



City of Westminster

Westminster Scrutiny Commission

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Title:	Learning from Terrorist Incidents and the Grenfell Fire during 2017
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Cabinet Member Portfolio	Public Protection and Licensing
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	City for All
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1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update for the Westminster Scrutiny Commission on the following items;

- Response to the Grenfell Tower Fire and areas of learning
- Response to other terrorist related incidents and areas of learning

2. Key matters for the Commission's Consideration

2.1 The Commission are asked to note the contents of this report and provide feedback on the following questions;

- How would the Commission like to be updated going forward?
- Is there a specific area of focus that the Commission would like a more detailed report?
- Would the Commission like to review the recommendations and action plan once developed?

3. Introduction

- 3.1 During 2017 there have been terrorist attacks on Westminster Bridge and at the Palace of Westminster, London Bridge and Manchester. We have also seen the threat level raised to critical for the first time since 2011. All of these incidents have had some degree of impact on the council. In addition, a number of councils have had a role in the recovery operation following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in Kensington and Chelsea with Westminster City Council taking a lead role and providing most of the day to day resource to support the operation. It is worth noting that in addition to the attacks in Manchester and on Westminster and London Bridges, we are aware of at least five other viable terrorist attack plots that have been thwarted by the security services.
- 3.2 Whilst members of the Scrutiny Commission can be reassured that City Council has detailed plans in place for responding to such incidents and an excellent track record in incident management given our previous experience of incidents such as July 2005 bombings and the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko by polonium in 2006, in addition to the internal and multi-agency training/testing that takes place. Furthermore, our command structures are well rehearsed at a number of high profile events, protests and ceremonial events that take place in the city on a regular basis. However, the number, nature and frequency of incidents in 2017 has prompted us to review our contingency planning arrangements to consider what changes need to be made and where additional capacity or resilience needs to be created. They have also highlighted the importance of regular training, awareness and testing of plans. Of particular note, has been the impact of the Grenfell Tower fire on our own business continuity plans, particularly around accommodation and staff. An overview of Westminster City Council and Pan London emergency planning arrangements can be found in appendix one, which is confidential and has been circulated separately to Members of the Commission.
- 3.3 This report will provide a summary of the City Council's response and highlight areas of learning for each of the key incidents, up to and including the tragic fire at Grenfell.

4. Response to the Grenfell Tower fire and areas of learning

4.1 Context

- 4.1.1 On 14 June 2017, the Grenfell Tower fire occurred in North Kensington, which, due to the nature and scale of the incident, required a significant response

over the coming days and weeks from a range of London partners, including Westminster.

4.2 Response to the incident

- 4.2.1 We focused our initial response around reviewing our own housing stock and supporting the Westminster Mortuary that was designated as the mortuary for the incident. A Westminster BECC (Borough Emergency Coordination Centre) was stood up to coordinate support and the Local Disaster Mortuary plan was kept under constant review to ensure appropriate governance was put in place around the mortuary.
- 4.2.2 Public Protection & Licensing had a significant role to play within this initial response including the contingency planning team, who initiated and coordinated relevant emergency and business continuity plans on behalf of the council, and to those staff working within Westminster Mortuary who implemented elements of the disaster mortuary plan and coordinated activity to meet the needs of being allocated the dedicated mortuary for the incident.
- 4.2.3 The response involving WCC gradually increased as more departments and key individuals became involved, including the Westminster BECC amalgamating with the Royal Borough Kensington & Chelsea BECC, when their staff were evacuated from Kensington Town Hall following a “breach” when protestors entered Kensington Town Hall. The joint BECC received mutual aid from across London and remained in place for 14 days until it was returned to Kensington & Chelsea to continue its function.
- 4.2.4 The impact on WCC became significant as the Grenfell Fire Response took over the 23rd floor at Portland House and over 150 WCC staff became directly involved as part of the response with WCC taking a lead role on housing and finance aspects of the recovery, as well as oversight of the BECC. Tri-borough social services staff also provided direct support for families.
- 4.2.5 The impact on WCC staff and accommodation was significant, requiring business continuity plans to be reviewed, implemented and constantly monitored to measure the impact on service delivery. Staff were required to work in a more agile manner and those usually working on the 23rd floor of Portland House had to work from other sites across Westminster or at home. Most WCC departments operated at 90-100% staffing capacity, the lowest being two directorates who operated at 70-80%.
- 4.2.6 Mass fatality arrangements were put in place and a number of changes to the Mortuary site were implemented resulting in the installation of an anthropology suite to support HM Coroner and disaster victim identification. The suite is still in situ but is expected to be decommissioned by the end of the year.

4.3 Fire Safety

Following the Grenfell Tower incident, Westminster Council provided specific focus around its housing stock, managed through City West Homes and to residential housing.

City West Homes

- 4.3.1 Significant engagement has taken place with residents through City West Homes (CWH) and the Council following the Grenfell fire. Information regarding CWH's regime for maintaining fire safety of the housing stock was shared with and explained to residents, to provide reassurance. The tower blocks at Little Venice on the Warwick and Brindley estates have cladding similar to that at Grenfell Tower and a bespoke communications plan was put in place for those residents. Cladding at Little Venice is in the process of being removed and will be replaced by the end of April 2018. Temporary changes to the fire evacuation procedure are in place until the cladding is completely removed and a 'waking watch' has been installed. Once the cladding is removed the 'stay put' fire evacuation advice will once again be in place for the whole building.
- 4.3.2 All tower blocks over ten stories were visited within the first few days following the fire, to carry out visual checks and to ensure all fire related signs and guidance was up to date and appropriate. Independent and/or scheduled Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) with London Fire Brigade (LFB) have been put into place and have escalated the FRA's for all blocks over six storeys. CWH' fire safety team are working closely with LFB to ensure the safety of the stock. Although there is no requirement to retrospectively fit sprinklers, the Council has committed to provide sprinklers in all its housing stock over 30 metres. Independent advice and options for installation are currently being considered by WCC. CWH has also completed a review of its portfolio and identified circa fifty blocks where non – ACM cladding systems or infill panels are present and will be completing a full technical review of these systems.
- 4.3.3 CWH has undertaken a review of its fire safety management systems following the Grenfell Tower fire and will be instigating the following changes:
- Enhanced risk assessments, moving from a Type 2 to 3, which includes sampling a number of flat doors and flat layouts. Type 4 is currently being used on all blocks over 30 meters.
 - Carrying out independent fire door checks on all blocks above 6 floors.
 - Enhancing fire assessments within street properties and low rise.

Residential Housing

- 4.3.4 Following the Grenfell fire, Westminster City Council has been working closely with Department for Communities and Local Government, London Fire Brigade and other partners to carry out the necessary tests on cladding and assess fire safety.
- 4.3.5 Residential Services distributed fire safety advice and guidance to private sector landlords and agents, as well as Registered Providers, in the weeks following the Grenfell tragedy. Officers have also fielded queries and service requests from concerned tenants, including those living in high rise developments.
- 4.3.6 The service is currently undertaking checks of all privately owned high rise residential buildings in Westminster as part of the government's ongoing response to the tragedy to identify and assess any cladding in respect of its fire safety. Officers are working alongside London Fire Brigade (LFB) colleagues to ensure building owners are carrying out necessary checks and remedial measures. Where buildings identified with non-compliant cladding are identified we are working alongside LFB to engage with responsible persons to ensure the necessary remediation and mitigation measures are implemented.

4.4 Financial Support

- 4.4.1 Westminster Council Finance Directorate provided the lead on financial matters in relation to the Grenfell response and officers worked closely with partner agencies to deliver financial support to those families requiring help in relation to their effected accommodation. Their role included providing reports to the Department for Communities and Local Government, monitoring costs, paying discretionary payments to residents and providing leadership on policy.
- 4.4.2 A number of financial issues were identified as learning opportunities following the incident. Recognising the complexity of the incident, more clarity on who and which addresses were eligible for payments could have improved the timeliness of payments and having up to date residential information could have supported this process.
- 4.4.3 The Bellwin scheme provides emergency financial assistance to local authorities under Section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 provides the Government with the ability to provide financial assistance to Local Authorities where an emergency or disaster has occurred. The scheme is intended to reimburse the cost of local authority actions taken in the immediate phase of an emergency, not those taken as part of the recovery phase. It is not intended to fund longer term repairs or cost and this is reflected in the eligible spending period of one month from the date when a qualifying

incident comes to an end. There is no automatic entitlement to financial assistance; Ministers are empowered by the Act to decide whether or not to activate a scheme after considering the circumstances of each individual case.

4.4.4 There is a threshold for claiming costs. Before being eligible for the grant, an individual authority is required to have spent 0.2 per cent of its calculated annual budget on works that have been reported to the Department as eligible for the grant. For Westminster threshold has been calculated as £353,519 in 2017/18.

4.4.5 This legislation is currently being used to claim the cost of expenditure incurred by Westminster City Council and Kensington and Chelsea during the initial 4 weeks of the response to the fire. Further expenditure claims are being processed on costs incurred by Westminster mortuary as the dedicated mortuary for the fire. These will be submitted to the Ministry of Justice. In addition, some costs are being directly funded by RBKC.

4.5 **Areas of Learning**

4.5.1 London Resilience is currently coordinating feedback on the response to the fire and a pan London de brief is anticipated to take place before the end of the year.

4.5.2 Recognising the importance of debriefing incidents and taking forward areas of learning, Westminster organised a series of internal debriefs that included a Corporate Leadership Session that focused on recent incidents. This provided an opportunity for senior leaders within WCC and City West Homes to reflect on recent terrorist incidents and the Grenfell fire, discussing their impact on service areas and areas of learning. Further sessions are now taking place with individual directorate senior management teams.

4.5.4 Discussions are currently taking place to examine options for improving resilience and capacity in key areas including contingency planning highlighted during the Grenfell response. Examples identified thus far include;

- Developing enhanced internal communications and cascade systems
- Reviewing the arrangements for identifying and equipping suitable premises for Rest Centres, Community Assistance Centres or Humanitarian Assistance Centres
- Developing procedures for managing large volumes of donated goods
- Reviewing protocols for providing food, money and supplies to large numbers of evacuees

- Developing enhanced relationships with community groups and businesses in emergency planning to build community resilience
- Further training for staff and command teams
- Desktop exercises are being arranged and some have already taken place to test the ability of the organisation to respond to large scale incidents. This will focus on our response to an emergency but also to maintain business as usual through our business continuity plans.

The taskforce initial report from the Independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce is also being reviewed and further actions arising will be incorporated into our plans.

5. Response to other terrorist related incidents and areas of learning

5.1 Westminster Bridge Terrorist Incident

Context

- 5.1.1 On 22 March 2017, a vehicle mounted the southern pavement of Westminster Bridge and subsequently injured and killed a number of pedestrians. The vehicle then crashed into the railings of the Palace of Westminster, the driver exited the vehicle and approached Carriage Gate where he entered the grounds of the Palace of Westminster, fatally injuring a police officer. The driver of the vehicle subsequently sustained fatal injuries.

Response

- 5.1.2 Initial reports of the incident were received by the contingency planning team and calls were then made to the duty silver officer, management, duty communications officer and an incident management log was opened. The council's response continued intensively for the next three days with the contingency planning office being used to coordinate this. Council officers from a number of departments were involved in the response, recovery and return to normality.

Areas of Learning

- 5.1.3 In order to effectively coordinate those areas of work linked to designing out terrorist opportunities in the public realm, a Strategic Counter Terrorism meeting has been introduced, chaired by the Executive Director for City Management and Communities, which provides additional support and direction to the three 'CONTEST' sub groups that are currently in place within Westminster City Council i.e. prepare, protect and prevent.

5.1.4 A strategic and tactical debrief session was undertaken to examine Westminster City Council's response to the incident, which highlighted good practice and areas of learning. Feedback focused around several key themes including governance, response, internal / external communications and equipment.

5.1.5 The following key areas are examples of work being taken forward as areas for learning;

- Cascade the command structure internally and externally following an incident, which should be distributed with guidance on how to escalate issues through the command structure.
- Reviewing the role and responsibilities of key staff directly involved in the response to an incident.
- Use a centralised email account for command roles to allow access by the various officers performing those roles, ensuring no information is lost by using personalised accounts.
- Review methods of communication with staff to ensure they are effectively and efficiently informed and kept apprised of the incident.
- Review the arrangements for humanitarian assistance and post incident welfare support.
- Providing feedback to London resilience on Pan-London issues that impact on Westminster Council.

5.2 **London Bridge Terrorist Incident**

Context

5.2.1 On 3 June 2017, a van mounted the pavement of London Bridge and was driven into pedestrians. The van then crashed and the three male occupants ran into the nearby Borough Market pub and restaurant area, where they stabbed various people with knives. Eight people were killed and forty eight injured, including four unarmed police officers who attempted to stop the assailants. The three attackers, who wore fake explosive vests, were all shot dead by armed police officers. The incident was declared as a terrorist incident.

Response

5.2.2 Although primacy rested with Southwark borough, the WCC contingency planning team contacted their colleagues in Southwark and offered support, which was duly accepted.

5.2.3 The London Bridge incident had far more resonance with businesses in Westminster than the Westminster Bridge attack had and in the aftermath of the incident the council worked closely with the police at borough and counter terrorism level to engage with and, as far as possible, reassure businesses. This included holding a public meeting at the Apollo Theatre which included presentations from the relevant agencies and a Q & A session.

Areas of learning

5.2.4 It was apparent from the public meeting that the vast majority of businesses who attended have well-rehearsed business continuity arrangements of their own, however there were those in attendance who did not understand their roles or responsibilities in relation to terrorist incidents or other incidents and it was clear that more work needed to be done to support these businesses. This area of work is being progressed by the contingency planning team in partnership with the police.

5.3 Manchester Terrorist Incident

Context

5.3.1 On 22nd May 2017, a terrorist suicide bomber detonated a device in the Manchester Arena during an Ariana Grande concert. Twenty-three people were killed, including the suicide bomber and one hundred and sixteen people injured. This was the first terrorist attack of this nature to occur in the United Kingdom since the 7th July 2005 London bombings.

Response

5.3.2 The impact on Westminster City Council was significant in terms of event management, leading to the review of many events by the council as well as working with the police who wanted to implement increased levels of counter terrorism measures to target harden certain events.

Areas of Learning

5.3.3 In subsequent days after the incident, Manchester City Council sought advice from the contingency planning team to support their planning around returning to normality. This focused on their experience from the Westminster Bridge incident relating to floral tributes, humanitarian assistance and victim support. Officers from WCC subsequently attended a seminar in Manchester during September to discuss aspects of their experience around humanitarian assistance and 'return to normality'.

6 Review of emergency planning arrangements in London

6.1 Even prior to these incidents, the Local Authorities' Panel commissioned a review of London's local authority emergency planning arrangements early in 2016, the review set out a series of recommendations which are designed to ensure that local authorities can continue to provide strong emergency planning services that deliver individual and collective leadership on resilience into the 2020s. The 13 recommendations made identified the aim to:

- Establish a corporate resource of professional advice, support and oversight, where not already established, to support authorities to withstand increasing pressures and ensure chief executives have ready access to high quality corporate advice and support in their localities;
- Strengthen collaborative working to better utilise experience, knowledge and expertise;
- Support a more cost effective and efficient service;
- Increase opportunities to share scarce resource;
- Create a more robust Duty London Local Authority Gold arrangement which will further compliment the leadership on resilience role and participation at the heart of London strategic coordination;
- Establish a more robust and meaningful assurance process to improve corporate oversight.

6.2 In addition the Lord Harris review of London preparedness was also published in 2016. It made 127 recommendations for the Mayor, the Central and local Government and other agencies to consider. Lord Harris highlighted the London Local Authority Gold arrangements and welcomed the agreed principles of collaboration and cooperation, including mutual aid, underpinned by the regular testing and exercising of arrangements. Lord Harris discussed the increase in sub-regional working, which he welcomed, but cautioned that local knowledge and connections must not be lost. He suggests that sub-regional working on emergency planning might be formal in some places and informal in others. The Local Authority Panel considered Lord Harris' report and reported that the concerns of substance outlined by Lord Harris – in terms of local authority operational resilience and capacity to respond - largely match the concerns addressed by the Local Authority Panel's own review.

6.3 However, given the cumulative significance of events over the last year a further peer review of London Local Government's Collective Resilience Arrangements has been commissioned and is expected to report in early 2018. Officers from the City Council are taking part in this peer review.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. All of these incidents have tested the council's ability to respond within the framework of counter terrorism, major incidents and the Civil Contingency's Act. They have also challenged our emergency and business continuity plans. The learning from these incidents and the feedback from the on-going reviews will be developed into a detailed action plan with a series of recommendations that will provide the foundation on which to build and enhance our approach to future incidents.
- 7.2 Positive feedback has been received from a range of partners and external organisation's regarding our ability to respond with specific praise for the dedication and commitment of our staff, which has been exemplary during the most challenging of circumstances.
- 7.3 The threat from terrorism and the risk of incidents linked to civil contingencies will continue to exist and it is our priority to ensure that as Council we are prepared and resilient by having robust local contingency and emergency plans in place alongside providing support the wider pan London arrangements.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the
Background Papers please contact Report Author x4252
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 (CONFIDENTIAL) - An overview of Westminster City Council and Pan London emergency planning arrangements

BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A