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7/7 Inquest recommendations and lessons for the FRS

Purpose of report

For discussion / decision.

Summary

The findings of the inquest into the deaths of 52 people who died in the July 7 terrorist bombings in 2005 were published on 6 May 2011. The recommendations were directed at the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the Director General of the Security Service, the Secretary of State for Health, Transport for London, the London Resilience Team, the London Ambulance Service and the Barts and London NHS Trust. The recommendations were issued under Rule 43 of the Coroner's Rules 1984 and the Government and relevant agencies have 56 days from the issue of the report to formally respond. Although the recommendations were not directed at the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), there are implications for the FRS at both strategic and operational levels. This is the first opportunity for the LG Group Fire Commission to consider the recommendations and the potential implications for the FRS.

Recommendation

Members are asked to consider the Lady Justice Hallett's recommendations and discuss the potential implications for the FRS.

Action

LG Group officers to progress actions as appropriate.

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Background

1. The Rt Hon Lady Justice Hallett was appointed as Assistant Deputy Coroner with jurisdiction over the 52 inquests that arose from the terrorist explosions that took place on the London Transport network on 7 July 2005. The inquests commenced on 11 October 2010 and finished on 11 March 2011 with the Coroner delivering her verdicts on 6 May 2011.
2. The Coroner determined in May 2010 that the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority would be granted 'interested person' status and that the scope of the inquests would examine the adequacy of the emergency response at each location and whether any failings or delay contributed to the deaths.
3. The preparation for the inquest was extremely challenging for LFEPA as the Coroner set a tight timetable for the disclosure of relevant documents. 36 witnesses were called from the LFB and all were supported through the process. The Coroner often praised the witnesses for their professionalism and sensitivity in having to relive these harrowing events.

Coroner's Verdict

4. As expected, the Inquest recorded verdicts of unlawful killing in all 52 cases. It also found that, on the balance of probabilities, there was no evidence to support a conclusion that any failings of any organisation or individual caused or contributed to the deaths and that "each of the victims would have died no matter what time emergency services reached them".
5. Rule 43 of the Coroner's Rules 1984 provides Coroners with the power to make reports to a person or organisation where the Coroner believes that action should be taken to prevent future deaths. Lady Justice Hallett made a number of recommendations, covering the security service MI5, the emergency services and Transport for London although none were addressed to LFEPA.
6. Two of the recommendations were directed at the security services on procedures on showing photographs to informants, and decisions on the assessment of targets and there was one recommendation for London Ambulance Service relating to triage procedures.
7. There were four recommendations for the London Resilience Team dealing with inter-agency training, protocols for declaring major incidents, procedures for establishing an initial rendezvous point at incidents and reviewing procedures for telling emergency services that the power in Underground tunnels has been

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switched off, and that it is safe to go onto the tracks (also addressed to Transport for London).

8. In light of current protocols which meant firefighters had to wait for a second appliance to be deployed before they could approach the wrecked train carriages, Hallett also considered whether firefighters should have more discretion in deciding when they can proceed to an incident. She found that these were matters for London Fire Brigade to determine in reviewing their procedures and policies.
9. The Coroner also examined the delays in reaching two of the scenes namely King's Cross and Edgware Road. She emphasised that important steps have now been taken to improve mobilisation by way of a unique identification for every underground station and tunnel in order that the exact location of an incident can be quickly and precisely identified.
10. Understandably, given the subject of the inquest, the recommendations are focused on London. However, there are important points which can be extracted from the recommendations that have relevance to all emergency situations where a response is required from a number of the emergency services.

Fire Service response

11. The Hallett recommendations are not aimed specifically at the Fire and Rescue Service, but clearly the London Fire Brigade will want to make a positive contribution to a number of the issues highlighted and they quickly responded saying that they would study the findings in depth. Members will want to consider both the strategic and operational implications for the FRS.
12. The London Resilience Team (LRT) will manage the response to the recommendations in London and LFEPA are already working closely with the LRT to shape the submission and ensure that recommendations are fully acted upon and that technical improvements and work over the past four years is reflected.
13. The focus of the inquest has been on processes and procedures that apply in London. However, other FRSs will want to consider the lessons to be learnt from the London experience. Issues of strategic significance include the wider health and safety implications, joint training, communication and operational practice.
14. Responding to this inquest was extremely challenging for LFEPA and significant operational and legal resources had to be devoted to the inquiry. It should be remembered that no other fire authority has ever faced this type of challenge covering four simultaneous major incidents.

Sharing the learning more widely

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15. To ensure that the sector can understand and reflect on implications for individual FRAs, there is a workshop session at the LG Group's Annual Conference and Exhibition on 28-30 June at the International Convention Centre in Birmingham.
16. Councillor Coleman will host the session with the Commissioner and Richard Barnes AM, Chairman of the 7/7 Review Committee. The session is scheduled for 1-1.45pm on 29 June and all Members are welcome to attend.

Recommendations

17. Members are asked to consider the Lady Justice Hallett's recommendations and discuss the potential implications for the FRS.