

**London Assembly Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee
23 May 2019**

Transcript of Item 8 – London Safety Plan

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Then we come to the main item for today, which is the London Safety Plan (LSP). I would like to welcome our guests, no strangers, Fiona Twycross [AM], Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience, and Dany Cotton [QFSM], London Fire Commissioner. Welcome. We also have in attendance Sue Budden, Director of Corporate Services; Susan Ellison-Bunce, Assistant Director, Strategy and Risk and Richard Mills, Deputy Commissioner.

I will start off by asking for the key highlights in the Safety Plan, which of course is two years old now, halfway through its term of office, for want of a better word. It seems a good time to review it. Perhaps I could start by asking, two years on, what changes or additions to the Plan have been made or are being considered to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Good afternoon. Obviously, we are halfway through the Plan and we have been looking at the Plan all the way through. This LSP was more of an enabling Plan. The previous LSP had a number of specific commitments, primarily the reduction in the number of fire stations. This Plan is far more about future-proofing what we want to do as a fire and rescue service.

Obviously, as you are all aware, Grenfell Tower coming as early as it did in the Plan did make us review some areas of the Plan and quite rightly we took the decision, in conjunction with Members, that it was not a suitable time to enact some of the parts of the Plan. Any alternative crewing options or anything that might look like a reduction in fire cover for London, before we get the outcome of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, we thought would not be appropriate. We have put those plans on hold.

However, what the Plan did give us was the ability to look a lot at our fire safety regulation and to increase the contact we have with both business and the public about making them safer. Lots of parts of the Plan have been coming along. We are really pleased with how those are working. As you will all be aware, Grenfell Tower has given a huge additional workload burden to the fire safety activity teams and a lot more focus work that we have been undertaking. The flexibility in the LSP has allowed us to do that, but it is something we are constantly reviewing because the main focus of the Plan is about ensuring that we are looking at and recognising the risks to Londoners. One of the main things is opening the big red doors and we are really pleased with the progress we are making in opening up our fire stations. However, we will continue to look into the Plan. We are pleased to say that only three of the actions are reporting amber at the moment and we have an action plan in place for those.

Overall, it is very welcome that we look at the Plan at the moment. We feel substantially that the Plan is fit for purpose and we will continue to work towards achieving the rest of the aims.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thanks for that. We will be looking in detail at some of those headlines, but perhaps we can start by just asking what is the biggest challenge and what is the biggest opportunity?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Probably one of the biggest challenges at the moment would be responding to the Grenfell Inquiry whilst trying to maintain core business for the London Fire Brigade (LFB), but I think the Plan allows us to do that. For me it is very much about ensuring that our firefighters can

be the very best they can be to protect the communities of London and I think a lot of the work we are doing with communities at the moment is demonstrating that.

I also think the Plan and the work we are doing around regulating fire safety is giving us an enhanced opportunity to reinforce our messages, especially in relation to the fitting and retrofitting of sprinklers in buildings and the fire safety work we are doing. Those are great opportunities for us, working in conjunction not only with the Plan but with the additional burdens that have come online as well.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Fiona [Twycross], perhaps I could ask you about performance management for the LFB and how you hold the Commissioner to account on the commitments in the Plan.

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): Yes, of course. Thank you. We have a robust process in place to track performance against the LSP. As I have mentioned at previous meetings, as part of the new governance arrangements I hold a monthly Deputy Mayor's Fire and Resilience Board where I am updated on the most recent performance trends and discuss these with the Commissioner and other senior officers. We also do this with the Mayor's Chief of Staff. We had a meeting this morning to discuss the financial performance and performance more generally. We do track performance and we do have a number of ways we do this.

It has been really important, and we have stressed the importance of making sure that we do not allow good relationships to become cosy relationships in terms of making sure that my role is partly to do with holding the Commissioner and the Fire Brigade to account. With the monthly meetings we have, we look at specific performance issues on a regular basis. For example, at the past two meetings we have had broad discussions. We are raising issues that are mentioned in the LSP, for example on increasing workforce diversity. I think you have raised issues around the inspection regime at care homes and I have also recently had updates on the progress on procuring the new fire boats and the new training centre at Croydon. These are things that we look at on a general level and at a service level in terms of general performance, but then I will have periodic updates on specific issues.

Then, on a less formal level, I also have weekly meetings with the Commissioner. I visit control on a regular basis to talk to staff and have updates on the vision and I regularly meet other senior staff to discuss areas of work, most of which on some level do link back into the LSP. As well as that obviously - I know others in the room also do this, including Members of the Committee - visiting fire stations is also quite a good way of getting a sense check of how things are going.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Firefighters are never slow in coming forward.

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): No, they are not, and it is very helpful.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): One of the areas where we are behind the curve, as it were, is flood response capability. Perhaps, Dany, you could tell us what you are doing to address this.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes. In quarter 4 we have reached some significant milestones in the project. We now have nine rescue recall responders who are assessed and are currently on courses to do with flood rescue. In boat operations, we have the specialist officer rescue team now in place. We are pleased to say that we now have the flood barriers. Over 200m of those are now available online for our operational support units. We now have the 142 new ejector pumps, which we have specialised training for, not only for serving firefighters but in our firefighter development courses. We have familiarisation that has been rolled out to all of our technical rescue advisers as well. We are making steady progress now with the

flood response, which I am very pleased about because as we are aware, that is an ever-increasing demand on our need at the moment.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): When will you be up to scratch?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes, we will be.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): When?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Mr [Richard] Mills? He has only been in post for five weeks, but he has the answer.

Richard Mills (Deputy Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Good afternoon. The reason it has been reported at amber, as the Commissioner has alluded to, is that while we have nine rescue recall responders, there are ongoing discussions around secondary contracts with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). We have been working very closely with our legal department to look at variation in contracts rather than secondary contracts and that is proving to be successful. As a result of that, we are running a rolling advertising campaign to encourage firefighters to come and be recall responders.

It is very much based on the take-up. As you are aware, there has been issues with secondary contracts both at a national level and with the London region. We are hopeful that by having a variation in contracts and taking into account the recent Welsh findings around secondary contracts and whether it is pensionable or not, we will encourage more people to join as part of that national response capability.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): OK. Thank you. Another issue is the Command Unit Replacement project. Can you tell where you have got to with that? Also, while you are doing that, one of the things I have picked up from others is some of the problems with the information technology (IT) on the existing Command Units. If you have information about that as well in the interim, it would be useful to know.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes. Obviously, we are well aware that there is an ongoing issue with the IT on the Command Units at the moment. We are fortunate in the fact that we do have a fallback position where all our officers are trained to work without the IT on the Command Units. Although it provides enhanced capability, when it does not work up to scratch, we do have the ability to continue with our command functions without any issue. It can be a hindrance but because we do have it as a regular event, we train for that, so we are aware of it.

With regards to the replacement of the Command Units, obviously we have been in conversation with our suppliers, Babcock [Critical Services Ltd]. It is not actually part of their provision to provide the software. What I really want to make sure of this time is that we have been known in the past, the LFB, to want to be too bespoke around our requirements. That can cause us issues in the future. This is about making sure we have the right software to fit in with the hardware of the Command Units for them to be available and working together, and not overcomplicate issues. Steady work is being done but, as you are aware, the procurement of some software can take longer, and it is about making sure that we have the right software with the right functionality. That work, in conjunction with the work to provide the Command Unit hardware and the vehicles themselves, is continuing with Babcock.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Effectively there are two issues: (1) the replacement of the vehicles, and (2) the IT.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Where are you with the procurement of the vehicles?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): The vehicle procurement process is still continuing. That is not being held up by the software. That is going through the process at the moment, which will then go out to tender. Babcock have that fully in train at the moment. It is just about us then getting the right software to be in place to go on the vehicles.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): OK. Coming to the software, is the idea to have a separate contract for maintenance of the software, apart from Babcock, or are Babcock going to subcontract it? How is it going to work?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I do not have the detail of that. Richard [Mills], do you?

Richard Mills (Deputy Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): On the Command Unit Replacement project in relation to some of the areas the Commissioner has spoken about, we are very mindful of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) compliance issue so the actual vehicles are being tendered through Babcock Critical Services. The hardware and the software for the vehicles are being tendered for separately. Because of the size of the contract, we have to go through the Official Journal of the European Union notice for that.

We recognise that in order to get the right solution for the longevity, we are more than likely going to go for a cloud-based- technology rather than have heavy hardware, where we are now. In doing so, the way in which the contract is proposed to be handled is that it will be a single point of contact. We will have the hardware and software managed through the Babcock contract. That is still very much open for wider conversation because we are going through that tendering process.

In relation to your question regarding the current hardware capability, as the Commissioner has said, all officers and Command Unit staff are trained to work off of whiteboards as well as hardware/software. I came from an incident this morning where we were doing just that, as well as utilising the hardware and software capability. What we have done is, recognising that things have moved on in the last 10 years, we have introduced a range of laptop capability that plugs into the Command Unit's current capability; updated the printers as well as all the other measures for the current fleet and recognising that if the tendering process is delayed in any way for the hardware/software, we can then transpose that into the new ULEZ compliant vehicle.

I am reasonably confident that with the help of Babcock Critical Services and through our contracts department, we will have a new vehicle that will be emission compliant and that the current hardware and software capability will be put in there as an interim measure until such time as that second part of the contract can get negotiated and settled.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): What is the timescale for the vehicles and the timescale for the new IT?

Richard Mills (Deputy Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We are going out to tender at the moment. The ideal deadline is obviously our licence for ULEZ, which I believe is October [2019]. We are mindful of that for the vehicle. The hardware/software, I would need to get back to you with specific details on that. I am very mindful that obviously this is televised so I need to be careful what I am saying around tendering processes, but I am quite happy to look into that in more detail and provide you a written response.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thank you. The third area is the Emergency Services Network (ESN). Grins all around, if that is the right way of putting it. It is a long and sorry story. It has been way behind. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) were looking at it yesterday and some of the evidence that was being put to the PAC was that the proposed new system does not have the same coverage, geographically, as the existing Airwave system. The written evidence to the Committee was:

“Areas benefiting from incidental coverage will be greatly reduced and therefore users’ experience of ‘coverage’ will be detrimentally affected.”

Anything to say?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I would say that it would not be suitable for the use of the ESN because it has to provide full coverage across London and for our capability to be able to not only communicate between ourselves and with our control room but with other emergency services. I would sincerely hope that no such thing is introduced until they have resolved those issues because it is clearly terribly important for the emergency services to be able to communicate fully, especially at peak demand times of operational incidents. Obviously, we will continue to work and supply the information we can but it will be vitally important to us that there is full functionality before we would be able to accept use of the new system.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): This was the written evidence from the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) to the PAC. I have not seen the oral evidence yet but that does sound quite serious in that Airwave apparently has incidental coverage simply because of the way it is built, whereas the new system will do what it says but nothing beyond it.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I would find that disappointing and not exactly progress if that is the case. I hope that that will be improved and updated before it is brought online, but it is obviously many years yet before we anticipate seeing it live.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): How many years?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I would like to say, “Many years”.

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): Is it 2022?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): The estimated date of the project has been 2022. I would like to hope it will be fully functional and that is more important than the actual delivery date at the moment. In the meantime, the Airwave contract has been extended so we will continue to use that to provide communication.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): OK. Progress against the three aims has been a bit mixed. What are the main areas where you think performance needs to be improved?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Obviously one of the major areas of concern for me is still around sickness absence. As you know, we have undertaken a review of the sickness absence policy which is due to come through Directorate Boards to myself at Commissioner’s Board in the next two months, once we have done full consultation with the unions as well because obviously they are heavily involved in the new policy. They are in agreement with us that we need to make changes and we need to support people in their ability to return to work following sickness absence. That is a serious concern for me.

We obviously are also still at the highest level of sickness absence and depression. The level of that still concerns me and we are putting a number of interventions in place to address mental health issues. I was very pleased to see the launch of our United Minds network, which is a staff support network specifically set up by people in response to issues around mental health. We already have a large number of people who are actively involved in that and we will continue to work both with our counselling and trauma team and with our internal medical providers to make sure we are supporting people. It is very important for me that we recognise that when people are off long-term sick, we need to provide the right support for them to be able to return to work. The longer they are absent, as we know, the more difficult it is for them to return to work.

Obviously one of the other challenges that I am disappointed around is our recruitment for the 2018 campaign, but I am very pleased to say that the 2019 campaign that we very recently launched has paid some really great dividends, not least of all through the great work that our outreach team have done. That meant that when we did the application, we have done a much smaller level of application to enable us to process those applications in a timely fashion. With the last recruitment round we attracted over 6,500 applications, which took a very long time to process. We suspect we lost very good candidates throughout that, purely due to lack of contact time with them. This time we closed it at 650 applicants, in which I am pleased to say that we have had a much higher proportion of both women and black and minority ethnic (BAME) applicants. We will of course be tracking that very closely through the whole recruitment process.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Just on recruitment, where are we with the establishment?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We aim to be online by the end of June [2019].

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): OK, thanks. The last question from me. You mentioned earlier on that I had been going on about care homes and fire safety in care homes, and it is good to see the number of fires going down, but in 2017, 51 care homes were issued with an enforcement notice, 498 were given notice of deficiencies, and Assistant Commissioner [Dan] Daly saw this as “the tip of the iceberg”. What are you doing to address premises where vulnerable people live?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): That is obviously one of our key priorities at the moment. Quite rightly and appropriately there has been a focus on high-rise following Grenfell, but we must not lose sight of properties where vulnerable people are living and those are very high-risk to us.

We carried out in 2018 intensive inspection of 177 care homes. We were somewhat shocked and horrified by the results of those. Of those inspected homes, 57% received formal notification. That is an appallingly high number and obviously raised great concerns. These are places where people place their loved ones, their dearly beloved who are vulnerable, and they think that they will be safe in those. The fact that that number of them had deficiencies is truly shocking to us.

We are now working with those care homes and the Care Quality Commission. We have written to all of them to express our concerns. All 1,300 care homes in London will receive an enhanced inspection in 2019 and 2020 and we will revisit the ones that we have given the inspection notices to. It remains an absolute key priority because any fatal fire in those homes should never be happening. Those are our most vulnerable people.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): You are going to inspect every care home over the next 12 months?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We are indeed, yes, definitely.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thank you.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): You mentioned the Croydon training centre. Where are we with the procurement of that?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We are really pleased by the plans that we now have in place that involve, instead of some of the more extensive building work, the redevelopment work we are doing of the current Protective Equipment Group building. The anticipated completion date is 2022 for the full build. That includes the new high-rise facility. We have excellent new plans. I am really pleased with the enhanced training facilities we have there at a reduced cost.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): OK, thanks.

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): On that, because the plans have changed since it came to the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) it might be something that Members might want an updated briefing on.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Thank you.

Leonie Cooper AM: Mine was just coming back to the issue about the care homes. There was a care home in Tooting that was fined £105,000 earlier this month for fire safety failings and I wondered if you could tell us how many care homes have been issued with fines. Andrew [Dismore AM] went through the figures for the number that have been issued with enforcement notices and notices of deficiencies, but how many have actually been fined?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I do not have those numbers to hand, but I can provide you with an updated report on those that were fined.

Leonie Cooper AM: I should have said that if that is not something you have to hand; we would be very grateful to receive it. Obviously, that is very much at the peak of the iceberg in terms of the worst conditions, I assume.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Absolutely. Obviously, our priority is to work closely with them now to ensure they do not have those levels of deficiencies to reach that, but where they have - tragically the Tooting fire resulted in a fatality - then it is absolutely right that fines are issued because that does send a message and it is very clear about our intent. We can provide you with that data.

Leonie Cooper AM: Thank you very much. That would be very helpful. Thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Susan [Hall], on helping to make London safe.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Thank you. To both of you, what criteria does the LFB use to identify vulnerable households and individuals?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): One of the main things we are working with is our local boroughs. We are making sure that we are working with all partners to identify vulnerable people. We have been doing a lot of joint work both with blue light partners and local authority partners to identify people at risk. We have had an increased level of reporting of things like hoarding, which has been one of the key areas of concern for us. We have done work to make sure that where hoarding has been identified by any blue light

partner, home fire safety referrals are given to us and we can then do the visit to the premises to try to issue both guidance and support and make sure that things like smoke alarms are fitted in those premises.

A lot of it is about awareness raising because we are obviously in the local community quite regularly. We are identifying those people and it is through not only our programmed home fire safety visits but our interventions through operational incidents, through regular inspections and just being out and about.

Part of our issue about opening the big red doors of the fire station is about trying to attract isolated, vulnerable people in the community to get them to come into the fire stations. As you will be aware, a number of our fire stations have had tea parties and meals for older people. Acton had a very successful one recently. Through that, we can make those links. A lot of those vulnerable people in the community are terribly isolated and do not have those connections.

It is also recognising that a lot more people are being cared for in normal residential properties now and not going into care homes. It is making sure we have the links with the care providers, whether that is through a provision by the local authority, a private provision or through family members or friends. It is about tying up all those links together to make sure that people are reported to us and we can take the steps to make them as safe as possible.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes. I have been to some of them. I thought I was invited because I was a Councillor but obviously it was because I was elderly.

At the recent London Fire Summit, it was suggested that the LFB have representatives on local authority Safeguarding Boards to help identify vulnerable people and work on policies to prevent fires in vulnerable households. Is that something that you can take forward as well, having people sitting on those Safeguarding Boards?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Absolutely. Safeguarding is something we have seen a massive increase of, and we have provided training to all of our firefighters and officers so they can identify safeguarding issues, not only adult safeguarding but child safeguarding issues, and flag them and make those referrals. If we can sit on those Boards then we are fully embedded in those local communities to understand that risk and to be able to respond to that risk.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Are you getting referrals from firefighters when they are putting fire alarms in?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes, we get a large number of those. One of the things that we train our firefighters to do is to look out for signs of vulnerability and safeguarding issues and we get regular referrals coming through those, which go into our local referral team to make sure we are identifying anything. We would rather our firefighters act in an overly cautious nature if they thought there was a risk and make those referrals. We are quite often the only people who go into those premises and the only people who have that point of contact with those vulnerable people.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): I absolutely agree. We were doing this years ago. Can you tell me though, do you have any problems with the Unions with the firefighters doing that?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): No, not at all. The Unions are fully on board in recognising the fact that protecting vulnerable communities in London is one of our key focuses and they are very keen for the firefighters to support the agenda.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): That is really good news. Thank you.

How does the LFB's Community Safety Strategy support and add value to the commitments in the LSP?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Obviously our prevention activities always form a key part of our LSP and through that we are very pleased to see the large reduction in the number of fires. We are conducting over 76,000 home fire safety visits in London. Our prevention work is continuing to target the most vulnerable people in our society, but we are now expanding that, not only for the risk of fire but obviously risks to different areas. We are really keen on youth intervention, especially at the moment with the level of youth crime in London and vulnerability from gangs and knife crime, being able to target young people to try to make interventions.

We have been dealing with a really high-profile issue around water safety recently. You may have seen the launch of it this week involving the royal family, which we are really pleased about. It is about the enhanced risk of drowning and also people entering floodwater, just understanding the risks associated with water and a lot more issues around community health as well. We are trying to target it on a number of different levels and raise it up, not just talking about fire but talking about greater risks to people in our community.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): The putting-in of smoke alarms has been going on for quite some time now. Do we have a list that you go back to? Obviously, the batteries run out or wear out. Do you have any list of the ones that were done a while ago?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): The other thing is that people move around, and people do things like decorating and take things off, but it is for us very much about targeting the vulnerable people first and it is changing focus on how we do that. Sometimes it is those people who we might not have been able to reach in the first place or who we might have visited a long time ago, who have moved. It is about working with our local authority partners to try to identify those people as our key focus, and then the wider-scale offering of the fire safety visits. Obviously, we have our new Community Safety and Prevention Strategy that is focusing on core delivery of the safest global city, widening that part of the programme, which is really important.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Great. Excellent. Thank you. In terms of responding to planning applications, how successful is LFB at responding within the designated consultation period?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): As you will be aware, some of our issues around responding have been that the same people who respond to our planning applications are those who are dealing with some of our really high-risk fire safety activity at the moment. While we have seen a dip in the level of some of our response to that planning activity, we are trying to recruit back up to make sure we have the right numbers of people to respond to that. Obviously, the people who are dealing with our fire safety regulation work at the moment are having an ever-increasing burden put on them, not only from the high-rise taskforce activity but from our care home activity as well. As you will be aware, there has been an increase in the number of types of cladding being tested at the moment. That will also see a spike in buildings that we need to now visit to prioritise. It is about balancing the priorities of all that work.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): How much notice do you think is taken of the Fire Brigade when you do responses to these planning applications? Do you feel that your comments are noted properly?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): No, nowhere near enough. The disappointment that we have in the level of response to our recommendations, for instance, around both fitting and retrofitting of things like sprinklers in buildings and automatic fire suppression systems is very, very disappointing. We provide recommendations and something like less than 5% of those recommendations are taken up. That is a shocking statistic, bearing in mind we know that the cost of fitting sprinklers at initial build stage is so cheap and yet can provide such a good service. It is Sprinkler Week this week. We are actively trying to push forward to continue our campaign that we have been pushing for so long because we know sprinklers save lives.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes. We have been pushing it for years and years.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): If you make comments on certain planning applications and you feel strongly about it and it is completely ignored, are you able to elevate that to anybody or anywhere?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Not at the moment, unfortunately. We can provide the recommendations, but they are recommendations, which is why we want those fire safety measures to become mandatory and not optional. We need Government backing to do that.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): OK. All right. Certain of us really support that. Thank you very much.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Just following on from Susan's question, presumably the decisions on this are being made by local planning committees in the boroughs. Have you done any educational exercises with planning committees to explain the importance of the sort of things you recommend in general terms, so that when a recommendation comes from the Brigade as part of a planning submission they know what you are talking about and why?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes, our fire safety teams have been doing that work because it is about education pieces as much as anything else. Whether or not we have done enough or have the resources to do enough, I think probably not at the moment because of the competing priorities we have. That is why we are doing so much widespread, London wide campaigning as well, to try to reinforce that message. I would say there is always more work that we could do to try to assist with providing education opportunity.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): That must be a job for the Borough Commanders. Presumably the local authorities will take the Borough Commanders seriously. It is not just the officers of the Council that make recommendations, it is the members you need to get to, who make the decisions. Bearing in mind we had the local elections last year and there was quite a churn, it might be something to get the Borough Commanders on to over the next few months.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes. Thank you.

Leonie Cooper AM: We were just talking about involvement in planning and educating people on planning committees but obviously we have seen that quite a number of residential premises - about 16,000, I think the estimate is now in London - have not gone anywhere near the planning process at all because they have been conversions from offices to residential using the permitted development rights arrangement. I just wondered if you could say what you think and how we can tackle any fire issues that might arise.

I have visited some of these premises and some of them, I thought, frankly looked dangerous with very dodgy-looking electrics and things like this. Do you think this is undermining the work that the Brigade is doing around planning because of these under-the-radar conversions that are not going through the planning processes?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We have to focus on remembering that responsibility of those premises and the fire safety divisions within them is the responsible person who is in charge of that building. We have been trying to do a lot of work with educating those people and supporting them to understand their role. Some of the findings we have had, especially on some of the high-rise taskforces we have done are that it is not just about cladding, it is about the fire safety provisions inside a building. We have seen where a lot of modifications have been made and people have not given due consideration to the enhanced risk that poses, for instance if people do not adhere to fire separation by drilling holes through to provide different services that are then not fire-stopped.

It is about a whole education piece and about those people understanding their responsibility. We want to go further, to make sure it is not just about looking at the building but the people in that building. You might be somebody who lives on the 18th floor of a building who is perfectly fit and well, capable and able to leave the premises, but you might be a person on the 18th floor who is bedbound and oxygen-dependent. Everyone is told, "don't use the lift in the event of a fire". What is the risk assessment for that individual person? It is not just about the building and the safety of the building; it is about the people who are living in that building and having people-focused risk assessments as well as building risk assessments.

Leonie Cooper AM: Sure. I was just wondering what impact you thought that permitted development might be having. Obviously, that work with the people who are managing or owning those buildings then becomes very important. How much of that kind of work has the Brigade been able to undertake up until now?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I would say once again that it is about balancing our resources against what we are dealing with at the moment and the enhanced workload of the fire safety inspection teams. Clearly, we are focusing on both high-rise premises and care premises. As and when they get flagged to us, if people raise issues of course we respond to that with an inspection, but sometimes they are unknown buildings and because of the vast array of buildings in London we are simply not able to inspect every single building. Where we are not notified or where we are unaware of them, that is where the risk is.

Leonie Cooper AM: I do not want to put words in your mouth but obviously the Brigade is quite stretched at the moment, from what you are saying. I think this is an area that has, as I said, potentially been going under the radar. I have certainly seen some really difficult arrangements and I wonder whether we have got over the current situation with the big focus on care homes and post-Grenfell activity, this is an area that maybe the Brigade should be trying to focus on.

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): Can I add something? You talked about something going under the radar. For a very long time, fire safety has effectively gone under the radar on a general basis. It can be tempting to pick out one sort of building or one type of premises but it is the whole fire regulation piece that we need to address, making sure that Government is investing appropriately in the prevention work, in making sure that they are taking forward some of the recommendations from [Dame Judith] Hackitt [DBE] [*Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety*] and looking at what recommendations from Hackitt on the high-rise residential premises would also be relevant for other types of building.

Every time we focus simply on one area of fire safety, we miss all the others. It is the same way that the Brigade was concerned that people were overly focused on cladding. Now, clearly cladding is an issue. Why on earth was flammable cladding ever allowed on buildings? But if you over-focus on one aspect or one thing that could go wrong or has gone wrong, in some ways you are almost starting to let other people, other types of premises or other issues off the hook. It is about making sure there is a holistic view, that we do look at, as you say - I have seen some shocking examples of buildings that have gone through on permitted development as well - but it has to be a holistic approach. The Brigade has limited resources and it has to prioritise the resources they have. The correct approach was to look at the high-risk buildings.

Leonie Cooper AM: That is a well-made point. Amongst the many huge mistakes David Cameron [former Prime Minister] oversaw in 2010, I think the bonfire of much of our health and safety regulations, which he described as “red tape”, was a huge mistake and has left us in the position that we are in now. I really do hope that Government decides to re-implement some of the things that were described as “red tape” because actually health and safety does what it says on the tin, it provides health and safety. Andrew, I will pass it back to you. Thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Just on permitted development rights, the Government are proposing to expand permitted development rights, which would make things even worse. Certainly, in Egdware we had an office tower block that was converted to residential and has aluminium composite material (ACM) cladding on it.

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): I am glad you have raised that, and I think it is a really serious issue. That is something we could potentially be lobbying on.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Now Andrew [Boff AM] on firefighters in the community.

Andrew Boff AM: Thanks very much. Commissioner, you have talked about how you have opened the doors to the fire stations and you are getting more involved in the community, which is great, but what training has been undertaken to equip station fire crews with the technical fire and safety knowledge that they require?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Obviously we recognise as part of the LSP that there is a wider role for firefighters in delivering and looking at fire safety as part of their general day-to-day job. We are delivering training and support to stations to complete fire safety checks of premises. Fire crews will be inspecting smaller, unknown premises and known high-rise residential premises. It will improve our firefighters’ skills and we can improve the regulation of fire safety so that they get a better understanding of risks within their ground. It is really important that they have that enhanced understanding, and they are then supporting the work and leaving the specialised fire safety work to the teams of fire safety officers.

They are going to receive a computer-based training (CBT) package and then they are receiving face-to-face training as well. The first types we are doing are the small shops, for instance, with dwellings above, because they can obviously have a higher risk living above shops. It is training firefighters to recognise those risks, especially issues around poor management and insufficient means of escape. That is one of the target areas for them. The other one is residential high-rise premises of six floors and above, normally those ones having rising mains and firefighting shafts.

We have had a successful trial in northeast London and it is expected the completed training will start in September and October [2019] and take about 18 months to complete.

Andrew Boff AM: It sounds like you have assessed the training and you think it is OK. I always think there is an alarm bell when somebody says “CBT, computer-based training”.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): The computer-based will be the first part of the knowledge, followed up by face-to-face. The computer-based will be the background knowledge and reading, the enhancement the face-to-face training.

Andrew Boff AM: Right. Are you are going to measure the outcomes for that, how many staff you know will be undertaking this training?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We will aim to undertake this for all staff. It will come in operation once 70% of the staff at any one workplace are trained, they will be able to go out and do that training, but 100% of staff we will train on fire stations.

Andrew Boff AM: In what period? When can we expect that to be completed?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Starting in September/October 2019, completed within 18 months.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you. You talked well about how you are supporting health partners to improve some outcomes for vulnerable people. How is the success and impact of the Brigade’s wider work with vulnerable Londoners measured? How do you know how much you are doing?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We have the absolute quantitative measure of the numbers we do, the 84,000 home fire safety visits, and there has also been a pilot of Fire Safe and Well visits using our community safety advisers, targeting the most vulnerable residents in pilot boroughs. They have undertaken approximately 1,000 visits to date. We also have a referral partnership and a memorandum of understanding with the London Ambulance Service (LAS), which has resulted in over 350 home fire safety visits being carried out specifically as a result of those. We have also been awareness-raising with all blue light partners around dementia, hoarding and other safety issues. We have our new Community Safety and Prevention Strategy, which is designed to target more vulnerable people.

It is all as part of a package of work that we are undertaking. We are very pleased to say it is a far wider-reaching package of safety for people in our communities, but always with the specific focus being that the most vulnerable people are the ones we should be targeting first. By reaching out across all our partners and getting them to respond to us when they find at-risk people so that we can then do that home fire safety intervention, we are making greater inroads into the people of London.

Andrew Boff AM: Your youth programme is to be admired. What discussions are taking place between the Brigade’s health and youth teams to work together in the future?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): The first thing I would like to do is do a shameless thanks and plug to the Chair and the work he has done around securing our additional funding for our cadet programmes to ensure that we have a cadet programme in each borough. Massive thanks for that. It is greatly appreciated. We are absolutely so proud of our cadet programme. To be able to roll it out across all our boroughs is genuinely a great joy for me because we absolutely know the difference those cadets make, and it makes to the lives of those young people.

For us, it is about not only the cadets but also around working together with other blue light partners. One of our activities, cross-borough at the moment, has developed a new workshop about exploitation of children selling drugs, the County Lines project. We are working very closely on that to make sure we can link into those vulnerable young people. We are also working with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) around knife crime and what we can do to help support those.

We are also recognising that we need to carry on working with young people in general, around not only the prevention agenda but around keeping and monitoring things like arson and deliberate fire-setting because that still does become a trend, especially during school holiday periods, unfortunately. They can have a devastating impact on communities, deliberate fires, especially when they result in loss of property and ultimately loss of life. They have massive impacts on local communities. It is about that awareness-raising.

We have a number of other activities: Prison Me! No Way!, Junior Citizen, Safe Drive Stay Alive. All those are targeting higher-risk young people in our communities. We, of course, continue with our programmes of visiting not only high-risk but low and medium-risk schools as well by firefighters to make that point of contact.

Andrew Boff AM: You however have missed your target on delivering fire and prevention safety measures to children. You originally wanted to do 100,000. I believe you have not achieved that. What are you going to be doing to address the shortfall?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): It is actually the fact that we are counting the wrong things. We have been only counting one specific measure rather than counting all of our interactions. For instance, cross-borough activities such as Junior Citizen, Prison Me! No Way! and Safe Drive Stay Alive are not currently counted in our numbers of impact on young people although clearly, they are, and our visits to our low and medium-risk schools are not counted. We are making sure that all the Brigade work that interacts with young people will be part of our quarter 1 performance reporting next time so that we can actually report on the direct interventions we are having with young people, not just those ones that we were counting previously, which were Local Intervention Fire Education (LIFE), the Juvenile Firesetters Intervention Scheme (JFIS), cadets and visits to high-risk schools.

Andrew Boff AM: Do you feel that that will be a better representation of the work that you are doing with young people?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Absolutely, because that covers our wide remit of interactions with young people, not just those specific projects.

Andrew Boff AM: I am fascinated that one of the areas that you are covering with young people in the health programme that you have is childhood obesity. I would be very grateful if you could write to me after the meeting with what the programme is and what outcomes you are looking at because it is something that interests me particularly.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Of course, yes.

Andrew Boff AM: The LSP talks about collaboration between emergency services as well as being in the community. What work has been conducted to share sites with the other emergency services?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Whenever we do any development of our sites we look at opportunities where we can share sites with other blue light partners. Sometimes it is easier to work on

smaller, low-level projects. Sometimes if we try to do something right across any of our estates, it becomes a very complex project and you never deliver on it, whereas small, local interventions are far better. We have opportunities where we had LAS sharing some of our sites - the cycle team at Stratford, for instance - and we have other opportunities. For instance, I think it is police cadets we have in at one of our premises now.

We always look at it to ensure that where there are opportunities of us being able to work together we can support those, but we do think it is better a lot of the time at the moment doing lower-level interventions because any large project just becomes unwieldy.

Andrew Boff AM: Yes. Thank you for saying that because I think the [London] Assembly has formed the view that if you try to do everything, you sometimes end up doing nothing.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Indeed.

Andrew Boff AM: I am pleased you have said that that is going to be a local initiative. Do you see that there is some potential, for example, for police Safer Neighbourhood Teams to be co-located?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Obviously we want to make sure that where we can maximise the opportunity to increasing the safety of our people, we do that. There are some issues around where those want to be sited and making sure we have the right fire station facilities for people to be able to use them. There are some ongoing issues about the sharing of those properties but for me it is about exploring all options where we can do blue light collaboration - not just blue light collaboration but collaboration across the Greater London Authority (GLA) where we can use any opportunity to share our sites.

Andrew Boff AM: It seems such a common-sense thing to do. I just wonder why it has not happened. Who has held it up? What is the big sticking point?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I do not think there is an issue of someone holding it up or having a sticking point. It has been the case that we have tried to do too much across the piece. I think that if we can try local trials, that works far more successfully than trying to have one large piece. There is an estate strategy. All of the blue light partners, when they do any establishment or are looking at estates, try to make sure that we maximise the opportunity to share those.

Andrew Boff AM: Is this a symptom of or a pointer to the fact that perhaps management is too centralised, if those local initiatives cannot be seized?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): No, I think not at all. It is important that we have an overview of all of our estate. We have to have a central overview and a management overview on that.

One of the pieces of work I have been doing is about ensuring that our local Borough Commanders are responding to local borough needs and local risks because, as you know, they are so wide and varied across London. If you look at the borough of Sutton compared to Tower Hamlets, the local community needs are entirely different. This is about me removing some of the central target-focused and target-driven work that we have done in the past, making it more local community-focused and responding to local need.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you very much. Thank you, Chair.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thank you for what you had to say about the cadets, by the way. Fiona and I saw them in action a couple of weeks ago at the Canary Wharf exercise. I commend their performance as victims. It was very realistic.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I hear they are up for a second job working in the acting world.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): When are the new units going to start coming out?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We have some online for this year. We will have them all completed by April 2021. We have a rollout programme now and that will be continuous. Obviously, it is easier to support rollouts in smaller groups to ensure they have the right staffing levels, equipment, uniform and that kind of stuff, and to make sure we have the right level of community volunteers involved. I am really pleased about how many community volunteers are getting involved now, and linking into those people being from our local communities and them being another opportunity for recruitment and outreach work. That is going really well.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Good. The other thing I was going to ask about was the Fire Safe and Well visits. I saw that they were subject to an evaluation which was beginning in January this year.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): How has that evaluation gone? Has it finished yet and if so, what was the outcome?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): No, the project goes on until September [2019]. We are having two lots of evaluation on it. One will be done as a Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime (MOPAC) evaluation. The other one we are going to invite a peer review in, but we are going to wait because obviously at the moment we are in the middle of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICRFS) inspections and we do not want to clash those two reviews. We will wait for the outcome of that before we have another look at it.

We have been really pleased about how that is going. It has paid some really good dividends in the pilot boroughs.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): We now move on to David Kurten and responding in an emergency.

David Kurten AM: Thanks. Good afternoon. Yes, I am going to ask you about responding in an emergency, particularly aimed at the Plan on response and resilience. You obviously have a huge range of incidents that you have to respond to as a fire brigade, but over the last two years what action has the Brigade undertaken to ensure that the response to the range of incidents is the right one whenever you attend an incident?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): As you are aware, the last two years have in some ways been exceptional with some of the different incidents we have attended, but as a process we are a learning organisation, we continually strive to ensure that we are professional, we have the best support, the best training and the best equipment for our firefighters. We have a number of different learning loops and interventions that we undertake following every large-scale operational incident.

We first of all have something called a performance review of operations, which involves all of the firefighters involved in that operational incident coming together, talking through the incident and identifying any learning points or any particularly exceptionally good points. That can be about performance, it can be about our policies or about our equipment. Those are then fed into a database.

We also have something called a performance review of command, which our officers undertake. We will get all the incident commanders together and talk through the incident. That is conducted by an independent chair and we will then pick up either points that went really well or development points, and those can be against individual incident commanders or organisational points: a similar thing, policies, procedures and the way we do our job.

All of those are fed into a database where we identify trends. Those go into a Board where the trends are looked at to identify not only what we need to improve but what we need to educate our firefighters around, how we base our training and development and how we base our resource requirements for new equipment.

In conjunction with that, it is about horizon-scanning, for instance looking to see what new equipment is available and what is coming on the market, ensuring that every time we go through a process to replace any of our equipment we are making sure that not only is it fit for purpose now but futureproofed. If you look at something, for instance, like drone technology, as you will be aware, we are doing a drone pilot at the moment. We have concluded that to buy a drone would not be the best use of our resources because the technology is evolving so quickly and developing, whereas if we look potentially at something like leasing then it means we can ensure we always have the best capability. It is about that horizon-scanning, about teams of people.

It is also about sharing our learning, not only among the LFB but among United Kingdom fire and rescue services. Obviously, I sit on the NFCC and we have National Operational Guidance and learning embedded in the LFB, so we are able to provide that support to ensure that we are fully embedded and part of that learning loop in London, making sure that we are leading the way to make sure our firefighters are the best resourced, trained and equipped that they can be.

David Kurten AM: Great. Thank you. Sounds fantastic. From the performance reviews that you have done, and you must have done quite a number over the last couple of years, what have you discovered that is working well and have you found any areas where improvements have been needed?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes, we are always identifying improvements. One of the things we will look at is to make sure that our training is up to scratch and that our firefighters and incident commanders have the right level of training. We are working through enhanced incident command training at the moment to ensure that our incident commanders train on a varying number of activities.

One of the things I have been very pleased about has come out of a local initiative. As you will be aware, there is an enhanced level of acid attacks taking place in London at the moment, truly shocking levels of that. As a result of a local initiative that came out of our northeast area from one fire station that responded to an acid attack and felt that people were not adequately prepared, we have now rolled out a fantastic, widespread acid attack programme where we are training not only London firefighters but transport providers to ensure that people who might come into contact with those people have the training and understanding. We have been working closely with not only the MPS but the British Transport Police, the City of London Police and security companies as well. We saw a really high spike in northeast London. Sadly, we are seeing that translate across the whole of London now. But that rolled out from a local initiative, it is now Brigade-wide and we are taking it countrywide through the NFCC.

It is responding to that risk in London and making sure that we are absolutely trained for every eventuality. I think things like that would be something that five years ago, we would never have anticipated. It shows our flexibility to be able to respond to that emerging risk.

David Kurten AM: You have anticipated what I was going to ask you next, which is about your flexibility. You are obviously thinking about that, doing that and responding to new things as they come along very, very well. Have you explored how you can make your operational resources more flexible as well?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes. For me, that is very much about utilising our frontline resources to make sure that not only are they fit to be able to respond but they are conducting the right training. We have been doing some excellent no-notice exercises. We will get our officers together for a borough training day and then in the afternoon they will be given a no-notice exercise. They will be deployed to a venue and they will undertake a training exercise. We did a large-scale one at a care home recently in north London. It gives our firefighters and specifically our officers the ability to train in real environments to actually respond to a need.

We have had such positive feedback because the more realistic we can make training for our firefighters, obviously the better it is. We have - thank goodness - reducing fires, and we want to make sure that we are supplementing that with the right training and that we have people available, not only those who are frontline. We take them away from the station and make sure that they have the training at dedicated training venues, so that all their basic levels of training around breathing apparatus as well are fully up to date. They do real fire training as part of that as well.

David Kurten AM: One of the things that it says specifically in the LSP is:

“The Brigade will conduct a review of strategic resources to make sure it fits with the priorities for delivering the service in the future.”

Have you made any progress on doing that review and what are the findings of the work you have done so far?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): That has been a key piece of work. It commenced on 6 March [2019] and it will be presented to my Commissioner’s Board in September 2019.

As people are aware, in the strategic resource (SR) facility we are up to 21 Brigade appliances placed on the second line, not immediately available. With additional capacity, we can have an additional four. Those appliances on SR are still available for recall to be able to respond to operational incidents but what we use them for is to enhance the training, to ensure that if it is more involved training, for instance, that they are able to conduct that training without the risk of being called out during it, especially if we want to do enhanced first aid training with watches together, that kind of stuff, where we do not want to be disturbed. However, in the event of a major incident we can recall them back to duty.

We have been doing a review of that, but we are also tying it into a review of a number of other things we are doing. There is the large-scale roll to rank programme we are doing, which will enhance the ability of our watch managers, becoming station officers, to train on watches, and the new project we are enhancing at the moment, which is about the development of our maintenance of skills. All those will feed in together to ensure that we are utilising SR in the best way possible.

One of the things that we did find early on was that sometimes people were training with stations that were not very close to them. While obviously firefighters can work with any firefighters, we do recognise that it is

really important for local firefighters from local boroughs and local stations to be able to work closely together because they are more liable to be the ones responding to an incident.

It is about making sure that SR is fit for the future. We will report back on that in September. I am happy to bring the report back after I have my conclusions.

David Kurten AM: OK. Yes, thank you. My final question is that obviously you have to respond to exceptional circumstances and complex operations and you receive a couple of grants to help you with that, the New Dimensions grant and the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) grant, but there has been a slight cut in the amount of money you get from those two things. Has that had any impact on you? If so, what is it?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): No. The specific reduction to the USAR grant was in relation to the fact that London no longer hosts the National Co-ordination Centre that we used to have in the LFB. That has now transferred to Merseyside, and the posts that we had that were associated with that. That was a reduction of £309,000. The incident response unit grant has been reduced because there has been a remodelling of incident response units and they are not all whole-time crewed now. Some of those are double-crewed because while they are still available as a resource, they are not something that is used regularly on the front line. It has had absolutely no impact on us, it is just a remodelling of some of the national resilience capability.

David Kurten AM: OK, so that was all calculated in and it has not affected your operations.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Not at all.

David Kurten AM: Great. Thank you very much.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Just a couple. Do you now have all the items that you put on the sort of shopping list after Grenfell, all £6 million worth?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We do not have all of them in yet. We have put the order in and we are waiting for the delivery of our turntable ladders. The first one of those we expect to see in the Brigade before the end of this year. In fact, I have a visit to the factory in October, I think it is, to check on progress. Ours will be in production at that time. We are really looking forward to that new capability coming in.

As I said, the drone project is well underway. We have been absolutely fascinated by the different uses of our drones. We did not anticipate just how much of a benefit they would be, not only to our incident commanders. This morning, for instance, Members may be aware that we had a 15-pump fire, a large-scale warehouse fire, over in the Tottenham area. Luckily, with early recognition by the incident commander of the benefit of the drone, they called it on.

One of the benefits that we did not foresee was that the Civil Aviation Authority contacted us and asked us if we could fly the drone up to estimate the height of the smoke plume in relation specifically to whether it was going to impact on City Airport and then, in conjunction with the police, to see whether or not the smoke was then going on to affect local roads. It has been fascinating.

Looking at the footage from this morning's drone activity, on the ground it looked quite dramatic, but when the drone was flown over the top of the incident this morning it showed the extent of the fire. We are really pleased how successful that has been. Obviously, we need to complete that project to look at not only the

drones themselves but how we provide them to the fireground, because there is the enhanced personnel cost of having the personnel available 24/7 on a rotating cover basis to be able to provide them. Those two are well entrenched.

On the other items of kit at the moment, we are providing the t-shirts. Let me think. Off the top of my head, BitKit, as far as the microphones -.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Smoke hoods and breathing apparatus (BA)?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): The BA is a much longer-term project to ensure that we are making sure that we get kit that is best and fit for purpose. BA is a really complicated piece of equipment. We want to make sure the new technology around BA is the best technology we have, in conjunction with ensuring that it is not so long-lasting that it burns out our firefighters. We have now come to the conclusion that we can provide the enhanced communication technology. We can replace that before we replace the BA sets. We were initially going to replace the BA communicators as part of that project, but we think we have found a way where we can get a communication set that is compatible with our current existing BA and will be transferrable to our new BA.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Is that Bluetooth?

Richard Mills (Deputy Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): There are some trials taking place for communication technology for BA. There are Bluetooth capabilities out there. There have been mixed reviews from other fire and rescue services around Bluetooth capability and the system dropping out. With the current 'Barry' set, as we call it, we recognise that the wires that attach to it make it a much more integral and effective piece, but we do recognise that the way in which they are being produced currently can cause problems for the operator.

In addition, there is the Respiratory Protection Equipment project around extended duration breathing apparatus (EDBA). There is recognition, particularly under prevention of future deaths recommendations previously, of the physiological effects and long-term impact of somebody going to an incident for a long duration. EDBA has a one-wear capability, compared to standard duration which is two-wear, which provides the individual an opportunity to rehydrate. That is why, rather than go out and purchase something that may be subject to review in the future, we have looked at differing delivery models of current EDBA sets, or the spare sets as it were, that are not carried on fire appliances, as an interim measure. Once we go out to tender there will be new products on the market that may extend the duration of BA but without the physiological burden of the weight of the existing set. That is what we are doing around EDBA.

Another area, to assist the Commissioner, is the fire escape hoods, which have been implemented very successfully. They have carried out a number of rescues utilising those fire escape hoods. It provides another opportunity for the incident commanders to look at what they have on the incident ground to make a decision on how best to extricate someone. That is it from the list.

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): I would say that we had the shopping list immediately after the incident, but we are going to have to look again when the [Grenfell Tower] Inquiry does publish its phase 1 report and look at whether there are further recommendations that might have a cost implication but also benefit the Brigade and the safety of Londoners.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): The drones are something --

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): The drones are very impressive, yes.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes, they certainly are, and they keep firefighters safe as well, which is good. How have the changes since Grenfell, such as the increase in fire engines from four to five as part of the LFB's Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA) policy, improved response to emergencies in high-rise buildings?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We have gone one step further on from that as well, in that where we receive multiple calls to high-rise buildings we are dispatching eight frontline pumping appliances. Where any of those calls make reference to the outside of the building potentially being involved, we send an initial attendance of 10 pumping appliances plus the officers required to support that. What we are finding that means is that for a number of those incidents, they are false alarms. We get a very high level of calls, for instance, to things like barbecues on balconies, which would be described as an outside fire. However, we have resources there available to tackle those in much shorter timeframes. We are finding that where there are high-rise incidents involving those, we get large-scale resources on the scene very quickly. That is providing addition levels of enhanced support.

What that does mean is that sometimes it causes alarm, because people see such a large number of fire engines outside their premises. What we want to do is try to measure that against distressing people and the journey times across London. But by providing that enhanced level of support it does mean that where incidents of fires do occur, we have firefighting numbers on the ground available to respond.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes. Do you think that was a good learning from Grenfell?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes. It is something that enhances the safety of people in high-rise buildings. At the moment, where we still have the issues with so many buildings with not only ACM cladding but the new types of cladding that have just been tested now, then it absolutely right and proper that we get large a number of resources there to respond to that need.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): OK, lovely. Thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Just on the PDA for high-rise, have you had to use that number of appliances on a high-rise fire?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We have had a couple of high-rise fires that resulted in make-ups. But what people do, in recognition of the fact they have those resources there, they will use them. Whereas sometimes people might have just got by with the ones there and thought, "We could manage with four or six", because they have eight pumping appliances there, they will use all eight of them, which is great, because it is important that people recognise that we need to resource to the right number of appliances for the incident they are attending. We need to make sure our incident commanders are fully prepared to ask for the right number of resources and in a timely fashion.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): If you started a barbecue on your balcony and 10 fire engines turned up, you might be a bit embarrassed.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Yes, for the people involved. Obviously, we do have issues around balconies. There are a lot of balconies now that have wooden cladding on them that enables the fire to spread up through the balconies, so we get quite a lot of that. It is obviously terribly visual in London and we receive lots of calls to those. We are trying to reinforce the message about barbecues on balconies,

especially where people are using those portable barbecues straight onto wooden balconies and not realising that wood is quite flammable.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Just while we are on barbecues, last year you put out a call to tell people not to have barbecues in grasslands which had been dried out. Are you going to repeat that message this year?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I will be the barbecue Grinch again this year. I am more than happy to be a Grinch when it comes to fire safety regarding wildland fires. Across the country we have already seen a pretty similar level of wildland fires that we did about July/August last year, so we know that large areas of green are very dry at the moment. We have had a number of grass fires ourselves already, fortunately none of a large scale, but we are seeing an increase in those. I will be very happy, once again, to be the misery point and to talk to people about not having barbecues out in public areas, along with all the messaging around discarding cigarettes and broken glass, and also an intervention around the fact that we know still a number of those fires are started deliberately.

It is about ensuring that local authorities take responsible action to ensure that there are not large accumulated areas of waste dumped on those grounds and that where they can, they make sure that they keep the levels of grassland low and all those things that prevent those fires. That is a big piece of work. We now have a wildfire tactical adviser in LFB who we managed to poach from another fire and rescue service, I am delighted to say. He is putting together a training package to ensure that we have enhanced training for our incident commanders around wildland fire fighting.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Going back to PDAs on high-rise, a couple of days ago the FBU published some quite worrying data about how poor the response is in large parts of the rest of the country, some only sending two pumps and so forth. I am obviously not going to ask you to comment on that to a degree, except to this extent: on our neighbouring brigades, where we may be called upon to provide assistance, what sort of PDAs do they have for high-rise?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I could not say off the top of my head. I can find out. Looking at our response across border at the moment, we are pretty even with all of our surrounding fire and rescue services in the support we provide to them compared with the support they provide to us. I could, out of interest, if you would like, get the PDAs of our responding --

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): That would be interesting. I would not like you to name and shame but if they are in that league -- I do not think they are in that league because I think the FBU did name names, but if they are only sending two pumps to a high-rise fire and we end up having to support them when things get out of control, that could be quite serious.

One other thing on our new kit. The drones are, without doubt, very useful. We saw that at the Lincolnshire USAR exercise, apart from anywhere else. I put down a question about this and did not get an exactly positive response. The Colossus robot that they used in Paris at the fire there. Are we going to look at having one of these ourselves?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I want to look at all technology. If you look at our historical buildings in London, following the Notre Dame fire, it is very important. As a result of that we have written to our historical buildings in London to remind them of issues around fire safety and we are doing a piece of work with them. We have a dedicated officer embedded in our fire safety team that specifically works in conjunction with all of those buildings. There are a number of new technologies coming online that can

assist with that. I went and saw a fire engine recently that has enhanced capabilities to be able to provide large quantities of water and had a greater throw range.

It is really important that we look at a number of packages and we look at all available technologies to see what we can have with us to assist us, not only in quicker and more rapid-fire intervention but in the safety of our firefighters. A lot of those very historic buildings are not built to the same building standards, clearly, as we have now. A lot of them are timber-framed. Once they become heavily involved in fire, obviously we cannot commit firefighters into those buildings, so any technology we can have to assist with extinguishing those fires and protecting firefighters would be key. I am always happy to explore new technologies and look at new toys.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thank you. I think the House of Parliament probably fall into that category. Also, just while we are on [the subject of] new kit, when we were in Lincolnshire we saw a couple of pieces of new kit there, the lance and the fan thing. I have forgotten what it is called. Where have we got to with those?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Those are both under evaluation as part of that trial. It is what I said earlier about looking at new technologies: it is very important to make sure that LFB are looking at every type of new kit and technology. Sometimes there are some really quirky things that come out that we will have a look at but may not be fully developed ideas yet. But, obviously, we want to make sure that those resources that are available are looked at and factored into our planning process for kit replacement.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thank you. Now we move on to Leonie and fire safety and building regulations post-Grenfell.

Leonie Cooper AM: Thank you, Andrew. You have touched on this a bit, but I just wondered, Commissioner, if you could outline in what ways the Brigade's regulation and enforcement work has changed post-Grenfell?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Obviously one of the key areas we have focused on is our detailed response to Approved Document B. We think that this is a once in a generation opportunity to make some key changes to fire safety regulations. We want to make sure that the work we have been doing as LFB for a number of years in looking at a lot of these areas, is now reinforced. We have officers seconded into the Home Office via the NFCC. They are working to assist with fire safety consultations. Specifically, we have them working with Government in response to the [Dame Judith] Hackitt [DBE] review as well. We want to make sure that we are leading those changes.

We have continued to be very vocal about Approved Document B. We supplied a very detailed response to that. We are continuing, obviously, to promote the use of automatic fire suppression systems, including sprinklers, one of the tools of a comprehensive range of fire safety measures that we think are essential, and also ensuring that responsible people consider factors such as the vulnerability of buildings and complexity of the buildings, not just the height of buildings. For a long time there has been a lot of focus on the height of a building but the complexity of buildings plays a key part.

The key change in legislation that we are looking at, at the moment is the addendum to the housing health and safety rating system. The Government announced at the end of November that local authorities will get full backing about carrying out emergency work in response to cladding and, obviously the response recently around assisting with private buildings and response to that. As far as I am concerned it is the two-year anniversary coming up very soon. It is quite shocking the amount of buildings that still have cladding on them. We want to make sure that focus does not get taken away from that. We need to make sure that we apply

every pressure where we can. At the moment those buildings are still very much at risk, so it is very much about how that is being responded to and the work we are doing with that.

We have also been looking at housing and planning and the range of options to tackle rogue landlords, which also includes a number of financial penalties that tend to focus people's minds. Also, the range of different enforcement work that we have been taking part in, not only around care homes, high-rise buildings and the work we are now doing around heritage sites, which we feel is really important. Notre Dame brought that very clearly into focus and people were very concerned about the risks to our heritage sites in London.

Leonie Cooper AM: That is quite a long list. If I could start with you, Commissioner, and then bring in the Deputy Mayor, how do you feel that the LFB is coping with all of these additional demands following Grenfell and also in responding to Hackitt and all these other building safety reviews?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): One of the things that we are very positive about is welcoming a lot of these reviews. We welcome the outcome of the Hackitt review because we think this is the opportunity to make some very key changes. We definitely need support around the area of highlighting the importance of skills and the lack of skills in the sector and the problems we have about recruiting into those levels of skills, specifically against the fact that private sector are paying considerably higher levies for people with those skills. It is not a skill set you can acquire overnight. We welcome the clearer definitions around who is responsible under fire safety legislation. We also think it is very important that we support increasing the role of the fire service in the safety of buildings, not just on an advice capability, but actually there are some teeth behind that.

At the moment I would say that my fire safety team are hugely stretched in the amount of work they have. It is fair to say, as the Deputy Mayor said, that for a long-time fire safety has been one of those areas that has just been ignored, predominantly. It has been seen as some sort of side-line. Now it is absolutely at the front of everything we are doing. The recognition about making people safe before a fire happens is really in sharp focus now. We do not want to lose that opportunity. It is an increased burden on us. It does mean that we have our teams working on increasingly complex projects and an increasing number of those. One of the things for me is about making sure we look after those people, because it would be very easy for them to step sideways into a much higher paid job in the private sector. Luckily, the people we have are very dedicated and very committed to the people of London and working for LFB.

Leonie Cooper AM: So, coping. Busy, but stretched. Is there anything that you would like to add to what the Commissioner has said?

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): I do not think there is anything else to add to that really, apart from the fact that one would have hoped that after this length of time - it is almost two years since the Grenfell Tower fire and just over a year since the Hackitt review - we would have seen more progress. I would also say that in terms of the fire safety team, we would have also probably, if you had asked us this 18 months ago, have assumed that their workload might be slowing down a bit, in terms of the amount of work. It really is not. If you consider that we have an additional whole range of cladding that is being tested now, this is inevitably going to end up back on their desks at some point. There is a limit to what those individuals can do. As the Commissioner said, there are very attractive packages out there. Hopefully none of the people from the team that we do not want to leave are watching this.

There is a key role for government at every single level around making sure that there are opportunities for people to get those skills. Obviously, the pipeline will take some time. For some of the fire engineers it takes years for the training, so this is not something that can happen overnight. A lot of the skills you need for the

more senior roles end up being degree-level skills. This is quite a costly and time-intensive process. We do need investment in this. The Brigade does invest in its own people, in terms of putting them through training. It is a drop in the ocean compared to what is needed longer-term.

This area of work of any fire brigade is clearly not going to get less. It is going to get more significant. We need to have an honest conversation at every level of government about how we make sure that you get those skills in place and you make sure that people understand what an attractive and interesting career it can be for people in those roles in the public sector.

Leonie Cooper AM: One of the things that you have been alluding to throughout the discussion has been the need to be working in conjunction with others. It is not just something that affects the Brigade, in terms of negotiations with the Home Office. You have just mentioned changes to the housing, health and safety rating system. That also presumably involves Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Are you working effectively with other partners, Homes England, London Councils and the Local Government Association (LGA)? Are they also pressing for these changes? Obviously local authorities have a massive role here as well as the brigades across the country and also housing providers, not all of whom are local authorities.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We are undertaking wide-ranging opportunities about engaging with partners. We are working very closely with London Councils to provide technical fire safety advice and liaising on major consultations. We remain a standing member of the London Housing Directors Fire Safety Group and Fire Safety Steering Group. As forums, they provide opportunities for us to share information and provide updates on the current status of our high-rise taskforce. Obviously, that has been established since the week after Grenfell and that has now conducted a total of 1,236 visits, so that has been a really key piece of work.

It is important to us that we continue working with partners, not only to ensure that we are providing that information and support to them, but to make sure we are reaching out to every angle to ensure we are accessing opportunities both to influence people and to provide education.

Leonie Cooper AM: You briefly mentioned the situation with cladding and the fact that the workload has not really declined. We know that there are now further tests being conducted on non-ACM cladding and it seems quite likely some of it has already failed. It looks as though more may fail. Do we have any kind of estimate of the number of buildings that are likely to be affected in London and what the eventual workload is going to be?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): No. That is, "How long is a piece of string?" As you know, there are 27 new types of cladding that are being tested at the moment. We do anticipate that a number of those will require interventions and new buildings being identified for us to visit, which will increase the load at the moment. We currently have 316 buildings identified with ACM cladding. We expect that number to increase hugely when we include the 27 new types of cladding. We have 200 buildings which have simultaneous evacuation in place at the moment. That level could increase. Obviously, the focus has been on high-rise buildings, but we all know that that cladding is not just on high-rise buildings.

It is about how we work going forward. We know that the workload will only continue to increase. It is about us responding and being able to provide that support and information to responsible people to ensure that they are taking the steps to ensure that the fire safety provisions within those buildings are appropriate and are measured and make sure they have the right risk assessments in place.

Leonie Cooper AM: You talked about also needing to have the amount of resources in place to deal with this workload, which is not going to decline. The Government announced very recently a fund of £200 million for fixing the situation with ACM cladding on privately owned tower blocks. That is only going to be open for applications for a very, very short period of time. My maths is not brilliant but £200 million does not sound like a great deal of money to me. Is the LFB or the GLA going to be planning some work to publicise the fact in case anyone has not noticed that it is available, to make sure that for blocks in London the owners apply in time?

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): The GLA obviously has been managing the Social Sector ACM Cladding Remediation Fund. I am not sure it is clear who is going to be administering that. I would think that it is highly likely that the GLA would do some promotion around it. I can check and see exactly what is planned.

Leonie Cooper AM: Yes, could we find out about that?

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): Yes.

Leonie Cooper AM: I would really hate us to miss out on anything that is available.

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): I can assure you that if there is money available, the GLA can help distribute if they use the same model as they did before, because they did the previous one through the GLA. We can check what the status of that is and over the coming days and weeks it might become clearer.

Leonie Cooper AM: OK. Thank you. I would just like to mention sprinklers as well. The Leaseholder Advisory Service, promoted by the Government, has been reported to be telling leaseholders that they are individually liable for the costs of interim fire measures. Also, potentially - we do not know yet because there are still some cases that are at first hearing in tribunal and not resolved - they may need to be responsible for the cost of installing sprinklers inside their own flats. Do you have any further information on whether or not this is something leaseholders are paying for? Is this really appropriate or should building owners be funding the interim fire measures that need to be in place while the situation with potential for putting in sprinklers is resolved?

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): It is varied. It is quite clear that some building owners have funded the sprinklers. For example, in Croydon, the borough I live in, and at least two other boroughs in London, the Council has funded it, including for leaseholders. There is a wider issue over the whole issue around rights of leaseholders and responsibilities of leaseholders. As you say, this is going through the courts. There are clear views of councils that the work needs to be done and somebody needs to find the money. Ideally, in my view, the Government would have come up with money to undertake this work and allow the discussion on who should pay and how much afterwards, rather than people having to argue before vital safety work was undertaken.

Leonie Cooper AM: Yes, because going through the courts is delaying it.

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): Yes, it is.

Leonie Cooper AM: Then there are interim measures being implemented. We have heard about some people living in residential tower block who do not want to have to pay for the interim measures. They are doing the waking watches themselves. Are you aware that that is happening? Do you think that is suitable at all?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I am not aware that that is happening.

Leonie Cooper AM: Do you think that would pass safety standards, if it does emerge that people are trying to do that for themselves?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I would say that it would depend on the training, the resources available and making sure that the responsible people have done a risk assessment against that. That would be very much down to the person who is responsible for the building, to ensure that those people have sufficient training and equipment available to maintain the waking watch and to alert residents in the event of a fire.

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): Can I suggest that this is something that we might be able to go back and identify whether this is something that the fire brigades have observed and report back to the Committee?

Leonie Cooper AM: OK. Thank you. That would be very helpful. Finally, with the Hackitt review having come out a year ago, we have not yet really seen the changes through. How is the LFB's role as a fire and rescue service and the GLA's role as a developer and planning regulator changing as a result of that review? How do you see that developing?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We were very key and instrumental in providing professional advice and support to the Hackitt review, because of the importance of it. Although it was an additional draw on our profession fire safety team, it was key that we ensured that that was supplied.

We welcomed the outcome of the Hackitt review. We think there is further work to be done in adopting a lot of the recommendations from that review. We are continuing to lobby to make sure that there is sufficient funding in place. We are urging the Government to make sure that where there are funding issues, where we need to plug gaps in skills sectors and where we need to work closely that there is that resource in place for it. We also agree that simply banning ACM cladding is not going to resolve the issue and that might take away from the proper testing regimes before any of these products are applied to a building. LFB will continue to be at the front and centre of supporting the recommendations and lobbying for further developments.

Leonie Cooper AM: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

Andrew Boff AM: Are you persuaded that sufficient changes have taken place in terms of the plans for disasters to prevent the chaos that ensued in the immediate aftermath of Grenfell?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Whilst it is not appropriate to comment on anything pertinent to Grenfell while the inquiry is carrying on with its investigations and reach the phase 1 conclusion then obviously the far deeper investigations into phase 2, I would say, as LFB, are ensuring that we are preparing, that we are a learning organisation and we are making sure that we are fit for purpose and able to respond to any incident in London. As soon as any recommendations come to light from the review, LFB will, of course, adopt those recommendations and respond to those in a timely fashion.

Andrew Boff AM: Thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Just a couple of follow-ups from me. On the testing that the Government is doing on non-ACM cladding, am I right in saying they are not testing the smoke and emissions going up? Is it

not the case that people are more likely going to be injured or die in fires from smoke inhalation than the flames?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I am not sighted on the details of the testing they are doing. I only know it has commenced and there has not been any reporting. I can get that detail for you. However, yes, as you are fully aware, people are even more likely to die from the products of the fire than they are from direct contact with the flames.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): The other thing I wanted to ask you about was the joint inspection teams, which were announced a year ago, in June 2018, the Fire Brigade, local authorities and the Health and Safety Authority (HSE) setting up a multidisciplinary taskforce to supervise or oversee the removal of dangerous cladding on high-rise buildings. Apparently, the law came into force in January this year, but the taskforce is still not up and running. The answer to a Mayor's Question on this said, "It should be up and running in the next couple of months". Two years on, it is pretty awful that it has not happened so far. Can you give us an idea of when that couple of months is likely to be up?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I do not have the details about that. We are supporting it, we are keen on those joint taskforces, and we are working to fully support it starting to happen. I can ask Dan Daly [Assistant Commissioner, Fire Safety, LFB] to provide a detailed response.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Some questions on the budget. Can you give us an update on the movement in the capital and revenue budget?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): Our outturn position on the Revenue budget is for an underspend of just over £4.5 million, 1.1%.

There will be an external audit and the final accounts will be approved by the London Fire Commissioner (LFC) on 31 July [2019].

There is an additional underspend [of] £1.7 million, since the last report, mainly due to a number of factors involving property – some of those due to additional rental income, receipt from the sale of Southwark Fire Station, and the reduction in income from insurance companies under the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Act - and also the revised forecast on our building maintenance due to the reduction in the forecast spending on maintenance contracts due to the backlog of works. We had a number of areas in the estate that we wanted to improve and that has progressed much more slowly than we would have liked. We have had a lower than expected spend against training and professional development, due to the way our firefighter apprenticeship training costs are working. We have also had an increase in the underspend on property rates following a successful appeal in this quarter. An underspend for professional services is due to revised costs for prosecution cases, and inquest matters.

Some of those underspends are offset by an increase in the operational staff following and updated forecast for pay awards and the telecommunications budget, mainly as a result of the Home Office catching up with the way it is billing on FireLink charges.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Historically, virtually every year since I have been around, we have had an underspend on the operational staff budget due to vacancies. From what you are saying, that is not the case this year.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): No. We are very pleased that we will have filled our vacancies by the end of June. We have had the issue of paying for overtime, to compensate, to ensure that we have had frontline services available, but I am pleased to report that we will have filled our vacancies by the end of June.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): The outturn for the year that has just ended, therefore, is not going to show an underspend.

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): I am looking to Sue Budden for the detail.

Sue Budden (Director of Corporate Services, London Fire Brigade): There will be a small underspend but we have factored in the vacancy margin, so the underspend will be much less than in previous years.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): A question on the reserves. There is £75 million in reserve. How much of that reserve is allocated to specific projects and how much is general reserve?

Sue Budden (Director of Corporate Services, London Fire Brigade): The majority of the reserve is allocated specific projects.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): How much?

Sue Budden (Director of Corporate Services, London Fire Brigade): We hold a minimum level of reserve of 3.5%, which is around £14 million. The rest is spread over a number of earmarked reserves. We have also had a strategy of building up a budget flexibility reserve, which is used for smoothing the impact of our pressures. That means we have a balanced budget for 2019/20, 2020/21, a smaller gap than we otherwise would have had in 2021/22, and we do not therefore hit a serious gap until 2022/23.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): What preparations are you making for the Comprehensive Spending Review later this year?

Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): The Brigade has been undertaking a lot of work on the comprehensive spending review, contributing to a piece of work being done with the Home Office by the LGA and the NFCC. The work that has been done in terms of putting case studies in to demonstrate what the Brigade currently spends its money on has been valuable in boosting that piece of work.

Other preparations have been around lobbying Government. My perspective on the Comprehensive Spending Review is that if all we are doing is saying that we want to perform at the same level, we are missing an opportunity to work with Government, to try and look for the next step change in improvements in fire safety. Particularly around preventing deaths, a large proportion of which we know could ultimately have been prevented. We need to look to how we make that next step change in improving fire safety and those are the discussions that I have been having through my role at the LGA and with Home Office.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): This is the last question from me, about the HMICRFS inspections. We have just had the first tranche. What are your initial reactions to what they have had to say?

Dany Cotton QFSM (London Fire Commissioner): We have had no feedback from HMICRFS yet. They have just been in the discovery phase. The feedback we have had from our staff who were part of that phase is that they have found it to be an engaging and open process that has enabled them to contribute fully and to be very open with the inspectors. Staff were surprised at the level of engagement. One of the things that

many of the staff said is that they wished they had had more time to sell the work they are doing in their local areas. Our internal team has worked very hard.

It has been a big ask. HMICRFS had not previously inspected such a large fire and rescue service and wanted to make sure that they were inspecting us on the same scale and proportion as they have inspected everyone else. That has meant so many planned station visits that although they are still in the first discovery phase, that will form part of the information collecting that they will use for the main phase when they come again in July. It has been a very interesting logistical task, planning the visits to various areas, to different teams and fire stations, but the feedback we have had from our staff has been overwhelmingly positive and they have felt that they have been able to contribute fully to the visits.

We are looking forward to the next stage. They will be doing a strategic briefing and then further visits. Where HMICRFS have come back to us with additional requests, we have already been able to facilitate. We are working very closely with them to make sure we portray ourselves in the very best light.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thank you. That is it, unless anybody has anything else. No?

Thank you both for coming and thank you to your back-up team. I am sorry Susan Ellison-Bunce did not have to do anything, but thank you for coming.