

MINUTES

Meeting	London Resilience Forum – Grenfell Phase 2 report
Date	Thursday 3 October 2024
Time	10.00 am
Place	Committee Rooms 2 & 3, City Hall, Kamal Chunchie Way, London, E16 1ZE

Present:

David Bellamy, Chief of Staff, Greater London Authority (Chair)
Pat Goulbourne, London Fire Brigade (Deputy Chair)
Kim Wright, LB Brent and Local Authority Regional Resilience Board (Deputy Chair)
Sean O'Callaghan, British Transport Police
David Ward, Business Sector Panel
Umer Khan, City of London Police
Emily Athwal, Environment Agency
Gopal Bhachu, Faith and Belief Sector Panel
Niran Mothada, Greater London Authority
Liam Lehane, London Ambulance Service
Mark Sawyer, Local Authority Regional Resilience Board
Terry Leach, Maritime & Coastguard Agency
Mark Rogers, Met Office
Lou Puddefoot, Metropolitan Police Service
Simon Holmes, Metropolitan Police Service
James Lunn, MHCLG
Peter Lee, MHCLG
Kenny Bowie, MOPAC
Martin Machray, NHS England (London)
Christian Van Der Nest, Transport Sector Panel
Robyn Knox, VCS Emergencies Partnership
Nina McLean, UK Health Security Agency
Beth Reeves, Utilities Sector Panel

London Resilience Unit (LRU):

Katherine Richardson, Director of London Resilience
Toby Gould, Interim Head of London Resilience
Matt Hogan, Deputy Head of London Resilience
Katie Wood, London Resilience Manager

Secretariat:

Felicity Harris, Senior Board Officer (clerk)

Also in attendance:

Beau Stanford-Francis, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Storme Alexander, London Fire Brigade

1 Introductions, apologies and Chair's opening remarks

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed members to the meeting, in particular Katherine Richardson, who had recently joined the GLA as the Director of London Resilience. Katherine had attended previous London Resilience Forum (LRF) meetings, but this would be her first in the new role.
- 1.2. Apologies had been received from: Julie Billett, Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC); Kevin Fenton, DHSC; Paul Hems, Health and Safety Executive; Brian Fahy, Military; and Cathryn Spain, Port of London Authority.
- 1.3. In opening the meeting, the Chair noted that his and attendees' foremost thoughts were with the families and communities who continue to live with the consequences of the Grenfell Tower fire. The grief and loss they continue to endure was an important reminder of the partnership's responsibility. The publication of the report represented a critical step forward on the road to justice.
- 1.4. This meeting had been convened outside of the usual LRF meeting schedule and presented an opportunity to share thoughts and reflections on the content of the report, the gravity of its findings and the action it compelled organisations to take. In advance of the meeting, the Chair had encouraged members to read Chapter 100 of the report, which described residents' experiences following the fire. It was agreed that their experiences were unacceptable.
- 1.5. Many partners had worked extremely closely on the Grenfell Tower fire, either at the time of the incident or with communities in the years following. The Chair expressed his hope that partners would continue to work closely together to support each other while acting on the difficult truths the report presented. Next steps would need to be approached with care and respect, and partners would need to move forward with a shared commitment to reduce the risk of emergencies while also providing appropriate support to Londoners. Work would need to continue at pace as it was clear that the next major challenge could happen at any time.
- 1.6. The Chair noted that the meeting would not focus on the report's findings relating to specific organisations. The meeting would instead focus on a strategic conversation about the report as a whole, while also being aware of the findings of the Manchester Arena and COVID-19 inquiries and what they mean for resilience in London.
- 1.7. Before the meeting continued, the Forum took a moment to pause and reflect, and remember the 72 people who lost their lives at the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017.

2 Opportunity for reflections from Deputy LRF Chairs, Kim Wright (Local Authorities) and Patrick Goulbourne (LFB)

- 2.1. The Chair invited the LRF's deputy chairs to share their reflections following the publication of the report.
- 2.2. Pat Goulbourne, Assistant Commissioner, LFB, thanked colleagues for convening the meeting, and, speaking on behalf of the Commissioner was clear that the LFB's thoughts remained with those who lost their lives, survivors, families and the wider community. The LFB had been committed to engaging with those most affected at every stage of the inquiry and would continue to do so. The Grenfell Tower fire had been the most significant challenge the LFB had experienced in living memory. The recommendations of the report would be central to institutional changes already underway. In direct response to the recommendations, a change of culture in leadership, training and ways of working at LFB was in progress. Improvements in response had already been demonstrated following a fire at the New Providence Wharf estate in Dagenham, though it was acknowledged that improvements would be a continual process. In addition to changes to training and leadership, LFB also continued to push for changes to building safety regulations in an effort to improve standards and ensure all buildings were safe.
- 2.3. While not all of the report recommendations were aimed at the LFB, Pat confirmed that those relating to the LFB and wider fire and rescue services (FRS) were accepted. The LFB was supportive of all the recommendations and would be releasing a public statement acknowledging this imminently. A draft response had already been shared with communities and local stakeholders, and publication would not proceed until those voices had been heard.
- 2.4. Kim Wright, Chief Executive of the London Borough of Brent and Chair of the Local Authority Regional Resilience Board, echoed Pat's thanks to those who had arranged the meeting. Kim noted the significance of the report for the families, communities and survivors who would forever live with the impact of the fire. She was clear that their voices and lived experiences needed to continue to be heard as partners focus on the recommendations of the report and confronting the systemic failures laid bare during incident and in the aftermath. Partners must accept the findings of the report, and respond to them with rigour, pace, transparency, dignity and respect. This report, alongside recommendations from the Manchester Arena and COVID-19 inquiries, presented a pivotal point to change the way partners operate.
- 2.5. At an operational level, the implications of the report would be discussed in the following weeks with the chief executives and political leaders of London's councils. The findings of the report would be stark and compelling for many council leaders, particularly in relation to the key elements of local authorities' response and recovery efforts.
- 2.6. Kim reminded partners of the collective responsibility they had to respond in a way that the victims, survivors and bereaved deserved, and she closed by sharing a quote from Thelma Stober, a 7/7 survivor, who highlighted the need to centre the response on those involved.

3 Open reflections from the room

- 3.1. The Chair invited other attendees to share any thoughts and reflections they had as they digested the report in the month following publication.
- 3.2. Beau Stanford-Francis, Executive Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods at the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), thanked the Chair for extending the invitation for RBKC to attend the meeting. Beau noted that RBKC wholly accepted the findings of the inquiry and that a paper outlining the key findings of the report had been discussed at their Cabinet meeting the previous week, with further updates on the response to the recommendations to be shared with the Cabinet before the end of the year. A series of engagement events were planned with impacted communities, independently facilitated by Bishop James Jones.
- 3.3. Robyn Knox, VCS Emergencies Partnership, welcomed having the space to reflect on the report and highlighted that the connections made across the partnership and beyond were instrumental in supporting people impacted by emergencies. She acknowledged that there would still be issues if a similar event were to occur now, but that partners were all now on a much stronger path and it was important to recognise the distance travelled over the last seven years.
- 3.4. Martin Machray, NHS England, noted that the NHS accepted the report and was keen to ensure that learning lessons from the report and supporting each other as partners during and following incidents was at the heart of the discussion. It was noted that the health service was still working with families of the victims and survivors on a range of health issues and would likely continue to do so over the coming years.
- 3.5. Sean O'Callaghan, British Transport Police, shared others' reflections and emphasised that the challenge in responding to the recommendations would be how organisations pursued collective change as a partnership. Partners needed to demonstrate real change rather than simply acknowledging the recommendations set out in the report.
- 3.6. David Ward, Business Sector Panel (BSP), noted that since the fire, the BSP had been working with LFB to create a bespoke online fire safety awareness training course for security officers. LFB had helped to design the not-for-profit course and were working with the BSP to get it rolled out as far as possible.

4. Update from MHCLG

- 4.1. The Chair welcomed Peter Lee and James Lunn, MHCLG, to the meeting and invited them to share thoughts on how the government intended to manage the recommendations from the report.
- 4.2. The Forum heard that ministers wanted to reflect carefully on the recommendations and the wider resilience landscape before issuing a formal response. Peter echoed others' remarks that victims, survivors and bereaved families should always be the main focus of the response.
- 4.3. On the recommendations, it was suggested that government would be considering them under three board themes: powers, guidance and peer review and audit. One of the fundamental questions to come out of Grenfell was what central government could and should do if the local response was failing, and what powers were required to act. This would need to be considered carefully when issuing resilience guidance, which needed to be clear, concise, and comprehensive. If additional guidance, for example

relating to the involvement of the voluntary sector, were produced, efforts would need to be made to ensure standards were aligned across all LRFs, while enabling local services to be reflected. Finally, the usefulness of existing peer review and audit processes were queried. It would be important to consider other mechanisms through which assurance could be provided that all partners had robust resilience arrangements.

- 4.4. It was acknowledged that, while LRFs provided a useful forum for multiagency response, accountability for resilience was blurry when it came to multiagency incidents. MHCLG officials would be working closely with partners to consider this.
- 4.5. The Chair confirmed that partners would actively support government in this and it was suggested that some examples of good practice on resilience standards and establishing an effective peer review process for local authorities could be shared with government. It was agreed that accountability was a challenge, particularly across local government where both democratic and political accountability could not be removed from the equation.

5. Strategic discussion – Paper 1

- 5.1. The Chair highlighted the paper circulated with the agenda, which included a series of key themes identified in consultation by the Chair, Deputy Chairs of the LRF and London Resilience Unit officers. A series of questions had been set out under each theme, each of which were designed to stimulate thoughtful discussion and led to actionable insights for improving the LRF's resilience activity.

Assurance

- 5.2. The Chair noted the report made clear that key partners responding to the fire were not ready, and that whatever assurance they thought they had was not accurate. The first question the LRF were asked to consider was: Recognising the way the LRF was constituted, how do partners feel about assurance and how organisations, individually and as part of the wider partnership, could be ready to respond to a future incident.
- 5.3. The Forum discussed training and exercising needs and whether there was any scope to carry out training and exercise activity with a wider range of partners, including the voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners. It was agreed that VCS and local community partners should be involved, not only during the course of the exercise itself, but also in the design and implementation of such activity. Members noted that exercises often ceased at the point that the incident was considered over and did not focus on the longer-term recovery following the incident.
- 5.4. It was queried how well partners understood other organisations' preparedness and whether more could be done to build strong relationships across the partnership while not actively responding to an incident. Some members suggested that while relationships across the emergency services were strong, other agencies' priorities and preparedness were not quite so broadly communicated. It was also noted that while partners around the table may have a strong understanding and assurance of their own organisation's resilience, there was often a notable lack of interest across other parts of the same organisation.
- 5.5. The Chair noted that one of the conclusions of the report was that key organisations involved in the response to the Grenfell Tower fire, including those in charge, had not got a sufficient level of assurance. The LFB, for example, had been identified in the

phase one report as having weak internal assurance mechanisms but had since made considerable changes to address this. Ensuring all resilience partners had effective and transparent assurance would be critical in responding to the phase two recommendations.

Identifying agencies that need support

- 5.6. The Chair asked partners to consider how the partnership could quickly identify when responders were unable to cope during an incident. The Forum discussed the time between LFB first becoming aware of the fire and sharing information with other partners. Other agencies brought in to provide additional support were starting from a difficult place and a considerable amount of damage had already been done. It was noted that colleagues from nearby local authorities had the required skillset to provide support but not necessarily the local knowledge. It was recognised that London had a strong VCS, and it was suggested that this be recognised in government's response to the report.
- 5.7. On the question of speed of response and identifying failures, it was queried whether existing response structures were fit for the modern risk picture and, although tactical coordinating groups (TCGs) and strategic coordinating groups (SCGs) were useful structures, did it take too long for them to be convened. Partners noted that other global cities benefited from tactical oversight teams in operation 24 hours a day. The scale of the city also presented challenges in quickly identifying where a response was failing, as did the possibility that a tactical lead from a national agency may not have existing working relationships with partners and could find confronting conversations about the adequacy of response difficult.
- 5.8. The Forum acknowledged the implicit pressure that could exist in meetings during an incident for organisations to confirm they were coping. It was suggested that a change in approach to focus on what additional support organisations may require could be useful, in addition to open questions relating to the weakest aspect of an ongoing response. The Forum queried whether there was a gap in the SCG structure, and whether someone could specifically be appointed to attend meetings and ask the right questions to identify struggling partners without encouraging defensiveness in response.

Enhancing our approach to recovery

- 5.9. The Forum had already discussed how to ensure recovery was considered and incorporated into resilience preparedness, including through testing and exercising, but was also keen to emphasise the importance of capturing good practice. The response to the recent New Providence Wharf estate fire in Dagenham was raised as an example of lessons which had already been implemented since the Grenfell Tower fire.
- 5.10. It was noted that the emphasis on recovery was likely to be different depending on the nature of the incident. It was noted that as the Manchester Arena bombing was a terrorist incident, specialist support for victims and survivors was immediately built into the counterterrorism and police response. Due to the nature of the Grenfell Tower fire, that specialist provision was not built into the response from the outset, and it was clear very quickly that there was a gap. Consideration of how to build recovery into response from the very start of an incident was crucial.
- 5.11. The Chair noted the considerable progress that had been made in terms of equipment and response processes. It was noted, however, that the fundamental issue in Dagenham was the fact that the building went up in flames so easily. While the

response was a success, more work was needed to prevent incidents from occurring and reducing their impact when they do was key.

London-level versus Borough-level planning

- 5.12. On the level of assurance the LRF felt it needed around borough-level risk planning, and whether processes were already in place for provide this assurance, it was suggested that variance at the borough level was a complicating factor. It was noted that the majority of borough resilience forums (BRFs) were chaired by default by local authorities and it could be challenging to engage other partners in the work. It was acknowledged that while BRFs were an important part of the resilience cycle, they were unfunded and so operated at a different level of engagement than LRFs.
- 5.13. Partners emphasised the importance of local community and engagement support, but also the lack of survivor and community voice within more formal structures. It was suggested that thought needed to be given to how communities mobilise in times of crisis and how they could be supported once the immediate incident had concluded.

Centering the people involved

- 5.14. The Forum was clear throughout the discussion that the voices of survivors, bereaved families and victims should be heard, and it was queried how the LRF could ensure those voices were central to shaping strategy and decisions, in preparation, response and recovery. It was suggested that efforts to understand individuals' lived experiences of incidents were crucial in measuring success but that existing mechanisms, such a humanitarian assistance groups, could be too slow to have a meaningful impact.
- 5.15. It was queried whether the LRF should be better sighted on the work of the faith and belief sector and the London Communities Emergencies Partnership (LCEP) in order to check levels of confidence around community engagement. Members indicated that the default position during a response was not to be particularly open in sharing information with non-categorised responders, but that sharing information competently and in a culturally sensitive manner could be useful. It was acknowledged that some groups could be wary of the formal response structures; making better use of the faith and belief sector and LCEP networks could improve trust levels with communities.

Resilience complexity

- 5.16. The Forum discussed the complexity of resilience and considered whether the system was too complicated and could be made clearer. Members felt that curious leadership was important to explore and navigate through complex resilience challenges.
- 5.17. It was agreed that there was strength in London's approach to resilience, with a relatively clear line of accountability. London boroughs had clear resilience responsibilities in comparison to local authorities across the rest of the country, and there was a structured process in place for mutual aid. The challenge in addressing the complexity of resilience would be not defaulting to more process and bureaucracy. It was suggested that some work to collectively assess London's highest risks and how to respond to them strategically would be worth pursuing.

6 Comments on other recommendations

- 6.1. There were no further comments beyond those summarised above.

7 Agreement of next steps

- 7.1. The Chair thanked those in attendance and noted how rich and valuable the discussion had been. The discussion would feed into the strategy of the LRF in the future and a number of the issues raised would also feed into government's resilience review. It would be critical to ensure the two were aligned.

8 Any other business

- 8.1. There was no other business.

9 Date of next meeting

- 9.1. The next meetings of the London Resilience Forum were due to take place on:
- Wednesday 6 November 2024, 2-4pm, City Hall
 - Thursday 27 February 2024, 2-4pm, City Hall.
- 9.2. The meeting closed at 11:58am.