

**London Assembly Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee
(Extraordinary)
5 November 2019**

Transcript of Item 4: Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 Report

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): We now come to the main item of today's business, the discussion on the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, and I would like to invite those present to stand for a minute's silence in memory of those who lost their lives.

[The Committee observed a minute's silence in memory of those who had lost their lives in the Grenfell Tower Fire]

Thank you.

Firstly, can I welcome our guests? We have Dr Fiona Twycross [AM], Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience; London Fire Commissioner (LFC), Dany Cotton QFSM; Assistant Commissioner, Andy Bell; Roy Wilsher, Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC); Mark Hardingham, Chair of the NFCC Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director at Suffolk County Council; and Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). Thank you all for coming.

I will ask if any of you want to make an opening statement shortly but I think it is important to note first of all that the report is a sobering, harrowing and heart-rending account of the disaster as it unfolded minute by minute and reading the full report, as I have done, provides a clear understanding of why the bereaved survivors and residents feel the frustration and anger that so many of them do.

It is clear that firefighters displayed extraordinary courage on the night of the fire, as acknowledged in the report and as we rightly recognise today. The Fire Brigade was not responsible for the cause of the fire or its rapid spread, which was due to the woeful management of the building, the alterations and, as the report says, the aluminium composite material (ACM) flammable cladding which compromised the building's ability to resist fire and protect the residents.

Nevertheless the report, along with its recommendations, sets out matters of particular concern relating to the London Fire Brigade (LFB) and we will be exploring some of those concerns in this meeting, including what happened in control, learning the lessons of the Lakanal House fire, the lack of active communication between control and the incident ground, and a failure to understand and disseminate the risks of cladding fires in high-rise buildings or understand obligations under Section 7(2)(d) [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004]. The report raises far-reaching questions for Phase two of the Inquiry as to whether LFB training is adequate and whether it is capable of learning from its mistakes.

We have quite a lot of ground to cover today but I would like to start by asking those present if they would like to make a brief opening statement. I will start with the Deputy Mayor, then Dany [Cotton QFSM].

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to make a statement at the start of what is obviously a significant extraordinary meeting.

For me, the part of the report that reminds us most powerfully why it was written, why we are here today, is the section with pen portraits towards the back which describes the individuals who died. The 72 victims of the Grenfell Tower fire, those bereaved and those who lost everything they owned have to be at the heart of our response to this report.

The Mayor, myself and, as she has made clear, the Commissioner accept the recommendations fully and unequivocally. We will work with the Brigade, the trade unions and other stakeholders to make sure that those that apply to the LFB are implemented and embedded as quickly as is possible. The report also rightly recognises, as you stated, the individual bravery of firefighters and control staff. I have spoken to many of those involved about what they did that night and about what they could not do, and what they experienced will undoubtedly never leave them. Sir Martin Moore-Bick [Chairman, Grenfell Tower Inquiry] makes it clear that the building should never have been clad in the way it was. This remains a fire that should never have happened.

The institutional failures within the Brigade outlined in the report require a hugely challenging level of systemic change that goes probably beyond the Brigade itself to the sector. The Mayor has personally committed to doing everything within his power to ensure that this change happens and that all of the Inquiry recommendations are implemented. We will work with the Commissioner and her team to address those aimed at the LFB. To that end, the Mayor will publish publicly regular updates on progress against each of the recommendations, including those aimed at the LFB and those aimed at building owners and managers. We will consult both with the Grenfell community and this Assembly Committee as to what should be included in this reporting, how we present it and its frequency, and of course we will continue to be available to you for your scrutiny on progress.

I would conclude by saying that we welcome the opportunity for what I know will be a frank discussion today and the ongoing scrutiny I know this Committee will provide. If we are serious about making sure that nothing like the Grenfell Tower fire happens again, we need to be honest and open about what we collectively need to do in order to address this. Thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thank you. Commissioner?

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

I would like to begin by taking this opportunity again, on behalf of everyone at the LFB, to express our deepest sorrow at not being able to save all of those who died in the Grenfell Tower fire. We will never forget the suffering of the bereaved, survivors and of the community.

As I set out to you three weeks ago, the LFB has made considerable changes and we have been working since the fire to do all we can to prevent such a tragedy from happening again. The publication of Sir Martin Moore-Bick's Phase 1 findings focused hard on our response and I want to thank every firefighter, officer and control officer who gave evidence in person in Phase 1.

We accept all of Sir Martin Moore-Bick's recommendations, which obviously include safety information for residents in high-rise buildings and improved markings on floor levels and staircases. I also fully accept the areas of learning that the Chairman set out specifically for the LFB to act on. As I said, many of those are in train, including the improvement of our training for incident commanders and for managing large numbers of fire survival calls handled by our 999 control officers.

With the Phase 1 report comprising nearly 1,000 pages we are now working to ensure we fully understand all of the findings and we will be setting out how we can respond to each of the recommendations. Many of those are more complex than they first appear, which demonstrates how complex fire safety is, and each recommendation must not only be considered by the LFB but by Government, every fire and rescue service and every residential building owner and a manager across the United Kingdom (UK).

Understandably, the findings in relation to the national “stay put” strategy are of significant interest and I want to be as clear as I can be about my response at this stage of the public inquiry. During media interviews last week, I explained that knowing what we have learnt since about how the fire spread and about the building’s safety failures, we would have responded differently. Let me be clear also that the “stay put” strategy does need urgent focus. I recently explained why I am backing the call for urgent research into what happens when a building fails and fire spreads unusually, meaning “stay put” cannot be relied upon, and I do so even with the knowledge and assurance that of the 5,000 high-rise fires we have attended in the last six years, the national “stay put” strategy has been effective to getting to fires, putting them out and not injuring residents.

The Chairman also recognised the mass evacuation of occupants would no doubt have presented serious risks to the lives of residents and firefighters given the layout of the building and the absence of any communication systems. We must hear all of the evidence to properly understand the really significant challenges of evacuating Grenfell Tower given the building was never designed for such an evacuation, and we know that further understanding and evidence will be gathered during Phase 2. That is why at this stage my focus is on making sure that we are prepared to respond as well as we can to buildings known to have a fire risk, pushing for a review of what to do when buildings fail and responding to fires where building safety measures do work as they should to keep residents safe.

We will now look to address each of the recommendations made and we will continue to assist the Grenfell Tower Inquiry throughout Phase 2, which is expected to begin in February next year [2020].

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thank you. Mr Wilsher, do you want to make a statement?

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): Thank you, Chair. I do not have a statement; just to say that my thoughts and the thoughts of the NFCC are with those victims, bereaved, survivors and residents, and to say thank you for the invitation to this extremely important Committee.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Matt, do you want to make a statement?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): If I can, Chair. Thank you very much.

I would echo the comments that have been made in regard to our thoughts being with those who lost their lives, the bereaved, the survivors and the community of Grenfell. I would echo the comments that Commissioner Cotton has made in regard to the actions of firefighters that night, most of whom are our members. It is a phrase that we do not often use but I think we did see real heroism by firefighters throughout that incident in impossible situations.

In terms of the report, we broadly welcome the recommendations. One comment that we would make, that we have made throughout this debate following the fire, is that many of the recommendations directed at the LFB we believe are national matters and should be addressed nationally. We have throughout the Inquiry and from

the start of the Inquiry expressed our concern about the ordering of the matters for inquiry in that the scrutiny has been entirely on the response of the LFB and of firefighters without considering in detail how the building came to be in the condition in which it was. The behaviour of the fire and therefore the response of firefighters cannot be fully considered without that full consideration of how the building came to be in that condition.

We welcome the references to the need for systemic change. It is a point we have made for many years in relation to fire policy across the UK. I have to say that we heard from the start in the immediate aftermath of the fire, both from Government Ministers and from Chief Fire Officers, that this would be a turning point. I have to say that from the perspective of firefighters so far, we have seen very little change in reality, so we really hope that this will be a turning point.

We do have some concerns with the narrative in the report, particularly in terms of the debate regarding evacuation. We have some concerns about how those conclusions were reached by the Inquiry and I think that does need examining further, when the evidence certainly of firefighters on the ground would be that an evacuation was extremely difficult if not impossible. That certainly is something that the fire service as a whole needs to be addressing.

In relation to the question of “stay put” and evacuation, we have some concerns that we raised this matter for many years. The FBU first raised the issue of “stay put” and concerns around “stay put” in 2005 following a fire in Hertfordshire, and we have raised it subsequently. In relation to Grenfell Tower, we raised it directly with Government Ministers in the months after the fire and we raised it with the Grenfell Tower Inquiry in relation to the possibility of urgent recommendations last December [2019]. We note that nobody has taken any action in terms of that, but there is obviously a very strong recommendation about the need for guidance in relation to “stay put”. Our concern is that those actions could have been taken much more quickly.

In terms of the engagement with the community, the FBU has placed a great deal of effort in seeking to have a dialogue with a community in the most difficult of circumstances because we do not see the interests of firefighters being any different to the interests of the residents of that community. We all seek to achieve fundamental change in terms of fire policy and planning within the fire and rescue service.

The issues that are raised in the report in relation to lesson learning, and I would use the phrase “lesson applying”, are ones we think need a thorough discussion. Our concern over many years is that lessons of incidents, fatalities and the like are not fully applied within the fire and rescue service. Many such debates arise following the deaths of our own members and our attendance at inquests. Our reviewing of those processes finds that in many cases coroners make recommendations which have been made previously, which suggests that the fire and rescue service as a whole is not applying the lessons previously learned. There are some major failings within the fire service nationally on that front.

My final point would be, in relation to fire policy more generally, that for something like 16 or 17 years we have heard a mantra from central Government and from politicians that fire is a declining risk in society, and the logic of that is that you can survive with fewer resources, fewer fire stations and less of a need for fire safety inspections. The story ever since that time has been a decline in resources for the fire and rescue service, including - significantly in this regard - a very significant decline in fire safety departments both in the LFB and across the country. There is indeed and has been a deep complacency in policy-setting about fire and rescue. This must be a turning point. It should have been a turning point 28 months ago. It has not so far, in my view, but now we must take that opportunity.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thank you. Assistant Commissioner Bell and Chief [Fire Officer, Suffolk County Council] Hardingham, I assume that you do not want to add anything to what Commissioner Cotton and Mr Wilsher have said? In that case, we will go into the detailed questions from us.

I think what you have said is your initial reactions to the findings. To Commissioner Cotton, is the LFB as an institution able to learn and apply the lessons from those mistakes, bearing in mind what Matt [Wrack] has said? Knowing what we now know from the Inquiry, would you change anything the LFB did on the night of the fire?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): First I would like to say that yes, the LFB is clearly readying to learn. The fact that we instigated our own internal investigation team the week of the Grenfell Tower fire because we wanted to learn lessons and we wanted to be able to identify those areas before even the Inquiry published its report shows that we were very willing to identify our own mistakes and put systems in place to learn from those.

Clearly, knowing what we know now about Grenfell Tower and similar buildings with ACM cladding, our response would be very different. Obviously, we know that there are still several hundred buildings in London that are covered in ACM cladding that have waking watches in them. Our concern is that action is not being taken quickly enough to remove that cladding, which is a high risk. Knowing what we know now, the actions we would take and the training we would put in place for our officers would mean we would respond in a different way.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): In what way would that response be different?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Now, we have increased our attendance, so if we receive a call to a high-rise fire, we have increased the number of fire engines we send. If there are several calls to the same building and if the callers state that the outside of the building is on fire, we send an initial attendance of ten fire engines, plus officers, plus specialist appliances, to ensure that we have large numbers of staff there at a very early stage. We have also given training to our officers on different ways to attempt to contact members of the public in buildings that obviously have no clear means for communication with them. Be that by the use of our new drone technology that has a loudhailer or by attempting to use other methods to be able to alert residents in the event of a fire. We are ensuring that where we know there are waking watches in place our watches visit those high-rise buildings and are familiar with the premises, and that we are working with building owners to understand how we would assist with an evacuation from those buildings.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thank you. You have already indicated, as has [Dr] Fiona [Twycross AM], that you accept all the recommendations of the report and I assume that everybody else does as well, in which case could I ask all of you: do you think the recommendations go far enough? Is there anything more that you would like to see at this stage?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): I was very disappointed that the recommendations did not include anything about sprinklers because we have been campaigning for years about the effectiveness of sprinklers as a means of not only fire suppression but of alerting people to the event of a fire. From the previous evidence we have seen we are very disappointed that it did not include that, but we are very pleased to see the breadth of the recommendations not only for the fire service nationally but for Government and for building owners and providers because there are a number of steps that all of us need to take to ensure this never happens again and that we can protect people in high-rise buildings.

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): I absolutely agree with Commissioner Cotton. The recommendations are far-ranging. I think they are lessons identified. As Matt Wrack said, we now need to turn them into lessons learned and make sure we learn those lessons for the public. I absolutely agree on sprinklers or automatic water suppression systems. There should be more about that.

The other recommendation I would like to have seen is some sort of resource implication support from Government to help fire and rescue services nationally look at these recommendations and turn them into better policy for all of us.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): We are going to come back to the resources issue in a minute. Matt?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): Two points. The first one for us would be that we think that many of the recommendations directed at the LFB are in reality, or should be, national matters. We have these buildings all over the country, certainly across England and Wales, possibly less so in Scotland but they are national matters and therefore the recommendations need to be addressed by fire and rescue services across the UK.

I would echo Roy Wilsher's comments about resources. Our initial assessment of these are that many of them will have resource implications. They cannot be done on the cheap. They cannot simply add additional workload to primarily, in our assessment, junior officers on fire stations, with another round of paperwork to deal with on top of all the other targets they are already dealing with.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Going on to resources, one thing that struck me was the substantial amount of data management that the report is calling for in relation to information about building construction, alterations, fire safety planning and so forth, and for you to put that information into the Operational Risk Database (ORD). Commissioner Cotton, what do you think the resource implications are for London?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Obviously you will be aware the building stock in London is vast and for us the storage of that information - but more importantly ensuring that information is up-to-date, is checked, and that we have the right information at the right time - will be key. They are talking about paper and electronic copies of this information. The storage, refresh and accuracy of that is something we will have to look into a system of doing, but equally making sure, most importantly, that it is available to our frontline firefighters when they attend those buildings, whether it be paper copies in the storage boxes at the high-rise buildings or whether it be the ones available on the electronic tablets.

It is, for us, about making sure not only that we as the fire and rescue service have the information but that the building owners are supplying us and keeping changes regularly updated. Those are some of our areas of concern, especially when you are talking about Person [Emergency] Evacuation Plans (PEEPs). Clearly, we need to be made aware of who is in those buildings but the importance is that the information needs to be regularly updated. When people change in those premises, we need to be made aware of that.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): What resource implications do you think there are for London?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): The difficulty for the LFB is about size and scale, the amount of buildings, when we look at the recommendations made about some of the areas of inspection. We welcome the fact that the LFB needs to make sure that all of our officers and firefighters are involved in knowing fully the buildings, but it is the scale of those in London that causes concern. We do not want to find ourselves in these situations again, and the conversation I had with you previously about not

knowing about some of the at-risk buildings in London until we attend them is our concern. The fact that building regulations have not been complied with for so long, and the fact that we think there are still buildings being designed and built today that would not perform as we would expect in a fire, is a serious area of concern for us.

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): Thank you. I have a couple of points.

Clearly the focus in the built environment is around high-rise residential buildings over 18 metres but there are many other building types across London and across the UK that present similar hazards. When we talk about providing data and information to frontline firefighters and incident commanders to enable them to deal with incidents in that built environment, we are talking about a very broad range of buildings in addition to the stock of high-rise residential buildings.

With regard to some of the other resource challenges, providing the information to firefighters and incident commanders is one part of it. The necessary training and development for those firefighters to enable them to take good-quality decisions with that information in the dynamic environment they will find when they are dealing with fires is another. There are resource challenges for fire services across the country around protection staff in particular, looking at regulating the built environment. I do not think there are many fire services in the country that are not struggling around recruitment and retention of those very highly qualified technical staff, given the challenges of resourcing that and losing people into the private sector and elsewhere.

I think the final resource challenge would be one for the NFCC. Clearly if we are going to be at the heart with Government and colleagues across the fire sector to deliver the sort of national change that we need to deliver on the back of this, we need to be properly resourced to enable us to do that.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thank you.

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): Just picking up one of the comments that Commissioner Cotton has made, it strikes me that fire and rescue services should have been aware of the risks in their communities. That is what integrated risk management planning is supposed to be about. What we now seem to be aware of is that actually fire and rescue services may not have been aware of the risks across their communities. That is alarming.

I do not refer to Commissioner Cotton here but certainly her predecessors have come to politicians here and in previous authorities and made the case that we can go through significant reductions. The fire safety teams in the LFB have been cut by something like 25%, and I wonder how we expect fire and rescue services to be aware of the risks in local communities if we go about cutting 25% of the teams supposedly responsible for making us aware of those risks. I have to say that is the story across the country. Fire chiefs have come, for the past ten years in particular, and made the case that we can safely reduce the fire and rescue service, and this needs to be a wake-up call to my colleagues in the NFCC that that needs to stop.

In terms of resource implications on a national scale, I come back to the question of “stay put” and evacuation. To my knowledge there has never been an evacuation on the scale debated in relation to Grenfell Tower in the UK. Nobody knows how it would be done or the resources that it would require. We have written to Government Ministers on this matter over many months. It strikes us that there needs to be a major national project to address that, firstly, because it needs to be scoped out, it needs to have professional input and it

needs to have fire and rescue service input. That is a major piece of work. Secondly, if we are talking about the mass evacuation of buildings in such circumstances, there are significant resource implications for the fire and rescue service across the country. The LFB is one of the best-resourced fire and rescue services in the country. I dread to think what would have happened if this had happened elsewhere.

Finally, on the point about the NFCC, I have to say to my colleagues in the NFCC that I think the NFCC have been part of the problem in terms of the fragmentation of the fire and rescue service and I hope we approach in a more joined-up way how we are going to solve the challenges set by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Fiona, the issue of resources ultimately comes back to you and to the Mayor. We know that immediately after the fire the Mayor made available £6 million for running costs and £6 million for new kit that the Government refused to help with. Will the Mayor be able to find the resources - clearly substantial resources as we have just heard - needed to enable all these recommendations to be implemented?

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): We have obviously only just started digesting the true likely cost of some of the potential changes that people have identified. We will be discussing that over the next weeks and will come back to the Budget and Performance Committee in December [2019] now to talk to colleagues about that. This is a national issue though so I do think that we would be looking to a national solution, not just in terms of the changes that need to be made but also in terms of the resourcing implications that some of the other panel members have said.

What I would say is this is not just about changing policies or changing the kit people have. Reading the report, as I know you have done, when the judge talks about systemic change or institutional issues that is a massive culture change piece as well. If we only talk about the changes to the policies without talking about what is meant by "systemic change", what is meant by "institutional problems", we risk not actually addressing the problems that were identified or the problems that arose for the long term. That is much more complicated than just changing policies or changing procedures or buying the new equipment that we do need to do.

I think *The Economist* summed it up quite nicely because they said that the culture change that was required was on the level that was required after the Piper Alpha disaster. That is the scale of the issue. It is not going to be achieved overnight. We will be as transparent as I have outlined already but this is a massive task that goes beyond simply changing policies, changing procedures or buying the necessary new equipment. This is about culture change on an absolutely massive scale. I have already been discussing with the Commissioner how we will go about this but this is not just an issue, as people have mentioned, for the Brigade. This is a sector-wide issue.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Before I bring Assembly Member Hall in, I want to ask some questions on resources. Looking at the other key challenges in the report, which may not be to do with resources, what other problems do you think there may be in implementing some of the recommendations? For example, on training, I know we have the contract with Babcock which is somewhat inflexible. Will that be able to be amended and what are the resource implications of dealing with all the additional training requirements set out in the recommendations in the report?

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): I think there has already been discussion of that. I might hand over to Dany or Andy to answer that one.

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): I think we do have the ability to flex the contract and we have done recently. In terms of the incident command training that we have put in for Level 1

and Level 2 commanders, we were able to flex the contract and reprioritise some of the courses. That made a number of training units available and therefore we were able to seek training from outside of the Babcock contract through the Fire Service College. That flexibility is there, it just requires a commitment - which I think we have shown we are already making - to be willing to flex that contract, and Babcock have to show that flexibility as well. To date, they are showing that.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): What about training for control, which is a major issue coming out of the report, and for senior officers as well?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): As you know, control training is not currently included within the Babcock contract and we are having conversations. The independent review of training the Commissioner implemented, which has now reported, suggests that it would be preferential for the control training to be included in the contract and we are having those conversations now. Senior officers' training is included in the Babcock contract. In terms of the work we have done around maintenance of competence, as you will be aware, Development and Maintenance of Operational Professionalism Phase 1 has gone in for frontline staff. Phase 2 of that project will roll out in the middle of next year [2020] and that will include a new maintenance of competency framework for both senior officers and control staff going forward. We are making changes. There is a long way to go but we are on the right steps, I think.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Thank you. Roy [Wilsher], do you envisage any other key challenges apart from resources in implementing the recommendations?

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): I would like to back up what everyone else is saying. These are national issues as well. Wherever you see, "The LFB should", it is a national implication as well. That is why we stand with and alongside the LFB to move this forward.

If you look outside of London to the way fire services are organised and resourced, you might have control rooms with four or five people on duty at night. Having policy and training that deals with mass fire survival guidance, how we support people to do that, is important. We have retained or part-time firefighters in many parts of the country with two or three hours' training most weeks. How we bring this cultural change and systemic change into those organisations is just as important for us, as the NFCC.

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): If I can, I would echo the comment that [Dr] Fiona [Twycross AM] made about the need for a fundamental change in culture because I think the culture that has crept in over what is approaching two decades now is a complacent one, and it is common across the advanced economies. It says that because there is a declining number of fire incidents, therefore the risk of fire has declined. Therefore, we can reduce our awareness and preparedness for fire incidents. If you used to have 100 fires in the community, you now have 80. The people who have the 80 fires still deserve the same standard of fire response, in our view, as when they had 100, but that is not the logic that has been adopted for the past 20 years or so.

In terms of training, I think there needs to be a fundamental rethink. Again, that is reflected in doing everything on the cheap. "Let us sell off the Fire Service College. Let us outsource training of the LFB and elsewhere". To then appeal to Babcock to be flexible -- Babcock is a commercial organisation. Babcock will do what they need to do for their own commercial interest. I think there should be a much more fundamental approach that we do not want privatised training in the fire and rescue service. That is the position of the FBU.

Picking up some of the points that Roy Wilsher made in terms of training, again it is a national issue. We have fire services who for years -- I do not know if this is the case in the LFB but elsewhere fire services have cut back on initial training to firefighters. That means that they are not being trained in things that were once part and parcel of basic initial training: building construction, how we deal with that in a modern built environment and so on.

Roy mentioned controls. He mentioned having four or five on duty. We have fire service controls in some parts of the country which go down to a crewing level of one, and how the hell they can deal with anything like this is unquestionable. But I have to say to Roy that in each case - and this is the problem when we approach Government Ministers on this - they respond by saying, "There has been an integrated risk management plan, it has been recommended by the professional adviser to the fire authority, which is the Chief Fire Officer, and it has been approved by the fire and rescue authority", so the Government can wash its hands of the fact that we have one on duty.

Until the profession starts to stand up and say, "You cannot have an emergency fire control with one person on duty" - and I say this to my colleagues in the NFCC, until you start saying that it is not acceptable, until you start saying, Mark [Hardingham], that you cannot send fire crews out with three riders on a pump - then these things are going to continue. I have to say I am concerned that the complacency is still there.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Because of comments made I think primarily by the FBU - and I do understand you are there to protect your members, to make sure you have as many members as possible and so on - where Mayor [Sadiq] Khan came into position he organised a review, the [Anthony] Mayer review. The Mayer review said, "OK, do not reduce any more but the amount of firefighters and so on that we have at the moment is absolutely adequate". It was looked at at that point. Fires had decreased by 50%, I think it was, in ten years, purely because of the work that the firefighters have done and various regulations that have come in, so well done to them, but it had reduced fires to a drastic level, which is why reductions were deemed as necessary.

I have heard, I am pretty sure - perhaps the Commissioner can vouch for this - the Commissioner did say that at Grenfell [Tower fire] there were enough firefighters on the ground and that this was not an issue. Can you confirm you have said that?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): When we increased our resources to 40 fire engines, we physically could not have put any more firefighters into the building at one time. As you know, obviously the single staircase issue meant that we did not have that. The longer-term issue of our fire safety officers is something we have discussed before and a shortage of those, but our frontline firefighters on the night were there in number in a very short space of time.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes, and I have heard you say that on numerous occasions. I put that back to you, Mr Wrack. One of the things I am particularly concerned about, from when I did my extensive visits to fire stations and I was with all the Borough Commanders for the whole of London, is that I was told in numerous boroughs that when the firefighters were not working, which is accepted to be a vast amount of the time because they have done so well and reduced fires so drastically, one of the things - other than doing fire safety checks, for which we are forever grateful - that they had to do was familiarise themselves with all the buildings on their patch. Clearly this was not done in this case. Is that correct?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): It is correct to say that the information that they stored on the electronic system when they did what we call their [Section] 7(2)(d) visits was not by any

means suitable or sufficient for Grenfell Tower. The firefighters and the officers from North Kensington were very familiar with the building because it was a place that they visited regularly, not only to carry out home fire safety inspections but for smaller operational incidents, but the information they had stored and recorded about it was in no way suitable or contained any level of detail that was of any use.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): That was not a resourcing fact, it was a training issue?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes, it was training, and it was about the level of information they put on there and stored on there. That is why we have done such a fundamental review of how we store our operational risk information.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): We will come to that. I will leave it at that for the time, thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Matt, do you want to comment?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): If I can, yes. I suppose my difference with Susan Hall's [AM] view on this is the following: that whether there is one fire or ten fires in a community, the fire remains the same and the risk to the people in that one fire or those ten fires remains the same. Our view is that the service that should be provided to the community, whether they are having one fire or they are having ten fires, should be the same.

What we have actually seen is that because of the reduction in fires, which is for a range of factors - the fire service's work is certainly one of them but there are societal factors as well at work - what we have seen from politicians during the past 15 years, is the argument that because the number of fires has declined, the service provided to communities when the fire happens can also be reduced. Response times across the UK are 20% slower than they were 20 years ago. I do not think that is progress, and the proof of the pudding happens when we have Grenfell [Tower fire]. I do not necessarily disagree with what Commissioner Cotton said about the resources on the night from the LFB - I suppose I make the point nationally that had that happened elsewhere, the disaster would have been far worse - but in terms of resources, Dany Cotton is saying today that things would have been dealt with differently and people are talking about evacuation. As I say, nobody has conducted an evacuation on that scale in any residential building in the UK.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): I accept that.

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): There are huge resource implications.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): We are talking about resources here. We are coming on to different subjects in a minute.

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): If I can --

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): We are talking about resources and the Commissioner --

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): If I can finish my point on resources, an evacuation from a residential tower block has huge resource implications for firefighters on the ground on the night. If we are talking about now moving to a policy of evacuation there are huge resource implications for fire and rescue services here in London and elsewhere.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes, but we are talking about Grenfell [Tower fire]. We are talking about the resources at Grenfell and the Commissioner has said that you could not have put more firefighters in the building, there could not have been more engines there and so on. I take on your broader point but the point in this instance is that there was more than enough resource there at the time to do what they could do, and they fought valiantly.

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): I suppose the question now, Susan [Hall AM], would be whether the LFB assess, if their view is now that the building should have been evacuated, that they would have had the resources to evacuate the building. I think that changes the whole debate around resources.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): The whole debate needs to be changed around “stay put”, but that is a separate issue.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): We will come back to “stay put” later on.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes, I think so.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): The point is: were there enough resources at 1.30am, which the report says is when the evacuation should have started? That is an open question for later on. Do you want to go on to your next question?

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes, I will go on to my proper questions. Do you agree, as stated in the report, that the LFB’s preparation and planning for a fire such as that at Grenfell Tower was gravely inadequate? I will start with the Commissioner, I think.

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Obviously, a fire of the scale and magnitude of Grenfell Tower has never been seen anywhere in the UK and we hope it never is again. We have identified areas where our training was inadequate and where the information we collected was inadequate. We recognise all the recommendations made in the report in response to that. Not only have we been working on those since very soon after the recommendations, when we founded our own internal investigation, but we now have a special reporting board that looks at all the measures that are in there, and we will obviously feed all the recommendations into that to ensure that we are taking steps to address those. We do recognise there are areas where clearly there was insufficient training for our firefighters, control staff and officers.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Do you mainly put it down to training or is there anything else that you would consider was inadequate at that time?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We did not have the fortune of some of the equipment we have now managed to procure that would have made a difference like the smoke evacuation hoods and possibly drones, but I think a lot of this is about the gathering of the information, and the training and response to buildings. Not only that; the understanding of the fact that buildings could behave in such a way that they should not, that the fire could spread in such a manner, and how we would respond to that.

I still have a concern that even though we now have a far greater understanding of that, it would be very difficult to implement training to respond to some of these situations. It is such an extraordinary event of such a significant scale that we still have huge concerns about the fires in those types of buildings.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Does anybody else have anything to add to that?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): If I could come back in, our concern on this point is partially directed at the LFB but it is a national point again. There were warning signs about external cladding fires. As long ago as 1999, my own union made a submission to the House of Commons Select Committee following a fire at Garnock Court in Ayrshire where one member of the public died. We warned of the risk of external cladding fires. The issue should have been on the radar of the fire and rescue service.

Our concern here is that there are, in our view, no robust national structures in the fire and rescue service. This is where I, to some degree, sympathise with the LFB. There are no national structures. We should be horizon-scanning, we should be monitoring changes in the built environment, we should be jointly thinking, "What are the implications of that for fire safety regimes? What are the implications for operational response?" and so on, but none of that happened. We had a fire in Melbourne. My understanding is that the Chief Fire Officers in the UK were aware and possibly even visited Melbourne in the aftermath of that fire. My question to them would be: what the hell did they do when they came back from such visits? We should have been aware of this and we seem not to have been.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Roy [Wilsher] wanted to come back.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Can I just go back to Mr Wrack? Can you at some point, either now or whenever, indicate to us who you wrote to about this?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): Sure.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Obviously if you knew it, they are your members going in and out of these fires, so if you can let the Committee know of all the times that you have made that obvious. Sorry, Roy.

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): Yes, thank you. A couple of points I would like to make on that. We should not lose sight of the fact that if buildings were built properly and maintained properly, Grenfell [Tower fire] would not have happened. Yes, there were some signs about cladding fire but Luke Bisby [Professor of Fire and Structures, University of Edinburgh], one of the expert witnesses himself, said that Grenfell was unusual mainly because of the architectural crown, the way the fire spread and moved, and it was beyond our experience.

The other thing is about the difficulty of identifying these buildings. Following Grenfell, every building we identified with ACM cladding had to have cladding removed and tested in a laboratory before we knew it was that type of cladding. For firefighters on fire stations to go and look at cladding to identify it was just not possible. That is why we need that information from building owners, so we get the information to the front line.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Anybody else?

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): The only thing I would add is that we would support Matt's call for a national body to make sure that you get this joined-up thinking and that we do get the systemic culture change that is needed to make sure that people take this learning on board.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Can I ask: what is your assessment of the way the LFB prepares for the risk of fires in the external envelopes of high-rise residential buildings?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Clearly, having learnt from what we learnt at Grenfell Tower and with the understanding now that there are large numbers of buildings that are covered in very highly flammable cladding, that is why we have now given the information to our Watch Officers and firefighters about looking out for abnormal signs of fire spread. Obviously the buildings that we know about that have waking watches in, as I said, our firefighters are visiting on a regular basis not only to ensure they are familiar with the buildings but to ensure that they are familiar with the waking watch system that is going on, so that they can assist in the evacuation of those buildings in the event of a fire taking place.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Given previous history of various fires - Mr Wrack has alluded to some - why was the LFB not provided with proper training about cladding fires?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): I think, as Mr Wilsher said, that part of the issue is that cladding should not be highly flammable and you cannot recognise the flammability of cladding merely by looking at it. There have been other fires across the world where there had been external fire spread but none of those suffered the breaches in compartmentation that Grenfell Tower had, along with the huge numbers of really poor fire safety interventions of the building. With all those factors combined together, it led to the terrible tragedy that happened.

It is important now that we make sure that all of our officers, right from the junior level upwards, are very alert to understanding what it looks like when fire spreads through cladding. Part of the problem clearly is the fact that cladding is rainproof in its nature. Therefore, extinguishing a fire where the cladding has become involved is almost impossible. It is the recognition of the fact that it is then very much about what we do inside the building and how we put steps in place there.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Can I just put to you page 588 of the report? It refers to the presentation that was --

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): I was just coming on to that.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): All right. Sorry.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): No, go on.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Why was that not disseminated more widely? Why did you not know about it?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): The *Tall Buildings* presentation was something which was put together by a group of fire engineers, predominantly around the issues of testing of cladding and vulnerability of cladding. It was shared with a group of fire safety professionals at that point. It was not shared more widely amongst the LFB. Very sadly, I was not aware of that presentation at that time.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): The question is: why was it not promulgated more widely? Why did you not know?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): I think at that time it was viewed as being an issue that fire safety engineers and professionals were looking at in relation to response to building consultation and those matters. I do not know why, but that is one of the matters that will be explored, quite

rightly, in Phase 2, why certain pieces of information were not learnt and shared. What I do know now is that we have a very different system for when we identify risks and how that information is shared across the LFB.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): I was going to bring that up because surely that is a real mistake, that that had not cascaded down.

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes, clearly. We have identified that had that information been shared, it might have been easier for our officers to identify the fact that the fire was spreading through cladding. I think it would still have given them significant issues about how to address that because, as we have alluded to and I know we are going to go on to talk about, the “stay put” policy is built on the building protecting the people inside for a certain period of time and allowing us to get in there and put fires out. Once the fire is completely involving the external envelope of the building, there is no way for us to extinguish that fire.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Obviously, it is very unsatisfactory given that that was there and we all knew, or those of you that needed to know that was the case, that there was not something in place certainly to protect not only residents of these buildings but also our firefighters. This is clearly a massive hazard.

I am very concerned that the information on these buildings - we touched on it earlier - is not better kept, is not better known, because that is part and parcel of a firefighter’s job, to look at the various buildings on their site. What have you put into place now to look at this?

I think Mr Wrack said earlier, “How did the building come to be in that condition?” Are you talking internal condition as well as external?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): I am talking about a condition whereby every element of fire protection in the building had completely failed, not just the cladding but the fire doors, the fire lifts, the smoke extraction system, the windows, the self-closing element on the fire door. Every single element on which firefighters would rely in a normal purpose-built residential block did not do what it was supposed to do. That placed the firefighters --

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): It was even down to self-closing doors and stuff like that? You said earlier that our firefighters were in and out of the building doing fire safety checks. If they were constantly in and out of the building, which you said earlier, why were they not going back and reporting this?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): They simply would not be aware. There is no way a firefighter would understand that (a) the cladding was flammable --

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): No, no, no, the internal features. I am going inside the building now. If everything failed, then the fire doors and all of these things that would cause problems --

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order [2005] does not give fire and rescue services the power to inspect doors and inspect self-closers. You have to make an entry into a private dwelling to do that, which is why the [Grenfell Tower Inquiry] Chairman has directed his recommendation around fire doors and self-closers to the Responsible Person (RP). He recognises the fire and rescue service is not able to achieve that.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): No, no, I accept that but if the building was so bad -- and I accept it was. I am not disputing that. I am saying that if firefighters were in and out of homes doing fire safety checks, if they saw something in a property where they went to do a home safety check, if they noticed that somebody had replaced the front door with one that was not a proper fire-retardant front door, that they had drilled lots of holes in for Sky [satellite television provider] or something and therefore you could not compartmentalise the fire, would they go back and say something to anybody or would they just do their fire safety check and ignore everything around them that could cause this issue?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We do have a process in place for that. If it is obvious to them that there are issues within the building then there is a station notification process where they would pass that information to Fire Safety Officers who are better able to go and assess that situation, but very often, the ability to see where those problems lie is not immediately obvious to firefighters and without some sort of invasive scrutiny it would not even be obvious to fire safety inspectors or fire safety engineers.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): With all the visits for home safety, did anything come back from firefighters that was wrong or concerning in the building?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We issued a Notice of Deficiencies in November 2016 to Kensington and Chelsea Borough. That identified a number of deficiencies within the building following a routine audit or inspection. Those issues we were informed by Kensington and Chelsea were being addressed and we would hope they would be picked up in the RP's Fire Risk Assessment.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Do we ever go back to double-check that anything has been done?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We do when we issue a Notice of Enforcement. For Notices of Deficiency we do not currently do that, and I think that is one of the things we need to look at in the future. You will recognise that for the LFB, with the huge built environment that we cover, addressing every Notice of Deficiency in the past is problematic, but given what we know now I think that is something that we have to look at going forward.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Do I have your assurance you will be looking at that going forward?

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

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): That has resource implications, presumably.

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes, it would have massive resource implications because the amount of Notices of Deficiency that we issue on a regular basis would mean we would need a huge increase in our fire safety staff to allow us to go back and inspect to ensure those works had been carried out.

Léonie Cooper AM: On this specific point. How much obligation is there on building owners and managers to inform you when they have made changes to a building prior to you conducting or even after you have conducted inspections? Are they obliged to ask for a reinspection at that point? When you issue a Notice of Deficiency, how far are building owners and managers required to implement what you have identified?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): I wonder if Mark [Hardingham] could answer that because he leads on protection. I am not a regulatory reform expert by any stretch.

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): If I can pick up on some of the other points that Andy was making earlier here, I would expect firefighters across the country going out and doing safer home visits, whatever the fire service calls them, in individual premises might pick up some of the issues if they were obvious, but I suspect that would be on the minority of occasions because most of the fire safety deficiencies that we come across in buildings would not be immediately obvious to a firefighter.

They might be more obvious to a fire safety inspecting officer going in and doing a proper, substantial audit of that premises but even then, what they are auditing is the Fire Risk Assessment that has been carried out by the competent person for that building and not necessarily pulling apart elements of the building to check the internal compartmentation because that is not --

Léonie Cooper AM: You would be reliant then on the owner or manager of the building who changes it to tell you exactly what the changes are that they have made --

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): Yes.

Léonie Cooper AM: -- and if they do not do that -- is there any kind of obligation on them to do that?

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): If they are making substantial changes to the building that impact on the fire safety of that building then there is a proper process through building regulations that they would need to go through and the fire service would be involved and engaged in that at the appropriate time.

This comes right to the heart of a lot of the issues that Dame Judy Hackitt [DBE] identified in her independent review, and the NFCC was firmly plugged into that with colleagues from the LFB supporting that as well. She called it a broken system and talked about the issues with the competence and culture of the system, playing back into some of the points that Matt [Wrack] made earlier about the culture within the system, beyond the fire and rescue service.

Léonie Cooper AM: It is a point that I have raised before, as Dany and Fiona know. I know that when they make big changes you can then make recommendations from the fire service but there is then no obligation on them to implement any of those changes at all, is there?

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): That is right, and that is what we often find.

Léonie Cooper AM: I would not call that a broken system, I would personally call that no system at all. After you have issued the Notice of Deficiency, is there any obligation -- obviously if you have issued a notice that

you are saying you want to enforce, that is different. After issuing a Notice of Deficiency, is there any obligation on the building owner or manager to implement the items identified?

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): If we issue a Notice of Deficiency, the expectation is that the RP will address and deal with those notices and the deficiencies in the building and put them right in that building. Once they have done that, they will then be back in a position where they have a suitable and sufficient fire risk assessment for that building.

Léonie Cooper AM: However, we have identified that many of the deficiencies could not necessarily be seen unless you rip the building apart, and people not telling you the changes they are making is obviously the more important part of my question. Thank you.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Going slightly back again, are you confident that the information recorded on the ORD is accurate, as Grenfell's was not? Is everything else being looked at rapidly?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We have a project in place at the moment that is reviewing all of our information that is stored on the ORD and we are introducing a new technology system to enable us to assist with that. In the meantime, we are working with the technology we have and the tablets that we have on fire engines to ensure that information is available. It is an ongoing project and a piece of work that we are looking at closely at the moment.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes. Those tablets have been available for quite some time now, have they not, and it is that that is not being updated properly?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): It is ensuring that the right information is available on those tablets, not only for the crews that work on those fire grounds but any crews that come on to those different fire grounds, to make sure they have access to that information.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes, I understand that. Are you confident that fire crews are suitably qualified to carry out Section 7(2)(d) visits? If not, what does need to be addressed?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): What we are doing, clearly, is reviewing some of the information that is in our own policy on how crews go out and collect that information. The information that is on there is a very comprehensive list. Clearly some areas were not being complied with. That is part of the review of the whole operational risk information project we are doing at the moment.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): What does the LFB's operational risk information project involve? Is that all around that?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): It is all around the information we collect, how we share that information and how we update that information.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Will you ensure, as recommended in the report that the LFB review and revise -- I am sorry for anybody watching this who does not know these things. Policy Note (PN) 633 said it fully reflects the principles in Generic Risk Assessment (GRA) 3.2. Obviously the GRA 3.2, if you look at it, is far more extensive than your PN 633. If not, why not?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Just a clarification for anyone watching, PN 633 is our current high-rise firefighting policy. We are doing the work at the moment on updating that policy and ensuring it complies fully with the GRA. That is something that we will continue with the work we are doing. It is something that we have been doing over the past months as well because we recognise there are some areas where there are gaps between the GRA and our own policy.

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): The guidance and the training that you issued over summer also related to that, did it not?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Are you going to ensure that all officers of the rank of Crew Manager and above are trained in carrying out those requirements on the PN 633?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes, we do. We have the information we share via the *Operational News*, which many of you will be familiar with. On the back of that there is a requirement for mandatory training for our firefighters and our officers and crews. That information is stored electronically so we are able to at any time inspect to see who has completed that. If it gets to the end of the time in which they should have completed and have not, it flags up to us that that training has not taken place. It is something we are closely monitoring.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): What period of time do you allow them to be trained within?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): The training is within the quarter, three months. It is every quarter. The end of this one is in December [2019], this piece of training. I am very pleased to say I did go on and look at it and two weeks ago 88% of the watches had completed the high-rise training way before the end of the quarter because they recognised the importance of it.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): That is good. I have finished that section. This is the incident ground. Incident command at the Grenfell Tower remained with a junior officer for nearly an hour. When more senior officers arrived, did they take the right steps to gain situational awareness and issue commands accordingly?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We recognise with the rapid escalation of the fire at Grenfell Tower the Watch Manager was in charge of the incident for far longer than is normal and is deemed suitable. Despite the fact that other operational officers did arrive, they undertook duties that they considered to be more significant and important in relation to Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) calls at that moment. It is obviously not ideal for any of our watch officers to be in charge of such a largescale incident for a long period of time. Although they are trained to be in charge, anything of that level of significance they would have required additional support.

We have looked at the response times of our officers getting to the incident itself. We constantly monitor those at all times and we have a requirement for officers to be available within certain periods of time. It is not ideal under any circumstance for a Watch Manager, who is obviously just in charge of a fire station, to be in charge for that significant length of time.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Do you accept that that is totally unacceptable?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes, it is unacceptable. Although there were other officers on the fire ground who were in conversation with the Watch Manager and were giving additional support and guidance, they did not take control and take over the incident.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): More senior officers?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes, there were Station Managers on the incident ground who then took the role of looking at FSG information.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): How long did it take for an Assistant Commissioner (AC) to get in situ?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): The first AC arrived at 2.31am, some hour and a half after the incident started. He was paged and informed as a remote monitoring officer much earlier. He had to come across from southeast London across to northwest London, obviously.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): I mentioned this in our last meeting. Are you going to be looking at making sure that there are senior officers more centrally going forward? I totally accept that to have such a junior officer responsible for this was, if nothing else, grossly unfair to him or her.

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): The AC was four levels up from the Watch Manager. We had Station Managers, Group Managers and Deputy Assistant Commissioners (DAC) who were on the fire ground far sooner than that because they were mobilised and in attendance much sooner. The issue around our officers is it depends on whereabouts they live in London and what other calls are going on. We will look at our officer distribution. One of the things we are pleased about is that we have reinstalled our campout bases so that our senior officers can stay in venues in central London if they live outside of the London area. We will review where our officers are available.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Good, because I mentioned this last time. When was that reinstalled?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): The campout bases were installed not long after I became Commissioner.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): You did not mention it last time. They are not obligated to stay there if they live outside London?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): If they live outside London they have to provide a base inside London to respond from. If they live inside London, they can respond from their home address.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): To follow this up, reading this report it looks as though there was no command and control at all, from what I can make out, that was co-ordinated until [AC] Andy Roe got there. That is not satisfactory and I think you have accepted that. When Andy Roe got there, about the first thing he did was to reverse the "stay put" policy. That is one of the criticisms, that it should have been done an hour earlier than he got there.

Susan [Hall AM] has made the point about the campout bases, which were abolished by Brian Coleman [former Chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority] and then brought back, as you say, earlier this year [2019]. It does seem to me that for it to take an hour and a half for a senior officer to get there is not

acceptable. Although you say you have performance times for senior officers to get to incidents, those performance times have to be looked at again for turnout. We know it was six minutes to get the first pump there and eight minutes for the second pump and so forth. How long is the attendance time for a senior officer of AC rank or above?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): There is no attendance time because there is only one AC on duty across the whole of London in any 24-hour period. It would purely depend on where the fire is and where they were located at night. If we were to wish to have an attendance time, we would need to have multiple ACs on duty and that would mean increasing our ACs from the five we have currently to probably 20.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): I am not saying we necessarily need 20 senior officers or DACs, but I do think we have to have a system where somebody can get a grip on this sort of incident much, much quicker. It is not acceptable for it to take an hour and a half for somebody to get there and to get a grip, which is what [AC] Andy Roe -- of all the firefighters he is the one who seems to have come through as having got a grip on what was going on, despite having officers of DAC and below. I do not think that is acceptable to Londoners, frankly.

Shaun Bailey AM: To continue what my two colleagues have started, what changes have been made to policies and training to ensure that senior officers inform themselves quickly enough of conditions and operations at an incident? The report does suggest that nobody knew what was going on. We have talked about [AC] Andy Roe but surely there must be some kind of system where you arrive at an incident and somebody brings you up to speed. Is that in place?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): That has always been in place. The situation is that whatever the level of incident we provide a senior officer appropriate to that level of incident. They also have an additional senior officer, who is called the Monitoring Officer, who comes on. When the senior officer comes on, they liaise with the previous senior officer and have a conversation about the situation on the incident ground. The difficulty of Grenfell Tower was not only the rapid escalation of the incident but the sheer volume of people involved and the fire spread involved. That meant that it was a very confused picture, understandably, because of the nature of what was happening at the incident ground.

Shaun Bailey AM: Aren't all fires a confused situation? Why have you not looked at the training that senior officers are subject to? It only takes you to look out the window to realise we have hundreds of different types of buildings of different ages, so any fire in any one of those buildings is going to be complicated. Is this not reflected in training?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): I do not think we can underestimate the completely unprecedented and unexpected nature of the incident, and the impact that had and the stress that applied to those incident commanders. This was something we have never seen anywhere in London. We have never seen anything on the scale of this anywhere in the country. I take Matt's [Wrack] point about other cladding fires but we have never seen a cladding fire that fully envelopes a building. We have recognised that those human factors and the impact of acute stress on those individuals may have played a part in that incident, so we are now looking at work to see to what extent human factors are embedded in our policy and training, and how we can make people more resilient when they are faced with those unexpected types of events so they can continue to perform in the way we would expect them to and as set out in our normal policies and procedures.

Shaun Bailey AM: This is my point. If we separate the human factors for a second, because everybody knows that a blazing building is going to be a distressing situation, certainly one of this size, where are the procedures, what went wrong and what are you doing to change them? The report strongly suggests that (a) people were slow to turn up and that (b) there was no understanding of what was happening. That is before I get to the fact that the radio system did not seem to work. Are you aware of that, Commissioner, that the radios do not work? That to me seems like 101, "Do these things work?"

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): The incident was a huge communications challenge for us, probably the largest communications challenge that any fire and rescue team has seen, certainly across the country. More than 300 personal radios were potentially at use in any one time. It is a Simplex radio system, therefore if one person is talking no one else can talk, so there needs to be absolute radio discipline. We do accept that there were some signal propagation issues within the building. As I say, I do not think we can underestimate the impact of the stress on those individuals from such an unprecedented incident.

You are absolutely right that any fire that you turn up to, to non-fire-service people, looks like an issue, but we deal with those things day in, day out. This was completely unprecedented, which is why we have put in place that if these things are going to happen again in the future, these types of building fires or terraced incidents, how do we make our people more resilient and be able to continue to perform in those circumstances.

Shaun Bailey AM: I will say one more time this is separate to the people. I am suggesting that you need to look at the procedures and, before that point, the training. For instance, when we had the Kings Cross fire, that was unprecedented. Surely the lesson to learn from that is you have to have firstly, some robust system for speaking to people who are meant to be dealing with things. Secondly, all fires, certainly anything above a wastepaper-bin fire, are of an unprecedented nature. Therefore, you should build structures to deal with some of that. This looks like fundamental failure. The idea that your radios do not work is simply not acceptable, because you know in any given fire you are going to need to speak to your colleagues.

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We are looking at our procedures and we are looking at our policy and training. I do not think you can completely separate out the human factors. Those things are intertwined and we need to increase the resilience of people.

Shaun Bailey AM: Sorry, let me restate that. The reason I say separate out the human factors is in order to support those people. Obviously, the bit that did go right is the firefighters got there very quickly. They leapt to the task. It is beyond doubt that people showed great personal levels of self-sacrifice. They got into the building and they did their best. My point about separating it out is before you can ask people in this case to put their life on the line, you at least have to have the training and the tactics involved. We have just had a conversation about how long it took senior people to get there. Had nobody considered that, that it takes people time to get across a very, very large city?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes, and that is why we have a number of senior officers on duty at any one time in London. At the rank that we were talking about there is only one person, but at any one time there are several numbers of station managers, group managers and DACs on duty to be able to provide that cover across the London.

On the radio issue, there was no radio system that would have been sufficient on the night to deal with the volume of information that was being relayed. We have looked into new radio technology now and part of that is looking into a different way of operating. One of the issues with fire brigade radios is that quite rightly

in the past they have looked at being intrinsically safe, which means that they cannot in themselves cause a spark to cause an explosion to happen. That very much limits the radio frequency and ability for people to communicate. We have been looking at different ways of addressing that issue as part of our radio replacement project. Part of the issue with Grenfell [Tower fire] was the sheer volume and numbers of people attempting to use the radio to communicate from inside the tower to outside the tower and share information across the fire ground.

We do provide all our firefighters and officers with training, both in the initial basic training they receive as being a firefighter, right through and up to and including officer training. However, this incident did present a number of completely unique challenges. That is why we have looked at a number of those aspects. That is why I committed to doing an independent review of the training of the LFB, a report I commissioned and that we have recently received at my Commissioners Board, which I have undertaken and will come here and share the findings of, to look at areas where we can address those issues that we have identified.

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): Could I add that you might find it of interest to read the update report that the LFB presented to the last extraordinary meeting, which outlines what the LFB has found on a number of these issues and what it already has in train to deal with them? I can make sure that we send you a copy of that after the meeting.

Shaun Bailey AM: Thank you for that. Do you agree that the LFB should be looking at these policies and ensuring - of course the answer is yes - the changes? Can you give me an idea of some of things you have done?

I want to go back to a comment Matt [Wrack] made. He used the term "horizon scanning" to look at what could be happening. Again, I go to my comment that in London we have a crazy assortment of buildings and we could produce this level of fire again. Look at the buildings over the road, full of more people than would have been in Grenfell [Tower]. Are you constantly looking at what we could be changing, are you testing yourselves, are you practising?

One of the things that comes out the report is that an awful lot of it looked like a shock, and Andy [Bell] keeps talking about the unprecedented nature of it. But if you sat in your office and horizon-scanned in the way Matt was suggesting, you would arrive very quickly at a very complicated situation. What are you doing to figure out what happens for the next one?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): The work of the LFB is about looking at the risk to London, assessing that risk and ensuring we have trained firefighters in recognition of the known risks we have in London. Not only do we use a lot of our data to identify the operational incidents that we are attending day in, day out, we share information with our colleagues nationally about the picture of what is happening, and around the world.

The reason Andy makes reference to it is that the circumstances of Grenfell [Tower fire] have never happened before and we pray never happen again. The spectacular failure of the building and the way the fire spread and developed throughout that building, inside and outside, is something that should never have happened if the building had been built correctly. The assessments we do and the buildings we look at now -- as you say, if you look opposite the building here, you will see many high-rise buildings. Those are buildings that are built with a number of fire safety regulations, with a number of protection and prevention measures inside those buildings. Obviously, we look at those buildings and we train to those, but the circumstances of Grenfell

[Tower fire], of that number of factors combining together, that is something that was completely unexpected to us.

Shaun Bailey AM: How familiar would any fire station be with its high-risk buildings? Would Grenfell [Tower], to the local fire station, have been flagged up on their system as high risk?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Grenfell [Tower fire] should never have been a high-risk building. It should have been a high-rise building that protected the residents inside it. The fire should have been able to stay confined to the compartment of origin for 60 minutes. Had Grenfell [Tower] been built correctly and not covered in flammable cladding, it would have protected the people in there. Our firefighters visit high-rise buildings so they understand things like where to plug into the dry riser to supply water, where to park, where the fire lifts are. All those things they do familiarise themselves with. Unfortunately, what they cannot see is the unknown. They cannot understand the conditions inside those buildings where fire safety breaches have been made or where the outside of the building has been covered in completely inappropriate material.

Shaun Bailey AM: Would not the single staircase flag up to somebody that it is a high-risk building?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): No, because the building should never be designed to be evacuated. That is the problem. Buildings like Grenfell Tower that have a single staircase are not designed for mass evacuation because they are designed that the “stay put” policy should work. The fire should remain contained to the compartment of origin, which allows the fire service to attend the incident and extinguish the fire without it spreading and without it putting the rest of the residents at risk. A single staircase is not designed for mass evacuation.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): I want to follow up on communication at the fire ground. It does seem to me like something out of the 19th century when you are relying on runners to take FSG calls from one place to another on the fire ground. That seems to be a recipe for duplication, things getting missed and so forth. Runners rather than radios must be 200 years out of date. Anyway, we know that you are looking at radios and I know from the Kings Cross fire and the work they did there that radios were a problem there because they would not work underground.

What I want to look at is the communication, or lack of it, between the control room and incident command, which is obviously a very important two-way channel. On the one hand we had the fire service control thinking the fire was contained on floor 4, despite what was coming in from what people were telling them when they were phoning in on 999. On the other hand, we had incident commanders not knowing what was going on in FSG calls because of the confusion around that. The first point is: do you agree with what the report says about the need for regular, active communication between control and incident commanders? Why was that not done?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We have accepted in our own preliminary report that that was an issue. We accept that that communication should have taken place and did not take place. At the moment we do not fully understand the reason for that. We can surmise that both the control room and the incident ground were completely overwhelmed. I am sorry to keep using that word but that is relevant. We have accepted that that is the case.

Within Phase 2, the Chairman will look at that and explore that issue fully and come to a conclusion or finding around why that happened. In the meantime, we are trying to address those issues. Control and operational

staff have undertaken a large number of exercises to try to inform what our FSG policy looks like going forward. We hope the Government will help us in terms of research into how we respond to these types of buildings and types of incidents that are of this unprecedented nature, and that will further inform both national policy and our own local policies.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Some of these problems are not new. They came out in the Lakanal House [Coroner Inquest] recommendations in terms of what was going on in control, and we will come back to control later on. It does seem to me bizarre that you have all these 999 calls coming in and control keep telling the people that they do not know what they are talking about, even though their flat is full of smoke. That does not seem to me a very satisfactory way of going on. Why was not at least information sent from the incident command to control saying this is going all the way up the building?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We accept that should have taken place. There was an informative message sent at 1.15am and then it was, I think, 2.30am or something before the next informative message was sent. That is not normal. Normally we would expect an informative message to be sent every 20 or 30 minutes at most. That did not happen. Again, I will use the word overwhelmed. I think they were overwhelmed on scene and they probably had other priorities at the time. That does not excuse the control room.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): If you are sending an informative at 1.30am, you could add in, "By the way, the whole lot has gone up."

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): I do not disagree, and we have accepted that in our own preliminary reports. We know that is an issue and we are trying to address those issues. What I think is not right to do is to speculate on why those things took place in advance of what the inquiry wants to do during Phase 2.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Before I bring Matt in, how are you addressing this issue? What are you doing to address this issue?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We are looking at our policies, both our high-rise firefighting policy and we are looking at our FSG policy. As soon as we have agreed what a new procedure looks like for FSG we will change and review our emergency call-handling procedure. There is a lot of work going on within control at the moment. In *Ops News 37* recently we have reinforced the need for exchanging information. That is the work we are doing at the moment. In the enhanced training that we are doing for incident commanders, the communications issue and the need to share information promptly will be reinforced.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Matt, you wanted to come in?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): I want to make a point on the communications between incident command at those earlier stages. I pick up a point that Commissioner Cotton made that in the later stages of the incident the LFB has systems of Monitoring Officers. It strikes me that when very senior managers are on the ground they have Monitoring Officers to support them and to assist them in their decision-making. The person at the crux of this at the most crucial time has no such systems of support. That is a Watch Manager. Therefore, what we perhaps need to look at is: why does that person, at that early stage of the incident, not have additional resources in terms of communicating directly with control, in terms of how he or she is making those decisions? There are resource implications there as well.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Commissioner?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): In order to address that, one of the things we have done recently, as you will be aware, is we have undertaken a project that has changed our rank structure. That means that from the very early stages our more junior officers will have the support of a senior officer on the fire ground, of a station officer who will go there to provide that additional support and guidance to them.

We are not only exploring different ways of training but new technologies, for instance, as I spoke to you about at a previous meeting here, around 999 technology, so that we can ask people who are on an incident ground to capture video and send it to us so our control officers will have that real-time, up-to-date information available to them so they can get better situational awareness.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Do you want to say anything about communications on the fire ground to control?

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): I can only reiterate what colleagues from the LFB have said about the difficulty of so many people trying to communicate. What we do need to look at is data and digital technology to help us in future, and things like 999 - i.e. different systems to communicate between control and control units - so that we have that dedicated source. They are things we are going to have to look at. I go back to resources and assistance, probably from Government, to make sure we have that implemented across the country.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): This is one for Andy now. What exercises has the LFB undertaken to test the interface and transfer of information between control, command and bridgehead?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): As part of the review of our FSG policy there have been six exercises that have taken place that involve control, senior officers and operational staff. They have tried to simulate multiple FSG calls to try to identify where those challenges take place and how the mutual aid arrangements between control figure into that. I am assured that we are getting close to a procedure for multiple FSG calls and that will be published when PN 790 is republished next year [2020].

There are other issues around the exchange of information because control rooms that are providing mutual aid to us. That was severely challenged on the night. A number of controls supported the LFB on the night but it is clear that there were really no national protocols in terms of how we exchanged information with them and that needs to be addressed going forwards. The NFCC, with us, is looking at that going forward.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Do you think if you had been based at the other control room, Merton control room rather than Stratford, things would have been better?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Had the control staff been there they would have had more tools available to them. They would have had the large-screen television (TV). There was an issue as well with the downlink from the police helicopter, which would have provided situational awareness. There are a number of things that were better when they were in place at the normal control room at Merton than they were at Stratford. However, we have taken steps since then to update the fall-back control room at Stratford to ensure they have better situational awareness.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Is there space for one of those great big screens?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): There is not space at Stratford for one of the largescale screens, but we have ensured they do have a visual system of being aware. At that time the TV system was not working. They do have a system that would enable them to be able to view images from the fire ground now.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): We have Assembly Member Navin Shah who has joined us to replace Assembly Member [Len] Duvall.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Was it not working because it was down or not working because it was not there?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): They had a TV screen, a small-scale TV, but not the facility we have in the large control room that is able to provide the links to information.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): You said the TV system was not working.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): The small one was not switched on either, was it?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): No.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): It was not switched on because it was not working?

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): It just was not switched on.

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): I do not think the evidence is clear on that.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): That is not good, is it? Did anybody ask for it to be switched on? Is that just a void that we do not know why that was not on?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): At this moment in time that is a void. We do not know why. I am not clear on that and I do not think the Inquiry is clear on that either.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): That would have helped. In what way are the fire and rescue services across the UK using modern communication techniques to provide a direct line of communication between the control room and the bridgehead? We have touched on that. Is there anything else you want to add? Roy?

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): With regard to communication directly between the control room and the bridgehead, I do not know of a fire service that does that at the moment because that is not within the command and control policy and it is something we are going to look at seriously. We need to consider what the unintended consequences of that might be with that direct communication that cuts out the command structure. As a group, with the policy look, we need to look at whether that is the best way of operating. The solution is getting the correct information to the bridgehead. Whether it is direct from control we are not sure of yet.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Do we have any timelines of when this might be discussed and decisions made?

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): As Commissioner Cotton and others have said, we are now looking at the recommendations and have accepted those. As the NFCC we are reprioritising our national work. We have a meeting of all the Chief Fire Officers next week to reprioritise our work to make Grenfell priority work for us. We are reviewing our strategy as well. We will be concentrating and working with Government and the LFB to look at all those recommendations and implement them as soon as possible.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): I will ask now or I know I will forget. Matt [Wrack] made a very good point earlier about things being suggested at inquests and things like that and ideas being put through. Matt said they asked before. The thing is these things, with inquests and goodness knows what, go on and on and on for years and then lots of these points are lost and are only brought back again when something occurs. Who is collating all this information? There are so many failures, even little ones like the TVs not going on or whatever else. There are so many failures here that it does need to be brought into an area and all of it addressed in a timely way. Who will take that on board?

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): As I said at the beginning, the Mayor is quite clear that he, as he said last week, is taking personal responsibility for making sure that this is driven forward. I would welcome the opportunity to sit down with Lead Members and discuss what format you would like that piece of work to look like when it comes back as a report to you. It is about assurance to the Mayor but it is also about assurance to you, assurance to the public, to the community and to the Government that things are being implemented.

I made the point at our last meeting that it is OK to say that you are learning the lessons, but the bigger thing is making sure that change is embedded, going back to points that Matt made earlier, that people have seen things in the past and it has not always become part of the practice. This is about making sure that we do get the detail right but we also get that bigger picture and that systemic change, both within the fire brigade in London but across the whole sector to make sure that the system is right, that the culture is right to drive things forward and make sure that nothing like this ever happens again.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Sadly, I am sure we have heard that before.

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): I know, but if we can sit down and talk through what reporting you would like to see as a Committee, that would be helpful.

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): Absolutely there is a role for the NFCC alongside the LFB and every other fire service in the country together, perhaps through national professional learning arrangements that are in place which influence national professional guidance that is then rolled out consistently across every fire service in the country, so that we do not end up in a risk where every fire service interprets things in a slightly different way and applies it in their service in a slightly different way.

Within that, we need to make sure that where we are bringing about change, that change is brought about in a properly considered way and then embedded into fire and rescue services in a way that can be sustained over an extended period of time. Where we attend particularly difficult, complex incidents, on occasions things that have happened in the past which we would not want to happen will happen again, but that is by exception rather than becoming the norm.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): “Properly considered” is correct but “properly considered”, as we all know, sitting on Committees, means years and years and years and it leaves the door open for other things to happen.

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): I would agree with that and we absolutely need to avoid that.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Yes, we do. Matt?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): Your question goes to the heart of what we have to think about, which is how we ensure that this is not just a lot of words that we are all putting out now and that we do have the cultural change that Fiona [Twycross AM] spoke of, because the truth is many of these warnings were there. Whether it was on the scale of [the] Grenfell [Tower fire] is open to debate, but certainly there were significant warnings about the threat to compartmentation of buildings in the UK, particularly following Lakanal House [fire]. There are, as you have referred to, previous incidents where in many cases firefighters have died and coroners have made recommendations.

Interestingly, time and again issues come about communications, issues come up about command and control, issues come up about training. These are common themes and the truth is, picking up Mark’s point, that if what we are going to say is we will just hand this back to the same people who have been there overseeing this for years, I have to say I do not find that convincing. We need something fundamentally different if we are going to seriously change the culture in relation to fire and rescue, and fire and rescue policy in the UK. Simply saying that the NFCC, who have been in place for several years, and its predecessor, the Chief Fire Officers Association, who have overseen the fragmentation of the fire service, will not convince us and I do not think it will convince the public that that is the mechanism to resolve the very fundamental issues that we have to grapple with.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Is the LFB on schedule to deliver improvements to its FSG policies and procedures and associated training by the end of 2019?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Good, that is the sort of answer I like. Positive. You will let us know if anything does not occur and if it is not completed?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes, we will update you, of course.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): Thank you. What exactly do those improvements involve?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): They involve information we share with our frontline firefighters and how we provide training for them to do their core role when they go out to view premises. Not only that, it is about ensuring we have the fire safety inspecting officers available to provide the service that is the next level up, effectively, because obviously our frontline firefighters are not all fire safety inspection experts and could not do that in conjunction with their day job. It is a highly specialised role that they do, so it is ensuring that we have those fire safety officers.

The other conversations we have had here before about the problem is that currently there is a shortage of those professionals available to fire services. Part of that is due to the fact that clearly there is a massive impact of the private sector, who offer a great deal better financial reward to people to go and work in the fire safety market there than there is in the public sector. It takes a long while to train up our fire-safety officers to a proficient level because it is such a detailed qualification they have to have.

It is about ensuring that not only do we have those fire safety staff in place but that we retain them as well, because there is considerable interest in the outside market in trying to procure them from us. Therefore, it is about ensuring that we look after the staff that we have. They have a massive work impact at the moment and their work impact has increased so hugely since Grenfell that they have been working hugely additional hours in order to meet the requirements.

The High Rise Taskforce that we put in place that went out to do those specific inspections on high-rise buildings, we have now transferred into a far wider taskforce. As you know, we have come in before and had conversations about, for instance, inspections on places like care homes that we have had to widen because of the defects we found in those. It is about maintaining our high level of professionally qualified officers as well.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): I am assuming it is much worse since [the] Grenfell [Tower fire] because the private sector has picked up a lot on this now, have they not?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Absolutely, and we know that a lot of our professional fire engineers and fire safety officers have been made very lucrative offers by the private sector to go and work there because the volume of work has increased. Luckily, the vast majority of those are very dedicated public sector servants who have not taken that offer and have chosen to stay with the LFB.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): The last question on this side. What action is being taken to ensure arrangements are made for information about the number and source of FSG calls to be communicated to the incident commanders?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): The whole issue we are talking about is around FSG and how we share that information. We have done a number of exercises; we are currently working on reviewing our policy, but we are also looking at new technology systems. You will see the recommendations that Sir Martin Moore-Bick made talking about how we could share that information via technology, and we have been looking into those. Obviously, there are a number of systems where you can have that information and relay it as a two-way. As Roy [Wilsher] said, there is no fire and rescue service at the moment that has that function available, but it is something that we need to work on nationally, not just in the LFB.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): OK, I will leave it there, thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): We will now go on to evacuating the tower or staying put.

Léonie Cooper AM: Can I preface what I am going to say? As one of the Assembly Members who represents the particular part of London, Merton and Wandsworth, I have taken the opportunity to talk to the people on the watches from both Merton and Wandsworth who were mobilised on that night and I have had some discussion with them about the impact of being at Grenfell [Tower fire]. It is a massive understatement on the part of any member of the public to not understand the full scale of what occurred. I was not there, and I can

only go on what people who were there have directly said to me. We all need to metaphorically take our hats off to the people who were there.

It is very difficult because a lot has been now said about evacuation and a lot of accusations, I feel, have flowed from Phase 1 of the report. That has not been contextualised, as far as I am concerned, with the state of the building and how we came to have the building in the state that it was. We touched very briefly on the failure of the compartmentalisation, the fact that people had breached it internally, the fact that on the outside of the building were rainscreens that were flammable but also they were rainscreens; obviously putting a hose against a rainscreen, it is not very easy to put the fire out. The fact that it was then galloping throughout the building and all of those things. Therefore, I find it quite difficult that the comments about evacuation have been made in that empty context. I have not even mentioned the failure of the fire lift or problems with the dry risers and all the rest of it. However, I do know that in my local stations they have maps of estates, they have maps of buildings, they have a lot of real detail and I feel very confident that where adjustments have been communicated back to the fire service that locally and across London there is a lot of effort that has gone into being able to respond properly.

That said, there are a series of recommendations in the report around evacuation versus “stay put”. It is not being done in the context of the state of the building, I feel, but there is a call for new national guidelines. Is there anybody here on this panel who does not agree that there should be new national guidelines? Does everyone feel that that is the case? I can see that Matt might want to come in on that point.

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): There is a prior issue to guidelines being issued, and that is to examine what the possibilities of evacuation are in those circumstances. I repeat the point I made earlier. That, to my knowledge, has never happened in a building in the UK so far. LFB colleagues have set out the design of those buildings, a single staircase. They were built and the architects designed them with a view of not evacuating them in the event of a fire. Therefore, we are talking about a complete change in policy in a building that was designed for a completely different policy.

We have raised that point with Government Ministers. I have to say the sort of exercise we envisaged could have been done very quickly after Grenfell [Tower fire]. We could have identified buildings, we could have filled them up with people, we could have taken architectural advice, fire-engineering advice and so on, looked at the issue of smoke movement and the behaviour of people and tested it. Then we could have developed ideas as to what you might be able to do if you decided to evacuate a building.

Our concern with the narrative in the report is that firstly it differs from what some of the expert witnesses say - the report seems to differ in terms from [Dr] Barbara Lane [chartered fire safety engineer], for example - but it does not give advice about how that decision should have been made. Secondly, it does not give advice about how the evacuation could have been carried out. Those are two pretty fundamental points for firefighters to consider if we shift from “stay put” to evacuation. There is a much bigger thing before national guidance is issued.

Léonie Cooper AM: I can see lots of nodding to that. My concern is the idea of the 200 people from the building, 40 engines with all those firefighters, all on one staircase that by that stage is filled with smoke. I do wonder how effective that evacuation could have been for anybody.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): I want to put to Dany - picking up the point Matt [Wrack] made because I do not want to lose it - Matt’s point about an exercise. I raised this with you three weeks ago as well. If the LFB could put on something like an Exercise Unified Response that you did two or three years ago, an enormous

exercise involving brigades from all over the country and internationally, is it beyond the wit of the LFB to organise an exercise to try to see what happens when you try to evacuate a block like Grenfell Tower?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Obviously Exercise Unified Response was a largescale exercise that took a number of months, or in fact years, to design and plan. Matt made the point as well that what you need to understand is that it is not just about filling a tower block full of people, telling them there is an exercise and evacuating. That is a very different set of circumstances to evacuating people in the middle of the night in a dark and smoky environment, overloaded with anxiety, fear and panic. That would be very difficult to replicate.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Exercise Unified Response used that organisation of mock victims, or whatever you call them. They are pretty good at replicating that sort of thing, are they not?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Absolutely, but what we would like to do is to seek to overlay that, first to understand things like the smoke behaviour in the building as well as evacuation planning for the building. That is why we have called on the Government to do this research to understand what happens when you have a building like that, where you overlay it with smoke and then you try to evacuate people who may have differing abilities. You might have people with younger children or older people with them who are slower to move. It would be very difficult for us to replicate those circumstances, but we would welcome the opportunity to work with Government and to work with colleagues to simulate those circumstances to give a better understanding.

We know that as part of Phase 2 all this modelling is going to be looked at. Not only do we have the very detailed explanations from the firefighters who were inside the towers but from the residents inside the tower in a minute-by-minute circumstance to understand how rapidly changing those events were. The situation on one landing was changing between one minute and the next with the smoke conditions. We need to overlay all those factors to truly understand, but then to understand the ability of us, as you say, with all those firefighters, with their firefighting equipment, wearing breathing apparatus, on a staircase that is just over a metre wide, which is two people standing side by side. For those people going into the building to attempt to rescue people and to put the fire out to be met with a mass of people trying to evacuate that building is a very challenging set of circumstances. It needs some detailed research and some work to understand how that could possibly take place.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Matt, you suggested there should have been an exercise. Do you disagree with Dany's comments?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): I agree with Dany's comments that it cannot be simply filling a building with people and evacuating it. You would need to scope out the expert advice from architects, from fire engineers, from toxicology experts, all the people who have given expert advice to the Inquiry. That would scope out the sorts of things you need to think about. Then you move on to a practical phase of designing how you would do this. what would be the triggers for the decision-making, for example, and how could you do it.

There is a point about the word "evacuation", because in reality I am not sure we really are talking about evacuation in the middle of a fire. We are talking about a mass rescue operation and I think the phrase "evacuation" can be misleading if we are not careful.

Léonie Cooper AM: Mark was going to come in next. We were talking about whether or not it would be possible and we were starting to explore that.

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): Thank you. I completely endorse the approach that is being talked about that leads to evacuation. It would be exercises. There would be a number that would have to take place. I also think the research needs to look at the three different opportunities to move from “stay put” to a different means of leaving the building in the event of fire. It links right back to the quality of the building from a fire safety perspective. If the building is not right and a RP knows the building is not right and will not be able to put it right, they need to put additional fire safety arrangements into that building to enable them to move away from “stay put” and evacuate people in the event they have a serious fire in that incident.

The interim measure that we have in place at the moment where we have a number of buildings with ACM cladding on the side, other cladding in some circumstances, or no cladding at all but significant compartmentation or other fire-safety issues, we put interim arrangements in place to move from stay put to simultaneous evacuation. The NFCC, LFB and other colleagues have developed guidance around waking watch and around temporary common fire alarms to enable that to happen. However, that should only be for an interim period and we are in a position now where in some circumstances we are two years into for that being in place and likely to be longer.

Léonie Cooper AM: Do you consider two years to be an interim period?

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): No, I do not. I think the ACM should have been off the buildings a long time ago. Then the third element is the really complicated piece about how you make that decision at 3.00am in the middle of a very dynamic, complicated incident, the likes of which Matt [Wrack] and Dany [Cotton QFSM] have set out to the Committee.

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): Yes. I agree with everything that has been said so far. We have also been trying to influence Government and we have had some success. A Steering Group has now been established to look at this research and move things forward, looking at a literature review, social science, evacuation and interaction between operations. It has all those experts on the Steering Group that we recommended, including [Professor] David Purser [CBE] who was one of the expert witnesses to the Grenfell Inquiry. We need to remember this is a building strategy, not a fire and rescue service policy. We need all those experts, those academics, those fire safety experts and building experts working with us. If we know we might have to shift from “stay put” to emergency evacuation/rescue, it is the “how” that this group will now look into.

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): I want to add that when we were before the Committee three weeks ago, we did stress the need for a national piece of research on this. I strongly believe this needs to be a national piece of research involving the LFB and involving a lot of other expertise from across the sector and, as people have mentioned, architects and suchlike. If we are going to do an exercise of this nature, which I agree that we should, we need the people who need to be convinced that the outcome of the exercise is accurate. We need independence from the LFB in delivering this. It does need to be involved because obviously it understands best what happened in the night in terms of exhibiting what the conditions were like according to the research that [AC] Andy [Bell] and his team have undertaken, but we do

need it to have an element of independence so that it can give that assurance to everybody who needs to get that assurance about whether it is possible and how that would work in practice. As the AC has indicated, this is something that is going to be looked into in much more depth in Phase 2.

Léonie Cooper AM: Can I ask you, and you can bring in any points that have sparked off by listening to others, even if we go through this process of reviewing -- calling it "fire rescue" rather than "evacuation" is much more accurate, I have to agree with that. Even if we go through this process of doing a national review that is independent - and I completely agree it should also be national - is that going to go far enough unless we also bring in the aspects relating to build quality and looking at all of that area? I do not see how we can review high-rise rescues unless we are looking at the build quality and also the issue that I flagged up earlier, the one about the adjustments that people have made to buildings. This building had been very seriously adjusted before the fire occurred.

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): Absolutely, and that does come through in the recommendations and the findings of the report as well. However, what we have seen over the summer is a number of fires in buildings that also should not have behaved in the way they did. We have to make sure, Government has to make sure and building owners have to make sure, everybody in the whole fire sector also needs to make sure that we get the fundamental change in the approach to fire safety in buildings.

Matt [Wrack] used the word "complacent" earlier. There has been a lot of complacency around fire safety in the built environment. However, we have to make sure that equally we are not complacent and that we do not just say we have to get the built environment right and then we do not have to change anything. We have to make sure that we get plan B, which there currently is not, for when fire safety features in buildings fail.

Léonie Cooper AM: There is an argument that the fire service has been too good at making people feel that fires can be dealt with, leading to public complacency on this issue, or by building owners or managers. That is a compliment in a very backhanded kind of way.

Because of this interim situation - and it is now two and a half years since Grenfell Tower [fire] happened - does that mean that now we have agreed that because of the state of those buildings and because all of the ACM cladding has not been removed, we do need to potentially adjust what we are doing around "stay put"? We have agreed that is something that the fire service is looking at. Is that an area where more training is needed because of the issues around when you make the decision to move from "stay put" over to a rescue situation? Is more training needed? Are more resources needed?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): With the interim arrangements that are currently in place with waking watches, that decision is almost taken out of the fire and rescue service's hands because as soon as a fire is discovered within that building, those waking watches should alert those people and evacuate that building. Hopefully by the time we get there that will be well underway if not completed. I can see Matt shaking his head and we have similar concerns around, if you have an interim measure in place for two to two and a half years, whether those waking watches stay as effective as we hoped they would be and whether they are being complacent as well. That is why we are saying Responsible People need to make sure they do not see those as long-term arrangements, because that is not what they were envisaged as at all.

Léonie Cooper AM: Did you want to come back on that point as well?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): A couple of points quickly. Firstly, on waking watches, we are extremely sceptical about the whole policy of waking watches. I have to say to our colleagues

in the NFCC, it was developed without our input even though our members on the ground are presumably expected to operate within it. There is an obvious point that if you live in a cost-cutting world you have to raise a question of how the waking watches will be recruited and put into place. Who are they? What training have they had? What procedures are they following? Nobody seems to know any of this and anecdotally firefighters on the ground who have met people who are undertaking waking watch work are very sceptical about the ability to do anything in the event of a fire.

My final point to the NFCC is that it is supposedly an interim policy but it is already two and a half years. Phase 2 is going to take another two and a half years. Is this going to be an interim policy that is going to last five years? I do not think that is acceptable.

In terms of developing another point because of operational response and the state of buildings, our concern is there is a danger of this not being joined up. This is a whole system of the whole fire safety regime, which is: what are buildings, what are the regulations by which they are built or altered, how do we inspect them, how do we enforce regulations? Our operational response fits in to that wider picture, yet we are looking at operational response when the other things have not been put right at all.

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): I agree. It was called an interim measure because it was intended to be in place for a short period of time to prevent a situation where effectively we were prohibiting the use of many, many buildings across the country and moving people out of those buildings, potentially into worse situations than they were previously in, so I completely take that point. I do think that if the outcome of all of this research is we still end up in a position where all we will have is slightly better-trained firefighters and emergency service responders who need to go and knock on all the doors of a high-rise residential building that is on fire, involving then going above the fire itself to the rest of the building, we will have missed an opportunity.

There are a couple of things in particular around that. One is sprinklers. We are responding to the consultation. We have a position statement about putting sprinklers in these buildings if they are over 11 metres in height, which would resolve this issue. The second is we have responded to a consultation recently and doing some work around a British Standard about an evacuation system for the use of the fire service that is built into high-rise residential buildings. Scotland has been leading the way on this in particular. That would mean that for the fire service, if you move from “stay put” to a simultaneous evacuation or rescue, you have an engineered facility to do that within the structure of the building.

Léonie Cooper AM: Something to alert everybody in the building as well, something that is hardwired in.

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): Yes. Safer for the residents and safer for the firefighters operating it.

Léonie Cooper AM: We are completely with you in terms of sprinklers. We did a report from the Assembly after the Lakanal House fire and we called for sprinklers after that. We have been very much on that page as well.

As well as sprinklers, there has been some discussion about smoke hoods. Do you think they would add something? Has there been any evaluation done of the impact of introducing them?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes. Clearly since we have introduced them in the LFB we have conducted a number of successful rescues of members of the public through smoke-filled environments to allow them to escape from those areas. The smoke evacuation hoods have been very successful with those. We welcome the opportunity. We have them on every frontline fire engine. Our firefighters all carry them on their BA sets. We have used them in a wide range of premises, not just high-rise, but in normal domestic premises to get people out of upper floors. They have been very successful.

Léonie Cooper AM: That is very encouraging.

My final question is to Roy if you do not mind. We know the Government, from tomorrow, will not exist as the Government, but has it responded to the NFCC call to instigate a research programme to consider and develop procedures to support an emergency mass rescue in a high-rise building? Obviously, we would not want to see firefighters put at risk at that point either, or any member of the public.

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): Yes, it has, which is the Steering Group I referred to earlier.

Léonie Cooper AM: That has been the response, to set up the steering committee?

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): The Competence Steering Group (CSG) has now been established. The point that people have been making about the whole system - the designers, the planners, the architects, the builders, the subcontractors, the building owners, all those people - is that the system needs to be fixed. Competence needs to be there across the board, and that includes us in that system, but it is whole system that needs fixing.

Léonie Cooper AM: I would quite like to see something introduced in Parliament immediately that says that any suggestions from the fire brigade around fire safety that are given to architects or surveyors when they're designing a building in the first place or planning any changes must be implemented without quibble, but at the moment, as we have already said, that's not the case.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Before we move on, I want to come to Matt, because you produced a very interesting three-page paper on 30 October [2019] and you make two particular points which I think are important.

First of all, you make the point that the inquiry in producing Phase 1 did not take any evidence or advice from Steve McGuirk, the former Chief Officer appointed by the Inquiry to advise on firefighting matters. We do find that bit surprising. He certainly does not appear in the report itself about the people who were consulted. It would be useful to know whether that is in fact the case?

The other point you make is about the practicalities of a rescue. What the report says is that there was a window between 1.30am and 1.50am where a rescue, a mass evacuation or a mass rescue could have taken place. You make the point that at that time there were only 30 firefighters on the fire ground. Obviously, the makeup was rapidly increasing but there was no Fire Rescue Unit, which meant that there was no extended duration BA, and we know from the rest of the report that the crews that were equipped with standard BA could not reach the 24th floor before their air was going to run out.

You also make the point there were no senior officers and presumably all those 30 firefighters who were there at that time would not all have been available to effect a mass rescue anyway because they would have other

duties, such as laying out hose, connecting up the hose to hydrants, operating the pumps and so forth, and operating the BA boards. Perhaps you could comment on that because I think that is quite an interesting and trenchant criticism of the report which is very much focused on that. Of course, if people were making calls to the control on 999, they could, I suppose, have been advised then to get out, and we will come to control shortly, but I just wondered what you thought about those points that you made there. Could you expand on them?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): Probably our biggest area of concern with the reports is not about the recommendations; it is about the narrative within the report. Yes, of the 30 firefighters of Watch Manager and below in attendance - presumably nobody would expect them to completely stop firefighting - somebody has to operate the pumps, somebody has to lay out hose, someone has to point the hose at the building. People have to fight fires. Simply I think, for anyone who has worked in the fire service, the idea that 20-something firefighters drop everything else they are doing, let the fire burn and go into a building and evacuate approaching 200 people, we all struggle with how that is feasible.

Then the question for us is: what is the evidential basis on which that analysis was made within the report? As you say, the report says between 1.30am and 1.50am. [Dr] Barbara Lane's report says the window was between - if I am correct - 1.26am and 1.40am, so it is 14 minutes. The 14 minutes is extended to 20 minutes but it is a different 20 minutes to that identified by Barbara Lane, who is the expert witness on that matter.

Very significantly, because this is clearly a firefighting matter, the expert witness, who by the way is not a particular friend of ours - we objected to his appointment - but he is the expert witness for the Inquiry, Steve McGuirk -- we wrote to the Inquiry during the process saying, "You have appointed a firefighting expert witness. You must ask that firefighting expert witness his view of whether an evacuation was feasible". They did not do so and Mr McGuirk, I think, deferred to others on that point. I would say it is baffling as to why you have a firefighting expert witness who is not asked a question on a key firefighting matter. If you look at the public debate, that is probably the major debate. The firefighting expert witness has given no evidence on that matter and has not indeed been asked about that matter by the Inquiry. That is a major concern for us.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Dany, do you want to comment on what Matt [Wrack] had to say?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We have some serious concerns. I think Sir Martin Moore-Bick himself said that some of the assertions around his comments around evacuation were not based on any expert testimony or evidence, which is why we think these matters should be explored in Phase 2 when we have a wide range of expert evidence that talks about the conditions inside the tower. I do share Matt's concerns that it would be very difficult for a small number of firefighters to make their way into the tower in those circumstances to do that evacuation, which is why we urgently need this piece of work to be done to support that. This is about the work of the firefighters, the job they can do and what they might face day in, day out, today if they attend another one of these buildings.

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): Andy [Bell] might correct me on this but in terms of what the gentleman said about the [Professor David] Purser evidence, there is a key element at the end of his comment. I disagree with the time in his advice anyway, but it is subject to the existence of a fire alarm or a fire evacuation system within the building, which of course did not exist. His comment about evacuation relies on the existence of a fire alarm system, which was not in place at Grenfell Tower.

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes, that caveat is absolutely correct. Matt is right. The FBU are core participants, as the LFB is. We are not aware that Steve McGuirk has provided any

evidence. We would certainly expect that if he has, we would have seen that. The only input I believe he has had is into the recommendations. All the expert witnesses were asked to provide suggested recommendations. We have seen that from Steve McGuirk but quite clearly in that he talks about it being a very complex incident. He made some recommendations, but he quite clearly points to there needing to be a lot more evidence and exploration of the evidence within Phase 2.

Léonie Cooper AM: I am sorry, Andrew, but even if there had been an alarm system, was it humanly possible to have evacuated Grenfell Tower in seven to eight minutes, which was the point that was just being made, with 200 residents? I am somewhat dubious that you could get 200 people out of a building of that size, with 24 floors, in seven to eight minutes. Roy?

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): I think [Professor] David Purser does caveat much more than just the fire alarm. My paraphrasing of what he says is that it was in an ideal situation with ideal notice.

Hopefully to let people look forward, David Purser is an invited member of the Steering Group to look at the evacuation so he will have every opportunity to put those points of view to all the other experts and we can come up with a proper conclusion amongst ourselves.

Léonie Cooper AM: So that question is definitely going to be answered by that expert group?

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): It will be set to the expert group and hopefully we will come up with some answers from that group, yes.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): We are going to move on to control now. Sorry, Susan.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): I will be quick. Commissioner, can you say why the “stay put” policy was not thoroughly re-evaluated after Lakanal [House fire], where compartmentalisation failed?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Obviously, as has been expressed by my colleagues, “stay put” is a building safety strategy policy. It is not a LFB policy or a fire service policy. It is the policy that is based on buildings behaving in the correct manner that allow firefighters to enter that building and put the fire out. “Stay put” is not fire service policy to review as such. What we have done is provide the additional training and information to our firefighters and officers about signs to look for and what to do should a building behave in an abnormal way and fire be spreading in a way that should not be allowed to happen if the building is built correctly.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): In your opinion, do you not think that the LFB has been slightly naive assuming that all buildings will react as they are supposed to react?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): I do not think we do assume that because we see day-to-day evidence where minor issues occur and where fire spreads in different ways. What we have never seen, and no fire service has ever seen, is a comprehensive building failure such as happened in Grenfell Tower.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): But you do see building failures all the time?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We see issues. Obviously, our fire safety inspection officers, when they are inspecting buildings will come across contraventions and fire safety issues, which is when we issue our Notice of Deficiency or prohibition orders on those buildings. We have never seen such a set of circumstances before.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): It is concerning me why it takes so long to get our senior officers in. When the senior offices are called in, are they blue-lighted in?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Absolutely, yes. They are all trained for emergency response driving and they drive in cars from the address they are at.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): It still took an hour and a half to get there.

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): That was the AC. Obviously, our Station Manager and Group Managers were on the fire ground considerably quicker than that. That was just the one AC time there that Andy gave you. We have a full list of the times of arrival of all the other officers.

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): They are in the report.

Susan Hall AM (Deputy Chairman): I will go through the report. Thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Moving on to control now.

Navin Shah AM: I want to explore a couple of questions about the control room. The report clearly notes that the control room was completely overwhelmed given the volume of 999 calls that it received and goes on to state that in many cases control room operators failed to handle the FSG calls in an appropriate and effective manner. This is followed by four recommendations. The opening question is, what contingency plans are in place to deal with large numbers of FSG calls?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): That is the work we have been doing, which we were discussing earlier. We have been looking at different methods of handling FSG calls. We are reviewing our current policy. Part of that is work we need to do nationally because where one control room is overwhelmed with the volume of fast FSG calls, we have additional control rooms that take those calls and it is about how we share that information. Obviously in the LFB we have more control officers on duty than any other control room round the country so this is a piece of work that the NFCC is doing about how we deal with the overflow of volume of FSG calls.

The way we deal with FSG calls at the moment, the policy states that control operators will remain on the call if someone is unable to leave their premises, to provide support, advice and reassurance. We are now reviewing that because it may well be the case that our control operators cannot dedicate themselves to one call. That is under review. For us, it is about understanding about how we answer those calls but more importantly how we record the information and share that information with the fire ground. That is the work we are doing with ongoing testing and exercising at the moment.

Navin Shah AM: The recommendations in the report cover both the review that you mentioned and also training for the operators, because every second, every minute, lost identifying and scrutinising the nature of the call and the trigger in terms of action that follows is critical. This is the most critical point in time.

Everything flows from that. Do you have a time frame as to how quickly you can undertake this review as well as conclude the training so that you have the control room fit for purpose in that respect?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): The control officers have all undertaken the training now. That has been ongoing over the last two years. They have all received additional training around FSG. What we are talking about is new and enhanced policies to help support the development of new technologies about sharing information. The training is all in place now. Control officers not only have received that training themselves but training on working with operational crews and with command unit crews on sharing that information.

Navin Shah AM: Looking at the information from the report, you get in a sense two kinds of calls. Some coming through the control room are advisory, and some are emergencies. How are you able to differentiate them and can that be done in a way that true emergency calls are not held up and therefore time taken to address them?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): In a normal event on any day in our control room the controllers receive a wide range of calls from basic information calls to some inappropriate calls where people are calling about matters that do not concern fire service, right across to people's concerns about fire safety issues and to minor-level emergencies - for instance a waste bin alight, which someone referred to earlier - up to large-scale incidents. Not only that, they are dealing with calls in from other control rooms, from other blue light services, and sharing information.

We have protocols in place. We have a time taken to answer our emergency service calls and then if it is not somebody where the control operator needs to stay the line, they deal with that, they ensure the right resource is despatched and then they terminate that call and go on to answer the next call. Unfortunately, if you have a queue of calls coming in, there is no way of identifying the nature of those calls.

One of the things is about understanding, where there are operational incidents. We were talking earlier about the 999 information sharing, so we can understand what a member of the public is saying. If you phone up as a member of the public about something that is immediately very urgent to you, it might be a low-level fire but you might describe it as a major incident. It is about getting the wider range of situational awareness and understanding.

My understanding is that on that night, our control operators dealt with more FSG calls that night than they had done in the previous ten years combined. They dealt with over 408 priority operational telephone calls. The number of those calls, the volume of those calls, the information they were trying to process, the information they were trying to share with other control rooms and other blue light services, and with the fire ground, was simply overwhelming for the volume of staff who were there.

Navin Shah AM: Can you absolutely reassure us that based on the recommendations in the report, you are on top of the job in terms of making sure that you do have both the policy review and aspects of identifying calls as your top priorities?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes. We are working on that. One of the other things we have done is introduce a new AC whose dedicated role is that of working in control and who has produced a Control Improvement Plan. He has undertaken a number of steps to look at and review policies and procedures in control and that is his sole job and responsibility, to implement that plan. We welcome the work we need to do with our colleagues in the NFCC about the wider sharing of information between control

rooms and how we relay information not only between fire control rooms but other blue light control rooms as well.

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): Can I add that I think it would be worthwhile for the Committee and other interested Assembly Members meeting the new AC who is overseeing this work at control? Last time we came to the Committee we mentioned the possibility of Members going both to Merton, which I know you have visited before, and also to the Stratford facility, just so that you understand what has been done, what is in train, and get that assurance that we are not just sitting here telling you that things are being done, but you can hear it for yourself, you can talk to the people who are implementing the work, so that you can have that confidence that what we are doing is what we are saying we're doing.

Navin Shah AM: Do you want to come in, Matt, on anything that you have heard?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): I would like to pick up on one the points that came up earlier in the discussion. On the question of controls, there have been cuts in job numbers in the London fire control over the past decade. I reported earlier, before you arrived, we have fire controls in the UK that on some occasions go down to a staffing level of one. How can you handle any single FSG call in those situations is beyond us.

In terms of a review, one thing that I think is often missed - and this is why systems end up failing - is the end-user involvement. People fail to talk to the control staff on the front line dealing with this. It is all very well the NFCC saying they are going to review all these things. Who they often fail to talk to are the people who take those calls and do the job on the front line.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): A couple of detail points, if I may, for Andy or Dany.

One of the things that come out of the report is that where the decision was made to revoke "stay put", virtually simultaneously on the fire ground and by the control supervisor, the transition from "stay put" to "get out" was somewhat haphazard to say the least. Some of the controller operators were giving very clear, very blunt guidance, as they are supposed to do -- Get out or you'll die -- while another was saying, when people were arguing with them, -- Okay, stay put --. The way that the change was communicated in control was by passing around a piece of paper saying, "Change to get out rather than stay put", which all seems a bit haphazard. What has been done to try to make sure that the transition from "stay put" to "get out" is conveyed effectively to callers?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): I think in the circumstances we saw that night the holding up of a piece of paper and walking around the control room with it was just a pragmatic solution because everybody was engaged in a call. I think there was no other way to deal with that at the time.

In terms of how that was handled, you talked about some control officers providing really blunt advice and some of it was less blunt. The training that has been done by the control staff over the past two years which reinforce that message, that if there is a change to get out, you need to be much more blunt about it and you need to leave virtually no option for the caller on the other end, particularly when you get to a point where staying is no longer an option. I think that has been reinforced over the past two years.

In terms of how we communicate that change in that stay put situation, certainly in Merton, with the introduction is a new wall screen, that information can be displayed there now. There are similar but smaller

screens at Stratford. That is the way we would have done it and we would do that in the future. Certainly, on that night, as you say, it seems a slightly simple way to do it but that was a pragmatic solution on the night.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): You have mentioned the introduction of the new AC in charge of control and presumably there has been a restructure of the command structure in control following from that. Can you give us an update on the development of the Brigade's control improvement plan?

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Yes. The new AC has been in place for a little while now and he has undertaken the work, closely involving all the control staff in the control room because as Matt [Wrack] quite rightly says, it is very important that the people who are doing the job, the people who are doing it day in day out, are absolutely involved in any changes that need to be introduced. The plan was only presented to my board very recently and as a result of that, a board is being set up to implement all those changes.

We are ensuring that where we have things such as the training review and the control review, all of those are being overseen, because obviously each one of those impacts not only the recommendations here, and also the learning that we have developed ourselves. It is about ensuring that we have oversight across all of those pieces of work to understand not only that they are taking place, that they are progressing as we wish, but that the interaction between all those pieces of work is recognised. What we are currently doing is a piece of detailed work looking into the 1,000-plus pages of this report to ensure that we look through not only the key recommendations at the end but at all the narrative throughout to pick up any other areas and ensure they are encompassed in the operational learning we are doing now.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): I will come to Roy and Mark. One of the issues that arose was about the transfer of information between different controls when the 999 calls started to be diverted to other controls around the country. What progress has been made to address the challenges of that sharing of information between the controls to which they were transferred and the main control operating out of London, and obviously vice versa if there is an incident elsewhere?

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): There are two aspects to this. One is the policy, the people and the training. That is the human side and just to reassure Matt, that is being led by the Mobilising Officers Group, who are virtually all control officers, with some other input. That is one side. The other side is the technological solutions. There is something called Multi-Agency Incident Transfer (MAIT), the automatic transfer of information between controls, which we have asked Government to invest in over a number of years now. The use of data and technology rather than relying on humans to pick up a phone and talk to each other is important not only between fire controls but between ambulance, police and fire controls. That is the big push. That technology is available; we just need the investment to make sure it works.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): For example, the report makes the point that ambulance and police can share their computer-aided despatch calls, but the Brigade cannot.

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): That is the thing. The MAIT system will be able to do that between the three controls from anywhere in the country

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): What is the timescale for that?

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): We need the investment, the money. As soon as the money comes in and is invested we can we can push forward on that.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Is that money from Government?

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): Government or the fire authorities. The money will need to come from somewhere.

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): Picking up on the point and a recommendation on the management of the shift from “stay put” to “evacuate”, the point you picked up. I do not think you can separate from the earlier discussion about the national guidance on “stay put” versus evacuation and the need for research and planning around that. For me, we have to plan for these eventualities, including planning for when things go wrong because you then train for what you plan for. The difficulty on the night of Grenfell was that it had not been planned for, people were not trained for it and therefore people were expected - largely, in hindsight - to make decisions for an event that had not been planned or prepared for.

Mark Hardingham (Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council Protection and Business Safety Committee, and Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director, Fire and Public Safety, Suffolk County Council): Regarding the FSG, “stay put” and the shift to evacuation, we should not lose sight of the responsibility of the RP for the building to make that they are communicating really clearly to the residents of those buildings what the circumstances are for the building that they live in. In addition to that being aware of who in particular are the vulnerable people that live in the building and then to have PEEPs in place for those individuals. That supports the fire service when we get involved in dealing with an incident in that building.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Andy, one of the criticisms was the lack of training on FSG calls, or refresher training on FSG. What was the reason for that? Was it because of the extra training you need to do on the Vision system?

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): We believe that does have an impact. After the Lakanal [House fire] inquest, we implemented that training and we expected that to take place annually. It does for two or three years and then it falls away and is not completed by all members of the control staff. That coincides with the implementation of Vision, and we know that the control operators were doing a lot of work and training to address those implementation issues with Vision training on various patches and workarounds. Our working assumption at the moment is that those implementation issues with Vision may well have impacted on the delivery of other trainings such as FSG refresher training.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): We have picked up Fiona’s invitation. I am sure [the Committee] would like to go and visit control before too long.

I think that is the end of the questions that we want to raise. Does anybody want to add anything to what they have said today? We will start with Andy and work round.

Andy Bell (Assistant Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): Nothing from me.

Dany Cotton QFSM (Commissioner, London Fire Brigade): No, thank you.

Dr Fiona Twycross AM (Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience): Just to reiterate that it is a personal commitment from the Mayor to make sure that he does everything in his power to ensure that the recommendations are implemented both as they relate to the fire brigade and to other people the

recommendations are aimed at. Also, it would be good to meet at a very early opportunity to talk about what format you would find that public reporting helpful to be in.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Roy?

Roy Wilsher (Chair, National Fire Chiefs Council): Nothing, thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Matt?

Matt Wrack (General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union): No, thank you.

Andrew Dismore AM (Chair): Can I thank you all for your contributions? It has been a very useful session. Obviously, this is only the start of our work scrutinising the Brigade's response to Grenfell. I think we are going to be returning in some detail to the training issue as part of a more in-depth review of the recommendations and what the Brigade has been doing. I think also we will be keeping a very close eye on the development of the next London Safety Plan, which presumably is underway, and hopefully we will be reflecting some of the lessons from Grenfell.