

Central London Fire Scrutiny: Critical Emergency Preparedness – Speaking Notes

Introduction

The Fire Protection Association was created in 1946 by the UK insurance industry to act as the UK's national fire safety organisation and our aims are: to protect people, property and the environment by advancing fire prevention and protection techniques. Although our ownership base has now broadened, we retain close links with the UK insurers who have a strong presence on our Board and on whose behalf we administer the RISC Authority research fund, who have evaluated every fire and rescue service IRMP since they were introduced nearly 10 years ago.

Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP)

It may be useful remind ourselves of the purpose of the integrated risk management plan (or as London refer to it their Safety Plan): introduced as a result of the Bain recommendation to abolish the national standards of fire cover: the IRMP is designed; to identify existing & potential risks; evaluate the effectiveness of current arrangements; identify opportunities for improvement & policies & standards for prevention & intervention and determine resource requirements.

In the context of today I would like begin by saying that we believe the current LFB plans to be generally robust but do have some comments on the Plan in relation to Prevention; Protection and Intervention.

Prevention

In common with all fire and rescue services across the UK, LFB have seen a drop in the number of incidents requiring intervention in recent years and a fall in the consequential deaths and injuries which is of course most welcome. However whilst the Safety Plan acknowledges the value of prevention, we are still losing 33 people (generally from the vulnerable groups) each year from fires in their homes and whilst a 4% reduction over a ten year period is welcome; I would question whether this target is ambitious enough. Acknowledging that LFB is one of the most professional and highly effective fire and rescue services in the world, I think that the numbers dying in fire is still too high; I would like to see London compare itself to other international cities with world class fire and rescue services such as Hong Kong and I would like to see this at least halved over a 10 year period.

Protection

As far as protection is concerned the safety plan acknowledges the part the Fire Safety Order and modern building regulations and standards contribute to the safety of the built environment there are however two factors which need consideration in the current plan.

The first and most significant in my view is the impact the withdrawal of the fire safety and property protection aspects of the London Building Act. The London Building Act required enhanced property protection measures and particularly sprinkler protection for any significant building (ie one in excess of 7,000m³) in the capital and enhanced fire resistance and compartmentation requirements for many others. The withdrawal of these requirements and the fact that buildings originally designed with these requirements in place need no longer comply, could significant deteriorate the protection levels of building stock in the Capital. We have already evidenced building owners

choosing to decommission or rip out sprinkler systems in buildings undergoing refurbishment or renewal and this is likely to become more of a feature over time. The loss of this type of inherent protection will invariably affect fire and rescue tactics and response.

The other issue affecting the built environment (as a consequence of the need for greater thermo efficiency) is the introduction of more combustible materials into the building process and consideration needs to be given as how this will affect building structures on fire. In London we have already seen the consequences of increased radiated heat from timber framed construction site fires; modern buildings generally use more combustible materials and as we have already witnessed do perform differently in fire and this will affect intervention times and fire-fighting strategies in the future.

We are interested to note the new strategy for tackling false calls from automatic fire alarms which we recognise as an unwanted and unnecessary drain of London Fire Brigade's resources. We are encouraged that calls from automatic fire alarms will continue to generate a full response and are supportive of the principle to recover costs from the worst offenders, albeit that we understand that many of these are in the public sector e.g. hospitals and universities. We are concerned that some organisations could take the decision to simply switch these important life safety systems off and we would encourage the brigade to look at the policies in Scotland and Buckinghamshire where officers are working with the worst offenders to manage the problem out.

Intervention

My final comments are on intervention and response. I am not expert on modelling and I am a not fan of average response times albeit, I appreciate that these have been successfully used for many years by LFB, but average response alone does not allow us to accurately assess the impact of the current proposed changes. I am sure that the work has been done and the risk assessment will of course have considered occupancy; issues such as social deprivation and factors such as mobility, inherent fire protection and geography. A tower block in Lambeth would require a completely different response from a fully sprinklered office in the city, but I cannot see that detail in the plan and sight of the assessment would be useful.

I close by reiterating that in our view LFB is well run, highly professional and world class in what it manages to achieve when called upon. The points I make are not intended as criticisms but simply clarifications required to fully understand the thinking behind the plan.

Jonathan O'Neill

April 2013

London Safety Plan

Jonathan O'Neill

Aims & Objectives of the FPA

- To protect people, property and the environment by advancing fire prevention and protection techniques
- To collaborate with insurers, central Government, fire service and other agencies in this work
- To focus national and European attention on these issues
- To influence related decision making by individual consumers and businesses
- To collect, analyse and publish statistics, identify trends and promote research
- To publish guidance, recommendations and Codes of Practice
- To disseminate advice and information

RISC Authority Membership



Integrated Risk Management Plans

- Identify existing & potential risks
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current arrangements
- Identify opportunities for improvement & policies & standards for prevention & intervention
- Determine resource requirements

London Safety Plan

- **Prevention**
 - Ambitious Enough?

London Safety Plan

- **Protection**
 - Loss of London Building Act
 - Less robust buildings
 - Greater use of combustible materials
 - Value of fire engineered
 - Less inbuilt or passive fire protection
 - Less prescriptive approach to enforcement
 - AFA Strategy (Scotland/Bucks)

London Safety Plan

- **Intervention**
 - Average attendance times
 - Risk Assessment
 - Occupancy
 - Protection
 - Geography