



Briefing Note - Grenfell Tower Inquiry - December 2019

Purpose of the Briefing

1. Since the publication of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry (GTI) phase 1 report, there has been understandable concern across the fire sector, and beyond, to ensure an effective and timely response is made to the issues raised within it. In this environment, it would be easy for work already in hand to be duplicated, or for new work to be commissioned that fails to effectively address the underlying issues identified by the Inquiry. To try to address this, this briefing note summarises the work of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) that is;
 - 1.1. already completed;
 - 1.2. currently being coordinated, led or being contributed to; and
 - 1.3. planned for the future, as far as that can be known at this time at this point in time.
2. By its nature, this note is a summary of the work and can not deal with every detailed element of it. The work is also still emerging and being scoped and the NFCC will welcome ongoing discussion with other stakeholders, including Governments, Local Government, Employers, Employee representatives within the fire sector as well as with wider stakeholders outside the sector that contribute to resolving the issues that underlie the Grenfell tragedy.
3. In this environment and with the pace of the work the content of this note will soon be superseded. Contact for further information can be made with the NFCC for the latest updates - nfccadmins@nationalfirechiefs.org.uk

The role of the National Fire Chiefs Council

4. The NFCC represents a collective view on behalf of the 50 Chief Fire Officers or Chief Executives that lead the professionals within all of the UK's fire and rescue services. Funding contributions are made by those services to fund the activities of the NFCC with a number of Government grants made available to support specific deliverables.

5. Since the Grenfell Tower fire on 14 June 2017, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has played a central role in supporting and facilitating the cross-Government response. Having stepped into the role of the Government's chief advisor following the disestablishment of the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser's Unit (CFRAU), the NFCC Chair's advice, and NFCC co-ordination across fire and rescue services (FRS) has been integral that response. Critically, the way in which the NFCC has been deeply embedded in all aspects of the response to Grenfell has enabled Ministers and Departments to provide reassurance to the public that the response to Grenfell is being delivered with the full involvement of the fire and rescue service.
6. In particular, the NFCC would like to mark the level of contribution and assistance received from colleagues in the London Fire Brigade (LFB). Without the openness, collaboration and contribution of LFB, the wider sector learning and action planning summarised in this note would not have been possible. That working relationship continues in all aspects of this work and is vital to its success.

Immediate response

7. The NFCC played a central role in the national response to Aluminium Composite Metal (ACM) and other emerging fire safety issues, providing a single point of contact through which Government can channel and coordinate information and visits to identified unsafe buildings.
8. This included the coordination and publication of sector led guidance for buildings perceived to have an unacceptable level of fire risk without remediation, such as moving to simultaneous evacuation strategies which were developed in co-operation with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and other stakeholders. The NFCC continues to monitor the implementation of this guidance, and support and guide FRSs who continue to have ACM buildings in their areas.
9. MHCLG also established the Independent Expert Advisory Panel in which the NFCC Chair has played a key role. The Industry Response Group (IRG) was set up to complement remediation efforts and the NFCC has been an integral member to the IRG since its inception. The IRG was originally supported by fire and rescue service volunteers which drew resources away from local delivery and response (largely the LFB). In addition, the IRG now oversees the Construction Industry Council (CIC) Competency Steering Group where the NFCC is also expected to play a key role across a number of working groups.

Operational learning

10. Immediately after the Grenfell Tower fire, the NFCC began working with LFB to identify learning and circulate information to fire and rescue services, using its National Operational Learning (NOL)

system. NOL had already been established as part of the National Operational Guidance (NOG) Programme provide a platform to respond to events quickly and effectively, to share learning, identify lessons, drive operational improvements and to keep operational guidance up to date.

11. Due to the scale and significance of the Grenfell fire and the urgency of the potential learning, the NOL team have been working closely with LFB. This has resulted in significant engagement and sharing of information to identify learning, which has enabled the NFCC to disseminate actions quickly. The NOL team worked with LFB in applying a systematic method (Bowtie methodology) to identify underlying issues of the incident and address them.
12. From this, based on information received directly from LFB, the NFCC has been able to gather information, identify learning, make changes to NOG and issue action notes to services, while being sure that any changes made were appropriate and proportionate.
13. The Home Secretary and SoS for MHCLG wrote to all Chief Fire Officers and Chairs of Fire Authorities highlighting the importance of the GTI recommendations and asking them to work in a co-ordinated way through NFCC. The NFCC fully recognises the importance of the recommendations made by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 report and the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety (Hackitt review), and understands the need to address them directly. But it also recognises that the recommendations should not be addressed in isolation; the broader themes identified have been prevalent throughout previous reports and can be seen against areas for improvement highlighted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).
14. It is unlikely that the issues identified in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 report will be repeated in exactly the same circumstances at a future incident. Many fire and rescue services have changed policies or procedures that relate directly to this type of fire, and awareness of the specific issues concerned have been elevated by the fire itself and the publication of the report. The NFCC is taking steps to identify the actions being taken by individual services, to collate them, identify good practice and share it accordingly.
15. It is, however, likely that if left unaddressed the underlying issues identified will impact in other ways and continue to affect the safety of the public and the delivery of response by all UK fire and rescue services. It is not possible for a single solution or action taken by any service to address some of the broader themes unless those changes are supported by actions taken across the service to embed the lessons learned and implement change.

16. To address current and future recommendations, the NFCC have developed an approach to help identify, track and map recommendations made to the fire and rescue service. This will identify core themes and address root causes as part of a broader service improvement process. All of the actions taken by the NFCC, its committees and other stakeholders are elements of a broader plan to achieve strategic improvement. This Strategic Improvement Model (SIM) database that has been developed to identify core themes and dependencies; to allow recommendations made in the future to be considered in context, and to allow the NFCC to plan effectively and deliver consistent strategic service improvements in the medium to long term.

Actions taken

17. To coordinate the response across fire and rescue services:

17.1. Communication issued to all chief fire officers setting out the approach of the NFCC and to request information from services regarding local action taken in relation to recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Investigation: Phase 1 report to enable central coordination.

17.2. An information note – Buildings that fail – was issued in December 2019 that highlighted the hazards associated with failures in building fire safety. This was in response to a number of building fires that have involved firespread resulting from failures in compartmentation or external fire protection. Although not directly linked to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 Report, there are clear areas of concern between the Grenfell Tower fire and subsequent fires. The note requests that services provide information relating to other incidents involving buildings that fail, so the scale of the problem can be assessed.

18. To address issues relation to fire protection in buildings:

18.1. The NFCC's Building Safety Programme Team has been established to support and liaise with the government's Building Safety Programme, to service the advice requests related to implementing the recommendations made by the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety (Hackitt review). Seconded from a diverse range of FRSs from around the country, each with their own area of fire safety expertise, the team provides technical advice, and maintains a strong network of FRS protection specialists nationally to ensure views are representative. This has included servicing advice requests to:

- Support the Call for Evidence on the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

- Shape and inform the recommendations in [Building a Safer Future](#).
- Support ongoing policy development as part of the Joint Regulators Group (JRG), such as the development of the Safety Case Regime

- 18.2. Support and advice to the MHCLG Independent Expert Advisory Panel.
- 18.3. Support and expert technical advice into the Industry Response Group (IRG) set up to complement remediation efforts. The IRG oversees the Construction Industry Council (CIC) Competency Steering Group where the NFCC also plays a key role across a number of Competency working groups.
- 18.4. Support and advice to the Ministerial-chaired building remediation taskforce, established with a key focus to try and progress the remediation and monitoring of buildings with unsafe combustible cladding
- 18.5. Worked with the LGA to convene a Joint Expert Inspection Team (JIT) to help local authorities on the ground. This team supports local authorities in ensuring and where necessary, enforcing remediation of private sector high-rise residential buildings with unsafe ACM cladding systems
- 18.6. Provision of professional and technical advice from fire and rescue service fire safety experts, into the policy development and review of building regulations, such as the review of Approved Document B.
- 18.7. Co-ordination and publication of *Guidance to support a temporary change to a simultaneous evacuation strategy in purpose-built block of flats*.
- 18.8. Co-ordination of consultation feedback to the *BS 8629:2019 Code of practice for the design, installation, commissioning and maintenance of evacuation alert systems for use by the fire and rescue services in buildings containing flats*.
- 18.9. Chairing the recently established Protection Board, to develop a programme of work focused on inspection activity across high-rise residential buildings.

19. To support more effective response at a national policy level:

- 19.1. Recommendation of the use of smoke hoods for evacuation will be made at the meeting of the NFCC Operations Committee in January 2020 following trials in London and Kent and the action note issued through the NOL process.
- 19.2. Communication issued – *Evidence based review of firefighting tactics at high-rise residential buildings*, to help identify future research opportunities in relation to firefighting in high-rise residential buildings
- 19.3. Amendments to National Operational Guidance: Fires in buildings (all guidance available on ukfrs.com):
- 19.4. National Operational Guidance: *Fires in buildings* (3rd edition Version 1), additional information added to highlight the hazard of fires in cladding assemblies – November 2017.
- 19.5. *People* hazard updated to emphasise the need to regularly review evacuation strategies at fires in tall buildings – August 2018.
- 19.6. *Firespread* hazard updated and restructured to emphasise risk of external firespread – February 2019.
- 19.7. *Fires in tall buildings* hazard amended to highlight hazards elsewhere in guidance that are made more significant when working in tall buildings – February 2019.
- 19.8. *Inaccurate situational awareness* hazard amended to clarify information gathering at fires in buildings – February 2019.
- 19.9. *Fires in tall buildings* scenario amended to provide additional incident prompts – February 2019.

20. To promote improved operational response at local level:

- 20.1. Action note to all UK fire and rescue services prompting a review of Site-Specific Risk Information (SSRI) for high-rise residential buildings.

- 20.2. Action note issued to prompt National Operational Guidance to be reviewed to show information regarding firespread and high-rise residential buildings.
- 20.3. Action note issued to Skills for Justice prompting a review of National Occupational Standards relating to knowledge of building construction materials
- 20.4. Action note issued to prompt National Operational Guidance to be reviewed relating to the structure of Foundation for breathing apparatus.

21. To address cross service liaison issues:

- 21.1. Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles - An action note has been issued to all UK Emergency Services with the following recommendations:
 - 21.1.1. Each emergency service must communicate the declaration of a Major Incident to all other Category 1 Responders as soon as possible;
 - 21.1.2. On the declaration of a Major Incident clear lines of communication must be established as soon as possible between the control rooms of the individual emergency services;
 - 21.1.3. A single point of contact should be designated within each control room to facilitate such communication;
 - 21.1.4. A "METHANE" message should be sent as soon as possible by the emergency service declaring a Major Incident.

Actions in progress

22. To respond thematically and strategically:

- 22.1. Development of the SIM to co-ordinate, track and manage the response to the recommendations and broader service improvements. Ongoing.
- 22.2. A Fire Standard will be published in Spring 2020 identifying National Operational Guidance as the professional standard for Operational Response.

23. To further develop Operational Guidance:

- 23.1. National Operational Guidance: *Operations* – Improved information regarding survival guidance and additional information added to improve links between the fireground and the fire control room. Consultation on draft content closes on 13 December 2019.
- 23.2. National Operational Guidance: *Operations* – Information restructured and enhanced to supersede the DCLG Health, safety and wellbeing framework for the operational environment, to clarify service responsibilities for operational risk assessment and provision of policy and training.
- 23.3. National Operational Guidance: *Foundation for breathing apparatus* restructured to provide appropriate strategic and tactical actions in supporting tools. Consultation on draft content closes 13 December 2019.
- 23.4. National Operational Guidance: *Incident command* – information added to enhance guidance relating to communication between the incident ground and the fire control room. Publication planned for March 2020.
- 23.5. Legacy guidance, including Generic Risk Assessment 3.2 – Fighting fires in high rise buildings, will be archived to clarify it has been superseded by NOG.

24. To improve capability for fire protection inspection:

- 24.1. Development of a competency framework for fire safety inspections and non-specialist risk information gathering.

Planned future work

- 24.2. A fire control room project business case has been updated to encompass recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 report. Work expected to begin early 2020.
- 24.3. Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) doctrine review business case has been updated to encompass recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry: Phase 1 report. Work expected to begin early 2020.

- 24.4. Liaising with services to develop a business case for the review of operational guidance for risk information gathering.
- 24.5. Review National Operational Guidance: *Fires and Fighting* to consider the recommendations made by the Institute of Fire Engineers independent review of the paper *Firefighting in the UK: A proposal to move towards an evidence-based strategy*.

Funding future work

25. As can be seen in this paper, the NFCC is already significantly committed to resolving the issues raised by the Grenfell Tower incident, many of which were already known. But this is only a small snapshot of a part of the work that it needs to undertake. This paper does not explore any of the wider service improvements that the NFCC is leading, including investment in risk management planning, people issues and digital and data developments. Demand for funding is currently far outstripping supply with many of the identified future projects currently being unfunded. The positive dialogue with government in relation to funding needs to continue in regard to support for improvement work.