

Decision title

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## CoVID-19 Lessons Learnt – First Wave

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Recommendation by  
Assistant Commissioner, Transformation Directorate

Decision Number  
LFC-0439-D

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Protective marking: **NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED**

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### Summary

Report LFC-0439 provides an account of the lessons learnt to date throughout the organisation from the first wave of the CoVID-19 pandemic. It provides information on the actions taken by the Brigade to carry out its daily activities to ensure that it continues to function normally as far as possible and also identifies ways of working introduced in response to the current situation that the organisation may wish to learn from to inform future ways of working.

### Decision

That the London Fire Commissioner:

1. Approves report LFC-0439 as the lessons learnt by the Brigade from the first wave of the CoVID-19 pandemic (covering the period from initial lock-down in March 2020 through to the period immediately prior to the commencement of the second wave in September 2020);
2. Makes the report available to HMICFRS; and
3. Makes the report available on the Brigade website to all staff and other interested parties (including external partners) to help promote understanding of the Brigade's journey through the CoVID pandemic.



**Andy Roe**  
London Fire Commissioner

This decision was remotely  
Date signed on Tuesday 12 January 2021

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LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

Report title

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## CoVID-19 Lessons Learnt – First Wave

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Report to	Date
Commissioner's Board	2 December 2020
Deputy Mayor's Fire and Resilience Board	15 December 2020
London Fire Commissioner	

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Report by	Report number
Assistant Commissioner, Transformation Directorate	LFC-0439

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### Executive Summary

This report provides an account of the lessons learnt to date throughout the organisation from the first wave of the CoVID-19 pandemic. It provides information on the actions taken by the Brigade to carry out its daily activities to ensure that it continues to function normally as far as possible and also identifies ways of working introduced in response to the current situation that the organisation may wish to learn from to inform future ways of working.

### Recommended decisions

For the London Fire Commissioner:

1. That this report is approved as the lessons learnt by the Brigade from the first wave of the CoVID-19 pandemic (covering the period from initial lock-down in March 2020 through to the period immediately prior to the commencement of the second wave in September 2020);
2. That this report is made available to HMICFRS; and
3. That this report is made available on the Brigade website to all staff and other interested parties (including external partners) to help promote understanding of the Brigade's journey through the CoVID pandemic.

### Introduction and Background

1. This report provides an overview and reflection on the lessons learnt by the organisation from the first wave of the CoVID-19 pandemic (the period up to September 2020).
2. The report has been structured around collating learning points into seven key themes:
  - Planning and Policy

- Remote working/visualisation
  - Communication and engagement
  - Estates and premises
  - Service delivery/partnerships
  - Front line operational response
  - Welfare and culture
3. Each section acknowledges what worked well and what were the main challenges. It asks pertinent questions to help inform considerations for the second wave or a further new coronavirus outbreak. This learning will also help the organisation deliver its remaining Transformation Delivery Plan actions effectively.
  4. The main report is attached at Appendix 1 - CoVID-19 Lessons Learnt – First Wave.

### **HMICFRS CoVID Inspection Report**

5. The outcome from the HMICFRS CoVID inspection carried out earlier this year is due to be published in early 2021. The results of that inspection will be considered alongside this report so that there is a joined up response to the lessons learnt and the Brigade's ongoing transformation.

### **Alternative Options Considered and Consultation**

6. The content of this report was collated from input given by each department across the Brigade. Early issues, problems and lessons learnt were collected in July 2020 and collated in a brief synopsis. Departments were engaged through the CoVID Working group representatives and all Head of Services where encouraged to send feed and review the July and September updates of the report to ensure we accurately reflect the challenges, innovation and lessons learnt.

### **Objectives and Expected Outcomes**

7. The objective is to capture a clear picture and narrative of the Brigade's CoVID journey during the first wave. This includes the transition from reacting and managing our initial response to the CoVID pandemic and charting the progression of how we maintained our service delivery. The report highlights the restrictions of non-essential activities, enabling a remote workforce, implementing CoVID Secure safe systems of work and managing the sickness and self-isolation of staff.
8. The expected outcomes from the report is that the learning is used to create a more resilient Brigade creating robust plans and ways of working to put us in a stronger position for the future. We will integrate and update the knowledge into existing and new plans to ensure we are in the best possible position should we face another pandemic in the future.

### **Equality Impact**

9. The London Fire Commissioner and decision takers are required to have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (s149 of the Equality Act 2010) when taking decisions. This in broad terms involves understanding the potential impact of policy and decisions on different people, taking this into account and then evidencing how decisions were reached.
10. It is important to note that consideration of the Public Sector Equality Duty is not a one-off task. The duty must be fulfilled before taking a decision, at the time of taking a decision, and after the decision has been taken.

11. The protected characteristics are: Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Pregnancy and maternity, Marriage and civil partnership (but only in respect of the requirements to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination), Race (ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality), Religion or belief (including lack of belief), Sex, Sexual orientation.
12. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us, in the exercise of all our functions (i.e. everything we do), to have due regard to the need to:
  - (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other prohibited conduct.
  - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
  - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
13. Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:
  - (a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic where those disadvantages are connected to that characteristic;
  - (b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
  - (c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
14. The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.
15. Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to—
  - (a) tackle prejudice, and
  - (b) promote understanding.
16. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been undertaken specifically for this report. An EIA was not required because equalities considerations have been undertaken as part of our response to CoVID-19.

### **Procurement and Sustainability**

17. There are no procurement or sustainability impacts arising from this report.

### **Strategic Drivers**

18. This report provides information that can be used to help delivery of the Transformation Delivery Plan and future Brigade plans.

### **Workforce Impact**

19. A draft of this report has been shared with the Fire Brigade's Union (FBU) through the CoVID working group. The FBU has asked that recognition be given to the concerted effort that the union made to reach the Tripartite Agreement. This report acknowledges this and it also recognises that it was challenging.
20. This report also contains information about the workforce, in particular their response to meeting the pandemic head on, and contains several learning points about welfare and culture to be taken into consideration.

### **Finance comments**

21. This report provides an account of the lessons learnt to date throughout the organisation from the first wave of the CoVID-19 pandemic.
22. The Financial Position report as at the end of Quarter 2 included a total forecast spend by the LFB against the pandemic of £9.4m, offset by grant and London Ambulance Service (LAS) funding reducing the pressure to £4.1m. Expenditure included £3.8m to support the LAS, for which the LFB is negotiating full cost recovery from the LAS and the Home Office. However, if this funding is not maintained it would not be possible to carry on providing this support on an ongoing basis.
23. Other material costs include cleaning estimated at £2.2m and PPE costs at £1.6m, which have had to be funded from reserves for the 2020/21 financial year. In the case of cleaning this has been assumed to be required on an ongoing basis from 2021/22 and built into the LFB's budget estimates, requiring additional savings to be found.

### **Legal comments**

24. This report together with Appendix 1 sets out the Brigades response to and learning from the first wave of CoVID19.
25. The London Fire Commissioner has the functions of the fire and rescue authority for Greater London under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 ('the Act'), with the core duties being set out in sections 6-9 such as fire-fighting, dealing with road accidents, fire safety and other emergencies. Section 5 of the same Act enables the Commissioner to do anything he considers appropriate for the purposes incidental or indirectly incidental for the purposes of carrying out any of the fire and rescue services functions.
26. Under s327A of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 the London Fire Commissioner must secure that the London Fire and Rescue Service is efficient and effective. Analysing the Brigades response to CoVID19, learning lessons on how to maintain and provide a continuous services, and asking probing questions of how the service can improve whilst the pandemic continues will ensure the Brigade remains efficient and effective in terms of service delivery.

### **List of Appendices**

<b>Appendix</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Protective Marking</b>
1.	CoVID-19 Lessons Learnt – First Wave.	None



# CoVID-19 Lessons Learnt – First Wave

2 December 2020

## Introduction and background

1. A new coronavirus disease (CoVID-19) causing respiratory symptoms was first identified in December 2019 in China. The World Health Organization declared the outbreak of CoVID-19 a pandemic on the 11 March 2020, as a result of CoVID-19 spreading worldwide.
2. In light of intelligence about the pandemic, its spread, and potential impact on the community and service delivery, the London Fire Brigade's business continuity arrangements were stood up in early February 2020.
3. Most people infected with the CoVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.
4. The CoVID-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The ease by which the virus is able to infect others is particularly concerning as it is highly contagious. The number of cases worldwide and in the UK continues to rise.
5. This stand alone report provides an account of the lessons learnt throughout the organisation from the first wave of the CoVID-19 pandemic. It provides information on the actions taken by the Brigade to carry out its daily activities to ensure that it continues to function normally as far as possible and also identifies ways of working introduced in response to the current situation that the organisation may wish to learn from and possibly integrate into the new normal of the future.

## Report outline and key findings

6. This report has been structured around seven key themes including planning, remote working, communication, premises, frontline, partnership working, and welfare.
7. Each section acknowledges what worked well and what were the main challenges. It asks pertinent questions to help inform considerations for a second wave or further new coronavirus outbreak.
8. Based on the information in this report, the Brigade has sound arrangements in place for a second wave, however, this is based on the parameters from the first wave of the virus. If intelligence from the World Health Organisation indicates that subsequent waves or newly developed coronavirus diseases will have a higher than anticipated impact on staff sickness and absenteeism (i.e. higher than the 30 per cent planning assumptions), this will need to be revisited. The Risk and Business Continuity team situated in Strategy and Risk will keep this intelligence under review.



## Coronavirus – Overview, context and timeline

9. Preparation for a pandemic has formed part of the Brigade's planning assumptions around business continuity for some time. As well as general testing exercises based on virus outbreaks (such as Exercise Cygnus), the Brigade has readied its arrangements for previous health threats including SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) in 2003 and swine flu in 2009. However, neither of these real events materialised into anything more substantial.

### Activation – February 2020

10. Initial reports regarding coronavirus indicated something far more contagious to the population. Following its early and significant spread, the Brigade's business continuity arrangements were reviewed in early February and core structures were stood up as per guidance under [Policy Number 699](#) – Strategic Response Arrangements.
11. In addition, Strategy and Risk activated the ALERT phase of [Policy Number 655](#) – Influenza Pandemic Policy in response to the CoVID-19 threat and Heads of Service (HoS) reviewed and undertook their departmental planning and preparation activities in line with the alert phase.
12. The first meeting of the Commissioner's Continuity Group (CCG) took place on 6 February 2020 and decided to establish a Coronavirus Continuity Working Group, chaired by Strategy and Risk, to coordinate day-to-day activities related to CoVID-19 and each of the phase stages described under the influenza pandemic policy. All departments were represented on the group, as well as the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). The group has met on a regular basis (this was weekly at the start of the arrangements) and reports to the CCG.
13. The Brigade also established its strategic objectives as follows:

*To maintain effective emergency response arrangements, provide support where possible to blue light partners and provide stakeholder reassurance of continued service as a Category 1 responder, during the expected spread of CoVID-19, to safeguard the health and safety of Brigade staff and minimise the potential impact on Brigade key services.*

*Strategic objectives:*

- *To implement the appropriate business continuity and governance structures in accordance with the Brigade's Strategic Response Arrangements (SRA), Business Continuity, and Influenza Pandemic policies.*
- *To support, as far as we are able, the activities of blue light and other partners in the protection of our communities.*
- *To provide central Government and London partners with timely and accurate information regarding the impact of the Coronavirus on the Brigade's ability to discharge its statutory functions.*
- *To provide timely, accurate information and compassionate direction to Brigade staff in a clear and consistent manner in alignment with Public Health England and NHS guidance.*
- *To provide timely, accurate information and reassurance to the media and general public as necessary in alignment with London Partners, Public Health England and the NHS, to ensure the Brigade's continuation of activities which serve and protect its staff and the public.*

- *Promote individual responsibility through good hygiene practises to reduce the spread of transmission and infection.*
- *To return to normality at the earliest opportunity.*

14. The spread of CoVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation in early March and a lockdown was issued by the UK government on the 17 March 2020; office based staff were instructed to work from home from the following day.

### **Initial response – March 2020**

15. Throughout the disruption, the Brigade has aimed to operate at a steady state with all critical activities are being managed in line with our business continuity arrangements. Our capacity to respond to incidents and maintain our response time has been mostly unaffected and degradation strategies were put in place to manage the impact on our staffing numbers.

16. One of the early actions was to adopt an approach limiting non-essential activities in-line with Governments 'social distancing' strategy, and the following face to face activities were temporarily ceased:

- Community Safety Activities: Home Fire Safety Visits (apart from those designated high risk);
- Fire Cadets face to face activity;
- All community access to and use of fire stations, except for blood donation and flu jab clinics, and excluding where emergency service partners are co-located;
- Schools Team visits (face to face);
- LIFE intervention scheme
- Junior Fire Setters Intervention Scheme (JFIS) unless a risk critical intervention was required (additional screening in place).
- Station Routine: Fire station group risk visits. Physical fitness tests and routine periodic medicals. All 4 pump+ exercises. All non-essential training (as per degradation strategy).
- Training: Group training for Fire Investigation/Control. All non-essential and non-risk critical training.
- Other: LFB Buildings were only been occupied by essential staff with approximately 700 Staff working from home. No unnecessary travel or physical meetings.

17. The Brigade was also able to assist our partner agencies through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), by providing staff and resources to support the pan London response, including:

- Staff trained/deployed assisting the London Ambulance Service deliver its front line service.
- Pandemic Multi Agency Response Teams (PMART) - 300 staff deployed over 6 hubs.
- Mortuary Body Handlers (MDH) – Guidance and systems of work were finalised to ensure establishment of role if required, however deployment of volunteers were not required during the first wave.
- Assisting with urgent logistical support to NHS the Brigade Distribution Centre (BDC) was tasked with delivery of urgently needed PPE across locations throughout London (86 pallets).

- Coordinating and construction of masks and visors for the NHS by fire stations / LFB staff.

### **Ongoing response – April/May 2020**

18. As well as standing up our Strategic Response Arrangements (SRA) with the CCG being convened on a regular basis to provide strategic management of the incident, we also liaised with the National Fire Chiefs' Council (NFCC) to ensure sharing of best practice and information across the country. It also ensured that the Brigade was aligned with the national position as relevant.
19. As well as liaison with the NFCC, the Brigade's ongoing response was also informed by London Strategic Co-ordinating Group which was co-ordinating the partner agency response and the work undertaken by the LRF.
20. The Brigade also continued to provide its full emergency fire and rescue service response, maintained operational assurance at simultaneous / waking watch provision, delivered fire safety inspecting officer activity, with additional pre appointment screening, conducted alleged fire risk inspections, again with additional pre appointment screening, maintained operational risk database visits, with premises risk assessment including high rise information gathering, and continued petroleum visits / hydrant inspections.

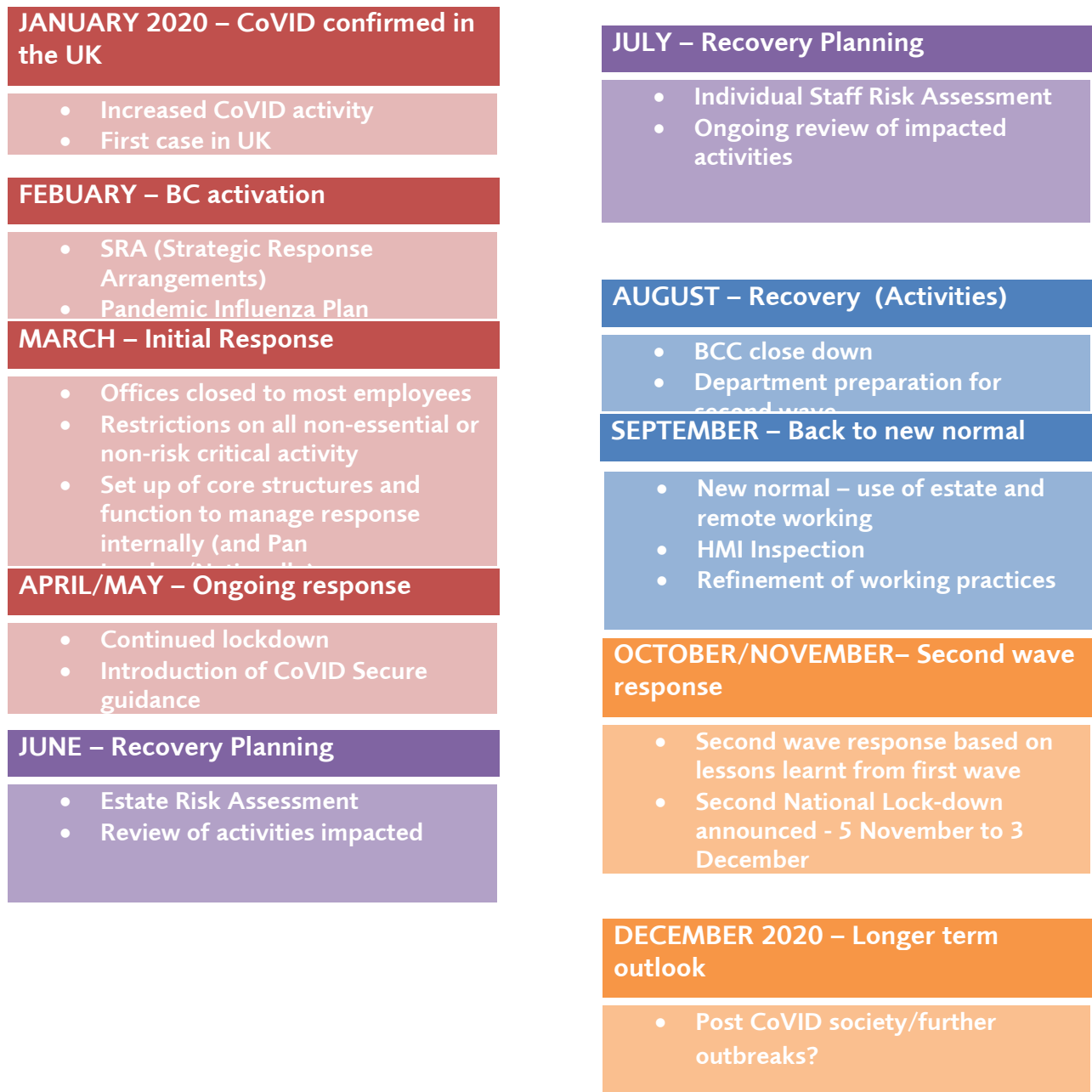
### **Recovery planning and activity – June/July/August 2020**

21. The summer months have mainly focused on the path to recovery for the Brigade, albeit a path that is likely to be very different to the pre-CoVID world.
22. The Brigade has conducted a number of assessments to help inform its recovery including individual risk assessments to identify medium and high risk staff members so that line managers can put appropriate working arrangements in place. Work has also concentrated on carrying out estate risk assessments and changing office environments where large numbers of staff work such as Union Street to make sure they are CoVID secure.
23. Departments were also asked to provide information to CCG in terms of steps they are taking to manage a potential second wave, as well as updating their local business continuity plans as necessary.

### **September 2020 and beyond**

24. The Brigade tasked the CoVID Working Group with assisting in plotting the path to recovery by prioritising critical/important activities through risk assessments and aligning these to best support the governments social distancing relaxation plans. This group has been capturing lessons learnt and good practice to inform this report.
25. The Brigade originally set out a 'return date' for office based working at headquarters as from the 1 September 2020 with around 50 per cent of desks being made available for use in line with CoVID Secure guidance.
26. However only a small minority of staff returned due to the early indication of a second wave of infections in the UK. It is expected that many staff will continue working at home on a longer-term basis and as the predicted length of the second wave can not be predicated we continue to follow Government advice.
27. The timeline has been illustrated at Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 - Timeline



## Second wave planning and lessons learnt

28. In order to inform effective planning for the second wave or further outbreaks, the activities undertaken by the Brigade during the time period illustrated above have been reviewed for lessons learnt and themed as follows:

- Planning and Policy
- Remote working/visualisation
- Communication and engagement
- Estates and premises
- Service delivery/partnerships
- Front line operational response
- Welfare and culture

## Planning and Policy

### Position prior to CoVID

29. The Brigade has a framework of policies and plans in place that allows us to respond to a major incident or business disruption. The core plans are

- Strategic Response Arrangements - The Brigade's Strategic Response Arrangements (PN 699) provide a flexible framework for managing and coordinating the Brigade's response to major incidents (spontaneous and protracted) and business disruptions.
- Influenza Pandemic Policy (PN655)
- Corporate and Departmental Business Continuity Plans
- Contingency specific plans such as degradation plans.

### Our initial response actions

30. The Strategic Response Arrangements were moved to alert in February 2020 and the CCG has sat and been in operation since then. The Influenza Pandemic policy was used to inform the initial early actions.

31. Following Government guidance on the lockdown of non-essential travel, contact and services a number of actions were taken. Officer and frontline operational degradation plans were created/updated and specific departmental plans were put into place to manage the risk to critical activities (such as Control).

32. In addition, a CoVID Working Group (CoVCG) designed to be a CoVID specific structure feeding into the SRA was set up to handle issues especially where immediate action was required.

33. The Brigade Coordination Centre (BCC) was also set up to support SRA and the Officer of the Day (OOD).

34. The business continuity co-ordination function within Strategy and Risk was also stood up.

### What worked well

35. Early activation: The early activation and lead in time from the Pandemic Influenza Policy and Strategic Response Arrangements gave a clear structure for managing the response providing a strategic overview of the organisation and giving officers the opportunity to address gaps within the policy / guidance framework.

36. CoVID Working Group: The early establishment of the CoVID working group was very effective. Department representatives were often not the relevant HoS and it was good to see middle and senior managers step up to the challenge. The group has worked well to identify not only issues, but also progress solutions. Strategy and Risk established an expectation of delegated authority amongst the group and as a consequence, CCG was able to focus on the more strategic issues. Identifying a separate lead for the Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) was a good decision made at the right time, just as the demands on that role increased significantly and the focus turned to service delivery.

37. Operational influence: The appointment and choice of a Deputy Assistant Commissioner as the SCG lead, who had established links to the NFCC proved very useful ensuring alignment with the national position as well as the London position.

38. BCC early set up: The standing up of the Brigade Coordination Centre (BCC) early on also facilitated faster responses to issues as they arose.

39. Degradation strategy: The early creation of the degradation strategy was able to provide confidence about the levels of resilience and available capacity to assist partners. Early decisions taken by CCG to focus on core activities freed up resources to support partners as required.
40. Virtualisation of risk critical work: New approaches to existing services have been developed including the reintroduction of the desktop audit process by Fire Safety to enable them to continue to identify high risk premises and work was brought forward to support on line guidance and facilitation of home fire safety visits.
41. Change to absence/leave policies: There have been low levels of CoVID-19 self-isolation and sickness (under five per cent). However, we have continued to take steps to maintain the health and safety of our workforce and Londoners. This has included adapting our sickness and leave policies to make sure that we continue to operate our services to the public in a CoVID-19 secure environment.

### **What was challenging**

42. Plans based on theory/old data: Policy such as the Influenza Pandemic Plan that was developed in line with the national pandemic framework were essential in our response but did not predict the extent or approach the Government took with the initial lockdown and the Brigade had to undertake a review of all critical and non-critical activities in order to ensure a balance between our obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) and our requirement to support the social distancing measures.
43. Agility: Our agility in responding to Government advice was tested as changes to both the initial lock down and the gradual relaxation that would follow, tended to be announced with little notice and in quick succession.
44. Focus on the short term: Key decision points in our strategy were pushed towards a shorter term planning approach due to lack of longer term planning assumptions. This resulted in some areas focussing on short term response rather than sustainability. The decision to offer pre-arranged overtime has impacted the budget significantly and has had a knock-on effect on staff welfare with key staff working longer hours. Often the desire to respond to new information meant it was difficult to contextualise the risk and urgency of actions.
45. No preparation time: The instruction to send staff to work from home was unexpected giving little or no time for managers to prepare. A longer notice period would have allowed departments to give more guidance to staff on actions to be taken before leaving e.g. diverting phones, changing answerphone messages, clearing desks, securing filing cabinets, etc.

### **Issues**

46. While the Strategic Response Arrangements have served the Brigade well in terms of dealing with the immediate crisis, there is a broader need for these to be reviewed to make sure they reflect the need to adapt to changing demands and to deploy staff where they are most needed, internally and externally. Crucially, this might mean stepping away from the departmental approach in order to agree a strategic approach that identifies clear organisational priorities.
47. There is also a practical need for business continuity plans to be reviewed to incorporate arrangements for long term lack of access to any Brigade buildings for some staff and the need to work from home. It became clear in some areas that some staff were unable to immediately work from home effectively due to lack of access to appropriate IT equipment and remote access.
48. The nature of the CoVID-19 crisis led to some departments seeing an increase in their workload due to the additional tasks they had to carry out either to facilitate our work with partner agencies or in response to the Brigade's business continuity arrangements and subsequent external reporting requirements to the NFCC and the SCG.

49. The extra demands on teams was uneven across the Brigade this placed extra pressure on smaller teams to shift their efforts towards maintaining activities and providing responses to areas of work requiring immediate action such as communications, reporting and the development of guidance/procedures.
50. Childcare has also been reported by many departments to have been one such issue where more guidance would have been helpful. It has been a challenging period for parents in terms of balancing work demands and the supervision of children at home. There was also some initial concern and confusion when the FBU announced that Brigade staff were key workers prior to the official announcement by the government in regard to schools being kept open for the children of key workers.

### **Learning points**

51. Given what actually happened with the advent of a pandemic, the Influenza Pandemic Plan is in need of a review with a greater focus on the initial suspension and restriction of activities.
52. It would also be helpful to factor in longer term resilience, sustainable actions and incorporate working practices that allow a continuity of service (e.g. virtualisation, flexible working etc.).
53. After the initial activity, there was a continued demand for departmental information covering issues such as the start-up of suspended activities and capturing the early lessons learnt. Setting up a Transition to New Normal (TTNN) Group immediately after the initial response was, in hindsight, too early and the approach placed another demand on departments. There have been pockets of innovation locally across the Brigade and we will continue to explore the most appropriate ways to capture this innovation.
54. The Brigade should use this opportunity to further review the use of prescriptive policies and encourage staff to take more responsibility and accountability for themselves and each other. A good example of this was the relaxation in the absence management procedures which did not cause a spike in absence.
55. The impact on training courses has been significant as they were either suspended or delayed due to the cancellation of Strategic Resource (SR). Mitigation is required to ensure the Brigade continues to meet its obligations under Health and Safety legislation to ensure its staff have and maintain the competencies required for their roles. The facilitation of training and the detachment of staff to support our partnership work with the London Ambulance Service (LAS) worked well but more detailed planning for training during a prolonged business disruption would be valuable including the prioritisation of formal training for newly created joint working roles.
56. Further gap analysis is also needed to assess contingencies arrangements over a longer term. Operational and Control room degradation plans needed revisiting and adapting to the specific nature of the event. In the case of the CoVID-19 pandemic, self-isolation represented a greater risk to maintaining front line services than sickness in the first wave. However, understanding the impact of self-isolation and the potential for loss of staff enabled Control to develop a training package for FRS staff to maintain the provision of service. This also included the utilisation of Stratford as a fall back to allow deep cleans of the LOC.



## **Planning and policy: Key questions and considerations for future/second wave**

57. Some key questions to consider are:

(a) What early warnings and triggers do we need to take account of, in order to stand up arrangements for future rises in infection rate ? How will we get this intelligence?

(b) How can the Brigade move away from its traditional 'command and control' nature into a space where it is more flexible and can adapt strategic policy to meet the needs of a dynamic situation? What are the advantages and disadvantages in having either a more generic or more specific continuity plan?

(c) How do we move the focus from concentrating on response to improving our long term planning outlook? What steps can we take to help with decision making?

## Remote working / virtualisation

### Position prior to CoVID

58. Our day to day working arrangements prior to the pandemic have largely consisted of most staff reporting to a Brigade premises to carry out their work. While there are some specialist staff such as inspecting officers using remote specialist devices, most staff were utilising work stations at a Brigade site.
59. However, there was some capacity for remote access pre-CoVID, with typically up to 80-100 staff working remotely per day.

### Our initial response actions

60. In the run up to the decision to restrict the use of Union Street and the area offices (including the LOC for non-control staff), the Chief Information Officer made arrangements to test the remote access facility and scaled up the capacity for remote access to 900 concurrent users.

### What worked well

61. Remote Access: Overall the ICT infrastructure has performed very well. There have been no major issues with 'line of business' systems issues.
62. Working from Home / Remote working: Departments responded quickly and adapted well to the remote working situation.
63. Becoming paper free: The change brought to light some of the lengthy paper based processes carried out by the Brigade and departments such as Finance took the opportunity to review their systems to enable a more efficient way of working. Fire Safety and Central Operations created electronic versions of some paper processes, including building consultations. General Counsel were able to carry out their work as normal because their legal reference material is available online and they have already been phasing out paper files with the use of their case management software.
64. Creation of virtual platforms: People Services has made use of software to carry out virtual interviews for recruitment of firefighters to facilitate the work with our partner agencies. People Services has also conducted a discipline interview (by exception) by posting the questions and giving the employee seven days to reply which sped up the process significantly. They have also carried out medical appointments, appraisal workshops and interview training via video calls and these worked well and to the usual standards. Virtual interviews for over 300 new volunteers were carried out and training was also completed using digital means.
65. Continued engagement with communities including virtual engagement with Cadets, online volunteer recruitment and firefighter information days, and telephone calls to vulnerable people who had previously received Fire Safety & Well visits, referring onwards when needed. Virtual fire safety sessions with schools and home schoolers created by the Education Team.
66. Fire Safety and other departments were quick to introduce webinars and on line training materials and work packages.
67. Training and Professional Development were able to progress the design work with Babcock, run pilots and proof of concepts for incident command training. Some departments like Control and Mobilising took the opportunity to carry out refresher training on fire survival guidance to their staff.

### What was challenging?

68. Rapid deployment of MS Teams: To some extent, one software solution has in effect replaced physical meetings and there are both advantages and challenges with that. MS Teams was seen

as a useful collaboration tool however it cannot be used within the Citrix environment and only a small number of staff have had their mailboxes migrated to Office365. The lack of training caused some initial frustration for staff, resulting in various degrees of anxiousness as they did not know how to use the software effectively.

69. Bring your own device: The working from home set up often relied on the use of staff's own equipment (phone, large screen, tablet). There were also concerns about personal set-ups not being compliance with DSE regulations. Although guidance has since gone out directing staff to the workstation health and safety assessment, some are still working on small screens or devices which may be problematic.
70. Lack of access to other ICT equipment: In some specific areas, unique equipment is required, (dual screen, specialist set up, software/hardware). The lack of access to this equipment has been an issue for some departments e.g.: the design team within Communications require large screens to carry out creative work and the Fire Safety department require dual screens to be able to visualise building plans. Local broadband speeds have also been an issue for some staff as well as the lack of printing facilities.
71. Availability of Brigade laptops and tablets: The considerable number of staff in the organisation who do not have access to laptops or tablets and the lack of availability of these at short notice to enable remote working caused delays in getting work done and caused further frustration.

## **Issues**

72. Although a test of remote access was undertaken prior to lockdown, it was poorly supported by staff in general and problems that could have been avoided weren't identified until staff had begun to work from home.
73. While some departments have made positive steps in reducing reliance on paper (as above), by contrast remote working has also highlighted to other departments that a lot of their systems are outdated with many still utilising manual and paper based processes.
74. This is further exacerbated by the fact that some departments still use physical files and find it difficult to carry out their work without them at hand. Due to the speed at which lockdown was introduced meant that staff did not have time to plan and collect these from the office. However, it is acknowledged that some processes such as the banking of cheques cannot be done electronically and with the increased risk of fraud, the Brigade need to ensure that financial controls are not eroded by new ways of working.

## **Learning points**

75. All departments agree that staff should be given the option to work remotely either at home or at local fire stations. The digitalisation of systems and processes and the availability of IT equipment will enable staff to carry out their duties as normal whilst enjoying a better work/life balance.
76. Other IT enablers which would improve the general user experience include the facility for station based staff to use MS teams and the ability for all to use it with outside agencies and partners. The adoption of digital signatures would be welcome by departments and would speed up processes e.g.: General Counsel obtained scanned, certified images of signatures of senior staff for their use. Introduction of applications such as Trello as used by the Communications team may also be useful.
77. Some staff have also reported that the range of electronic communication channels is overwhelming and potentially confusing and a shared approach to the purpose and use of MS Teams, WhatsApp, Kaizala, email, text etc. would be beneficial.

## **Remote working/virtualisation: Key questions and considerations for the future/second wave**

78. Some key questions to consider are:

- (a) Seizing the future: Given that staff have proven they can innovate and adapt to the challenges CoVID-19 has presented, how do we create a virtual working environment that promotes innovation and new ways of working to ensure that we continually improve?
- (b) What longer term investment in staff is required by the Brigade to support safe DSE compliant personal ICT set ups at home?

## Communication / Engagement

### Position prior to CoVID

79. The Brigade naturally has a variety of ways to communicate and engage audiences internally and externally. We have a dedicated Communications department which makes wide use of digital communications including the internet and intranet, e-mail messages, social media platforms, video production and communication forums to disseminate information.

### Our initial response actions

80. Communication was one of the high profile areas that has been consistently impacted in terms of increased workload from CoVID and the requirement from the organisation to deliver frequent updates across the work force.
81. The early introduction of a dedicated space on Hotwire to provide information to staff which went onto to become a hub where all information relating to CoVID-19 worked well. Information was constantly produced and published in the following categories providing latest updates; information about the virus; how to protect yourself and others; self-isolation guidance; guidance for managers; guidance for operational staff; volunteer roles to support the LFB joint response; priority testing guidance; information for easing lockdown and information for staff returning to an office working environment.
82. The Communications department were firmly embedded into the SCG Communications Cell, leading to strong partnership working and joint amplification of LFB / partner messaging. This was especially important and useful in relation to the joined up messaging with regards to the Brigade's work with LAS and Public Health England (PHE) to successfully place the Brigade's work in the media.

### What worked well

83. Working in partnership with SCG communications cell: As a well-rehearsed member of the London Resilience Gold communications group, the department ensured dedicated resource to participate in all communications planning and ensure the Brigade influenced and amplified messaging, generating public and partnership understanding of the Brigade's role.
84. Kaizala app: The introduction of the Kaizala app within a few days of the lockdown demonstrated an ability by ICT and Communications to respond quickly to changing working arrangements.
85. Additional comms facilities: Conference calling facilities were made available to Heads of Service immediately and were quickly followed with MS Teams, with supporting guidance for managers. The infrastructure has performed well despite the increase in demand.
86. Home schooling resources: Creating home schooling resources was a great success. This involved using topics that we know are popular from information gained from the LFB Museum and using our archives to bring them to life digitally. It has allowed us to communicate with a much wider internal and external audience, and has a great potential as a future resource while the museum is closed.
87. Fire Safety communications: A range of digital communications were developed, working closely with Fire Safety, relevant to the pandemic and recognising increased risks, e.g. an increased number of outside fires possibly caused by fly tipping as a result of recycling centres being closed. An entire section of fire safety content for home fire safety and business safety was produced and shared effectively utilising the SCG communications group, including London Councils, and ensured links and published information was shared for all London boroughs to use. Furthermore a wide range of media activity led to media placement relating to CoVID-19

related fire risks including a successful campaign that resulted in Amazon and gift retailer Menkind removing from sale barbecues specifically designed for use on balconies.

### **What was challenging**

88. Line management support: The ability for line managers to maintain a schedule of meetings to keep staff engaged and informed was challenging and resulted in a degree of inconsistency across the organisation. Some departments were very early adopters of MS Teams and used tools such as WhatsApp and various other platforms (Zoom, Workspace) to maintain a sense of normality and support collaborative working (a limitation of MS Teams). However this was not universal across the organisation and issues such as prior knowledge of how best to use software for effective communication impacted on a consistent approach.
89. Meeting demand for more information: Within some departments, there was the expectation internal communication messages could have been sent out quicker and that co-ordination could have been improved in the early days to prevent confusion. Expectations of staff in this regard were challenging to manage; especially in terms of how quickly staff felt that newly updated guidance and advice should be available. There were also challenges in terms of advice being given by the Brigade which differed to other agencies because of a rapidly changing situation. There is a need to balance the clearance process to ensure the communication of correct information with the speed of sharing information. There is also clearly a demand for tailored information for different staff groups.

### **Issues**

90. One of the key issues with getting messages out quickly is the lengthy governance chain for signing off on key communications, basically due to the number of people involved. However, this has improved as the pandemic has progressed. Part of future considerations should include whether it is possible to expedite this by having more streamlined governance in place, or whether it is a requirement that all communications messages should be subjected to the same verification process. This would need an assessment of the risk exposure.
91. The frequency in which the Government and PHE disseminated updates was also initially problematic but the development of the CoVID hub on Hotwire to collate these has worked well.
92. With the lack of face to face contact and familiar ways of working, the use of emails to communicate has increased exponentially. As a result, the utilisation of existing software packages such as SharePoint appears to have decreased significantly. The Brigade does not appear to be as mature as other organisations in terms of exploiting alternative methods of collaborative working.

### **Learning points**

93. The sudden shift to having a large proportion of those staff based at Union Street and Area Hubs working remotely has been a challenge but also has also given insight and focus into the importance of communicating and engaging with our staff. In the absence of face to face contact, there has been a clear and consistent demand for information. There is an opportunity here for all to connect to the core purpose of the Brigade which it would be a shame to lose.
94. Similarly, ongoing engagement with station based staff has been challenging during this period but the Assistant Commissioner – Fire Stations has encouraged Station and Borough Commanders to ensure that communication with these staff is maintained.
95. We should consider how to upskill our staff on how to communicate effectively incorporating existing software packages that facilitate better communication and collaborative working. This would help manage the burden on email and help staff feel better connected to the organisation and each other. This may help with combating virtual 'loneliness.'

## **Communications/engagement: Key questions and considerations for the future/second wave**

96. Some key questions to consider are:

- (a) Was the level and amount of communication activity to the workforce appropriate?
- (b) What resources can be utilised to help with the inevitable high demand on Communications at times of crisis?
- (c) Could the governance around official communications messages be reviewed to speed up the process? Do all messages require the same level of governance?
- (d) How do we bridge the 'virtual gap' in the absence of face to face conversations so that staff still feel connected to the organisation?

## Premises

### Position prior to CoVID

97. The majority of the operational work force work set shift patterns from a fire station. To ensure the correct number of personnel and skills to keep appliances "on the run" there are approximately 150 standby moves per day.
98. The majority of the non-operational workforce are based at Union Street headquarters or one of the area hubs. Whilst some staff work compressed hours or occasionally work from home most are on full time contracts with minimal flexible working.
99. Specialist teams such as Control and Fire Safety Inspection Officers have locations and systems of working specific to their departments.

### Our initial response actions

100. On the 17 March 2020, the Brigade made the decision to only allow staff who need to work from a specific location (mostly operational, some specialist staff and those in roles where a physical presence is required) to continue using the estate.
101. Support staff working at the LOC (London Operations Centre) were also instructed to work from home to support the resilience of Control.
102. Protective Equipment Group (PEG) and the Brigade Distribution Centre (BDC) remained open with CoVID secure social distancing put in place. From March onwards, all parts of the estate, in accordance with government guidelines, were aligned to CoVID secure guidance.

### What worked well

103. *Immediate transition:* Most staff who were required to work from home made the immediate change to their working arrangements with minimal lead in time. This demonstrates that the Brigade can make substantial changes quickly and will capitalise on this adaptability and flexibility as part of its transformation under the Transformation Delivery Plan.
104. *Enhanced cleaning regime:* The introduction of the enhanced cleaning regime across the Brigade estate reduced the risk of spread of the virus and addressed the concerns of spreading the virus to other members of the team or family members. The procedure for reporting and dealing with a potential CoVID-19 risk ensured that the safety of both staff and community was maintained at all times with very limited incidents where a station was taken off the run.
105. *Property survey and transformation of Union Street:* The Union Street office as at 1 September 2020 is a very different place to the one on 18 March 2020. The amount of work to transform headquarters into a CoVID secure environment should not be underestimated and is the result of a planned project approach led by Property Services and supported by People Services, Health and Safety and ICT to open up Union Street. The work was informed by a Property Services survey which invited Heads of Service to think about the office in a very different way and how they wanted to use space based on a 50 per cent reduction in available space. The work to transform Union Street used the results from the survey to deliver a collaborative approach to re-occupation.

### What was challenging

106. *Staff returning to the office:* Approximately six weeks after the decision to send staff home, there was a gradual increase in the numbers of staff returning to Union Street. This was not in response to any specific CCG instruction, rather it was a reflection of the difficulties some staff were having with feelings of isolation resulting from the move to remote working and a subsequent desire to return to some sort of 'normality'. This is indicative of how powerful the need for human interaction is, particularly for those who live alone. This was addressed by



Property Services through the line management chain and occupancy rates went back to a by exceptions basis but it gives a clue as to how difficult and potentially how long it will take for some staff to adjust to a different way of using our premises in a CoVID secure environment. This challenge should not be underestimated.

107. Expectations of Property Services: Although Property Services has taken a collaborative approach to what use of the estate will look like in the post-CoVID world, there is still an expectation by some managers that Property Services will set the rules for how and when occupancy of office space occurs. This is contrary to the Brigade's development in getting managers to be accountable for the way they work and the actions they take. While Property Services are responsible for estate management, local working arrangements should be led by relevant lead officers assessing their needs in line with the latest guidance.

### **Issues**

108. An inconsistency in understanding resulted in some deliveries, maintenance staff and standbys being turned away by station staff due to local interpretation of the guidance. This impacted on premises maintenance and deliveries to station for a period of time.
109. The need to 'deep clean' stations in response to suspected or positive CoVID cases has resulted in the need for crews to vacate stations for a period of time. This, in turn, has generated appliance movements to maintain strategic fire cover across London.
110. The process of leaving Union Street was difficult for some staff based there. The decision was made in line with government direction and within the correct decision making process however the urgency created anxiety for some staff who were required to vacate with minimal notice. With the benefit of hindsight, a different approach could have been taken whereby decisions to work from home could have been taken earlier, with staff informed of the decision and preparations made to work from home over the course of the next few days. This would have facilitated a coordinated and considered approach to taking equipment home. It also might have made the transition easier for some staff groups. However, it should also be remembered that expectations at the time were centred around a swift return to Union Street rather than preparing for a prolonged period of working from home.

### **Learning points**

111. The challenge to transform Union Street into a CoVID secure environment should not be underestimated and has been facilitated by effective outcome planning and a collaborative approach led by Property Services working with other departments. It is worth remembering this successful approach for future transformations.
112. Although the sudden transition was effective, the physical and extended change to people's work location has been especially difficult for some staff. There is a learning point about preparing and planning for large scale premises loss at short notice (this could be for other major disruptions such as flooding) and supporting our staff to be more agile and increasing their personal resilience.
113. In support of making our staff more agile, there is some work to be done regarding what the future of the Brigade might look like in terms of its premises (e.g. long term aspirations for Union Street and area offices), and managing staff expectations about their working arrangements accordingly.

## **Key questions and considerations for future/second wave**

114. Some key questions to consider are:

- (a) What changes are required in departmental business continuity plans to enable an immediate and / or a prolonged absence from the Brigade's estate ?
- (b) How can we leverage the collaborative approach to changing the use of premises to realise success in other areas?
- (c) What additional support can we give to staff to prepare for different working arrangements in the future, including how staff work in their own home?

## Service delivery / Supporting our partners

### Position prior to CoVID

115. The Brigade has a series of standard operating procedures in place with regards to service delivery. This extends to how we also work with others through collaboration, and during a major incident or business disruption. There are procedures in place that cover multiagency working (such as LESLP), pan London resilience (through the London Resilience Group) and the Strategic Response Arrangements. These also make provision for temporary structures and the provision of staffing and funding, such as the London Local Authority Coordination Centre (LLACC) etc.

### Our initial response actions

116. The initial focus was on maintaining the Brigade's operational response, standing down community based activities and supporting our partners (especially the LAS) cope with high demand for their services.

117. Utilising spare capacity, externally, Brigade staff were trained and deployed to assist the LAS deliver its front line service. Other staff when on to form part of the Pandemic Multiagency Response Team (PMART). Yet more staff assisted with urgent logistical support to NHS.

118. Internally, staff whose duties were suspended were redeployed to help other departments either to cover absent staff or to support of additional workload. For example, the Events Team supported the Wellbeing Team with their work with getting volunteers for the keep in contact (Initial Caller scheme) support initiative for the LAS/PMART workers.

### What worked well

119. Vital support for our blue light partners: The Brigade stepped in to offer support, notably in terms of Operations Braidwood and Seacole and by providing assistance to the LAS assistance. This demonstrated our ability to flex in response to a changing risk profile. It is far too early to assess the impact of the contribution overall, but has clearly made a very significant difference to the blue light response to the crisis and to our partners. Consideration will need to be given to how this informs partnership working into the future. Blue Light mental health champions were also called upon to provide emotional support to the LFB staff carrying out this work.

120. Support for vulnerable people in the community: Community Safety Staff made approximately 1150 calls to vulnerable people in the community, with referrals onwards to Local Authority hubs and partner organisations where needed

121. Contribution to London's CoVID response: LFB hosted the Strategic Coordination Centre for London in its HQ and will continue to provide ongoing support as the employer for the London Resilience Group that facilitates and administrates the pan-London response to civil contingencies. We have been able to assist our partner agencies through the Local Resilience Forum by providing staff and resources to support the pan London response. Additionally, joined up communications messages the with LAS and partner agencies has worked exceptionally well both internally and externally, ensuring staff have the information they need to do their jobs as effectively as possible. In July 2020, the Brigade reinforced its support to the NFCC with an Assistant Commissioner taking on a role to lead a project to identify lessons to be learned from the fire and rescue service response nationally to the pandemic.

122. Alternative methods of service delivery: We have discovered many alternative approaches to delivering the services we provide and the assistance we provide to others. The Brigade will need to determine the relevance and appropriateness of these approaches for the longer term, in the light of assessments of their success. This includes different ways of responding to risk and delivering our services such as online Home Fire Safety Visits, and virtual inspections to help reduce unwanted fire signals. Furthermore our assistance to the LAS demonstrated an ability to

respond to emerging new threats and adapt our services accordingly. This flexibility is something the Brigade should aim to build on as it looks to the future.

123. *Securing PPE supplies at times of high demand*: Procurement officers worked quickly and effectively to understand and respond to changing operating requirements and managed to overcome any supply chain challenges by securing supplies of PPE with assistance from Kent Fire and Rescue Service.
124. Procurement also successfully identified and utilised the BDC as a facility to help with the delivery of urgently needed PPE into London (86 pallets). This meant that the Brigade, through PEG and the BDC, was able to assist in the logistics and distribution of millions of items of PPE on behalf of Public Health England. (PHE). Furthermore, Brigade staff also went on to produce and make visors for the NHS to help the service cope with the shortage of masks.

### **What was challenging**

125. *Industrial Relations*: Involving the representative bodies (RBs) appropriately in a dynamic and evolving environment was challenging. The RBs were understandably concerned about the proposals for new ways of working and additional activities and the impacts and risks they may expose their members to. The need to find quick solutions to issues raised and reach formal agreements in short deadlines took concerted efforts, both locally and nationally as the Tripartite Agreement between the National Employers, NFCC and the FBU was established. The Brigade has played a significant role in supporting the development nationally of the Tripartite Agreements, enabling local negotiation to be simplified to an extent by national determination of what additional activities were permitted and the control measures required. However, it is recognised that whilst the Tripartite Agreements were established as an enabler, at times the process of negotiation has been cumbersome and offered opportunities for disagreement, which in turn impacted on the ability of fire and rescue services to offer immediate support to other agencies. Similarly, last minute and short term extensions to the tripartite agreement have also proved problematic and impacted on planning and resourcing.
126. *Dealing with a pandemic and new systems*: The Brigade, like other public services, was faced with the unenviable task of dealing with a pandemic and developing our own ways of overcoming issues and at same time familiarising ourselves with newly introduced systems by the Government, the NFCC and our partners to name but a few.
127. This has had an impact on important pieces of work for the Brigade such as the Fire Safety Bill which came up for debate early in the crisis and the need to brief MPs remotely in a 'hybrid Parliament'. Another example was the need to maintain momentum with the Commissioner's community stakeholder engagement programme by switching to remote meetings.
128. *Reporting*: During the pandemic period, the Brigade like other fire and rescue services has been inundated with requests for information, principally to provide assurance to stakeholders that it was able to maintain its statutory duties. In addition, information was requested to enable stakeholders, including government, about the scale and impact of the Brigade's support to other agencies and communities.
129. The requests for data have been prolific and, to an extent, uncoordinated between the different agencies requesting information. Fulfilling these requests has been challenging and time consuming and a more joined up and streamlined approach should be implemented for future waves of the pandemic.

### **Issues**

130. There was initially an ad-hoc approach regarding the use of staff in some areas. This was partly due to meeting the crisis head on and putting numbers of people in the areas most needed. While

this has advantages, not least in terms of responsiveness, it does also mean that we may not be making the best use of the talents available to us by having a better planning process to match the skills and experiences of staff to areas where they may be best suited. The pandemic has also meant that some have seen a reduction in their role while others are struggling with an increased workload.

131. There was a moral imperative for the Brigade to do what it could to help partners who were under significant pressure. To stand idly by while others were in dire need would have been irresponsible. Nevertheless, the help provided has a financial cost which may impact the Brigade and its services in the future. It is hard to be certain about the overall financial impact but the Brigade has incurred additional costs owing to the pandemic. The Financial Position report as at the end of Quarter 2 included a total forecast spend by the LFB against the pandemic of £9.4m, offset by grant and London Ambulance Service (LAS) funding reducing the pressure to £4.1m. Expenditure included £3.8m to support the LAS, for which the LFB is negotiating full cost recovery from the LAS and the Home Office.
132. Discussions are taking place with LAS, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, GLA and Home office about funding now and the consequences for the future. However, if this funding is not maintained it would not be possible to carry on providing this support on an ongoing basis.

### **Learning points**

133. Time and time again, Brigade staff adapted to take on new roles to help our partners and managing London's response to the CoVID pandemic. Brigade staff have a proud history of wanting to do the right thing and at times of crisis, they can be relied upon to adapt quickly and without fuss. However, by contrast and during 'normal' business, the Brigade can be really slow to adapt. There is something about tapping into the 'can do' attitude and applying this to the very real need for the Brigade to transform into an effective and highly performing service.
134. A second wave of the pandemic may result in a tightening of CoVID secure guidance, with the likely political pressure to maintain a continuity of service to boost the economy (unlike the general close down of activity seen during the first wave).
135. Organisations looked to the Brigade and the London response due to the scale and early focus on London as an epicentre. This places us in a position of influence to other brigades and the NFCC. Process put in place for the management of ADA and the categorisation of self-isolating was shared and adopted by other FRS. We heavily contributed to the national approach and are well placed to build on the links we have into the future.

### **Key questions and considerations for future/second wave**

136. Some of the key questions to consider are:

(a) What can we do to support our partners in the long term? Is it sustainable or does it risk the development of the Brigade and its future services?

(b) How can we utilise the 'spirit' so very evident within the Brigade into adapting and changing our own service at speed for the better?

## Frontline and Operational Response

### Position prior to CoVID

137. The Brigade employs approximately 4,800 operational staff, most are based at one of the 102 fire stations located across London. Station based staff work as part of a four watch rota working two twelve hour days shifts followed by two 12 hour night shifts.
138. The daily routine of station based staff is highly structured and a typical day shift may be made up of the following activities:
- Emergency response
  - Training such as DaMop (Development and Maintenance of Operational Professionalism) and specialist training and exercising
  - Community Fire Safety work such as Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs)
139. In order to maintain operational emergency cover, it is necessary to move staff across the Brigade to ride appliances by standby moves. The responsibility for managing standbys is undertaken by the Resource Management Centre (RMC), who will maintain a strategic overview of personnel ridership levels across the Brigade.

### Our initial response actions

140. Much of the restriction of non-essential activities directly impacted station based staff. As most of our staff continued to work from stations they were often the first to struggle with making sense of the guidance available. This covered a wide variety of issues ranging from who should be treated as vulnerable, safe systems of work, conflicting information about what should be classed as essential activity and procedures for engaging the public and contractors or standbys at stations.

### What worked well

141. Increased communication and visibility: Senior Officers visiting stations and holding communications sessions with crews went well, acknowledging there were challenges with getting information out in the early dynamic stages as policy was determined. Increased engagement has improved relationships, a sense of purpose, and an understanding and working together within Borough teams. Leadership has been displayed across all ranks (NB- any face to face visits were compliant with CoVID Secure guidance and prior to this social distancing was observed).
142. Online meetings: Regular area management updates have worked well, increased understanding and saved lots of time travelling to venues together with reduced use of 'officer status 7' times and volumes of email traffic. This has given people more time to deal with local issues within Borough.
143. Community support: Station based crews recognised the importance in getting involved in community support and resilience and have demonstrated a willingness for such work outside of core business (such as food parcel deliveries to the local community) and have provided local discussions with representative bodies to ensure they reflect members views.
144. Working from home: Category 1 and 2 status for senior officers has had a positive effect (this is a second line response available at 1 or 2 hours respectively), especially for those officers that live outside London. This approach also supports the Brigade's green agenda. It has been noted Borough based officers have been maintaining a visual presence on stations with non-station based officers utilising Category 1 and 2 regularly.

145. Ambulance Driver Assistance: Firefighters reported that they have enjoyed the LAS role. It is providing our staff with greater exposure to medical incidents and providing them with more understanding of physical and psychological patient care.

### **What was challenging**

146. Early processes: In the early days of the initiatives, there were delays in contacting volunteers for both PMART and the LAS role. Information was initially slow in terms of detail around these roles which made it harder to generate volunteers until more clarity was provided.

147. Access to stations: Staff were often unsure what constituted essential activities and what the guidance was for standby moves and allowing contractors onto Brigade property. This created inconsistencies between stations with local managers feeling they lacked clear guidance and were not empowered to make local level decisions in the short term.

148. Self-isolation: Overall, self isolation has been managed well in all boroughs and the area teams, however the recording of this could have been made easier from the outset. There has also been occasions of conflicting advice with decisions on self-isolation left to local management. This has been the case for advice around shielding for vulnerable family members, and for specific conditions such as diabetes.

149. Conflicts in agreeing essential / non-essential work/training: As above, there have been a number of differences in advice on external websites which staff have accessed prior to official Brigade communication. Even though there was an agreement between the Commissioner and London and National FBU in what was agreed as 'essential and non – essential activity', there was still an increase in local management interventions at station level adding to the increased work load for some borough based officers.

### **Issues**

150. PPE: At the start of the first wave there was a lot of conflicting information on the appropriate use of PPE. This was particularly difficult for frontline staff working in a emergency services or healthcare setting as the Government and PHE had failed to provide clear and understandable risk based rationales for appropriate use of PPE in various settings.

151. CoVID Testing: There has been a lack of clarity on the availability of emergency service staff testing to minimise the number of individuals self-isolating. In many cases as watches work together, a positive CoVID result for one member of staff would result in self isolation for the rest of the watch.

152. Track and Trace: Rules around the use of QR codes, Track and Trace Apps and exemptions for non-medical emergency response workers continue to be an issue, placing firefighters in a potential grey area and perceived inconsistencies between the use of PPE and compliance with CoVID secure guidance on the operational ground and fire station.

### **Learning points**

153. Borough Commanders could continue to apply local discretion to plan and implement small projects / activities. Watch involvement is crucial and some good ideas have been generated at watch level. This could include more active involvement and consideration given to local crews' ideas and proposals.

154. It was essential for the service to be seen to be contributing in areas other than response and normal core business through the crisis, as the Brigade is a key community partner. Areas where station based staff have proactively identified ways to support the local community include:

- Assistance to Local Authorities delivering food to the vulnerable.
- Delivery and coordination of food donations and distribution.
- Delivery of PPE and medicine to vulnerable residents.
- Making visors, masks, face shielding.

155. Where possible there should be a continuation of LAS secondments so that Brigade personnel have the opportunity to receive additional qualifications or experience. The secondments have provided individual and organisational benefits from embedding personnel into other services – this will increase when they return and talk to colleagues about their experiences and we should seek to incorporate this into our normal business to increase resilience and awareness of partner responsibilities.

156. Consideration should be given to continuing area based briefings to engage Stations and Area Teams using video conferencing software. Advantages include less travel, less fuel, less cost, and direct and timely messages. Utilising video conferencing post CoVID may help to improve the level of engagement with stations.

### **Key questions and considerations for future/second wave**

157. Some of the key questions to consider are:

(a) How do we empower local level use of stations to support communities and encourage greater self-determination in deciding what stations should be involved in beyond their core duties. ?

(b) What have we learned about engaging with station staff and how can we maintain this into the future?



## Welfare / Culture

### Position prior to CoVID

158. The Brigade has recognised the importance of staff welfare and the part that culture has to play on how effective it is for some time now. There have been a long standing counselling and wellbeing service available to staff for many years now, which was called heavily upon following the Grenfell Tower fire. The Brigade has also been developing its understanding of mental health and now has a dedicated cultural change team in place. The evolution of the Inclusion Strategy into the Togetherness Strategy is another important strand of the work on welfare and enabling our people to be the best they can be.

### Initial response

159. With the move to remote working, the general feeling of staff is that their work/life balance improved with this new way of working for various reasons, ranging from the opportunity to spend more time with family, to the financial savings from reduced travelling and subsistence.

160. It should be noted however, that the flip side of this is that the flexibility around remote working resulted in some areas in a lack of structure and need to develop new systems of working to support virtual working. Staff reported an increase in workload with staff attending (virtual) meetings at all hours, ignoring meals and break times, being dialled into meeting on days off and unrealistic perceptions of how challenging it is for parents and careers working from home and maintaining traditional working times.

### What worked well

161. *Flexibility and responsiveness:* The pandemic has allowed us to show ourselves in a flexible, responsive positive light, working effectively with partners and providing services in response to new threats. Staff have adapted really well and many have thrived in a less formal environment. Some have reported that they feel liberated and have more freedom to work in the way that they choose and there is evidence of increased accountability among staff for their own work. The benefits of this should work in favour of the cultural change we have been seeking to deliver through the Transformation Delivery Plan.

### What was challenging

162. *New staff wellbeing challenges:* Remote working from home has been challenging for some staff living either with their parents, children or sharing accommodation with several other people. Often working in these environments means having to make do with makeshift desks in bedrooms as there is no space for a dedicated home office set up. This is having an impact on physical and mental health. Conversely, for staff on their own, the lack of face to face communication is making them feeling isolated. Staff are also reporting finding it difficult to take regular breaks from their screens and working longer hours than usual because the distinction between home life and work life is less clear. For some staff, a crucial part of social interaction centres around their job and the workplace as they tend to spend most of their time with their colleagues.

163. However, whilst station based staff have continued to operate from their normal locations, the impact on their wellbeing resulting from the pandemic should not be underestimated. All staff have had to adapt to respond to incidents differently to mitigate the risk of transmission of the virus in the community through amended procedures and the use of alternative PPE requirements.

164. Operating from stations in order to maintain our frontline emergency response and other risk critical activities, such as high risk home fire safety visits and the gathering of operational risk

information has led to concerns amongst station based staff about the risk of transmission to their families, particularly those considered vulnerable.

165. It is their credit that the Brigade has been able to maintain its operational service delivery and provide significant support to our partner agencies during this period. The Brigade should also pay tribute to their families who have supported our staff coming to work during the lockdown period.
166. New staff joining the Brigade in this period have also had a very different and challenging experience in terms of getting to know and relate to their new team colleagues.

### **Issues**

167. The Brigade is perceived by staff as an organisation that places an important focus on hierarchy, structure, rank, rules, and policy. Managing remote and dispersed teams requires different management styles and techniques to traditional office based management. Ensuring staff are busy, motivated, on message, well connected and informed requires proactivity on their part and also their managers. These are skills which many are having to acquire 'on the job' given the sudden transition in working arrangements.

### **Learning points**

168. The gradual return to Union Street represents an opportunity for the Brigade to instil a cultural change that empowers the workforce to work flexibly and productively. Similarly, there is an opportunity to build on the flexibility and adaptability demonstrated by station based staff who have responded admirably to supporting their local communities through the continuing provision of our emergency response and taking on additional activities to support those communities.
169. There is a need to upskill staff on virtual management techniques and effective ways of working. This should sit alongside a renewed focus on how to support staff wellbeing for a combined remote and office/station based workforce.

### **Key questions and considerations for the future/second wave**

170. Some of the key questions to consider are:

- (a) How can we more effectively support staff who work remotely?
- (b) What tools and techniques are we developing to support the wellbeing of staff in this new environment?
- (c) How do we build on the flexibility and adaptability demonstrated by our staff during this period to support the Brigade's cultural change ambitions?

### **Distribution and use of this report**

171. The intended use of this report is to help capture our experience and lessons learnt so that it can be shared internally and also with external audiences such as our partners and other interested parties, including HMICFRS and Home Office. It is also intended to help LFB departments review and update their own business continuity plans as appropriate in response to the learning captured in this report.