

MIND THE GAP

A REVIEW OF THE VOLUNTARY
SECTOR RESPONSE TO THE
GRENFELL TRAGEDY



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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are the views of the author and supported by Muslim Aid and do not reflect necessarily the opinions of other participating organisations.

The text of this report also appears in full on Muslim Aid's website www.muslimaid.org

Foreword

As we approach the first anniversary of the Grenfell Tower, this timely report by Muslim Aid rightly highlights the role community and charity played in responding to a horrific disaster. The great British public demonstrated immense generosity, and local volunteers and members of the community stepped forward to support their neighbours, friends and strangers. This was voluntary action at its best and most immediate.

However, the report also highlights the need for lessons to be learnt for the voluntary and community sector, to ensure charities' response to any future disasters is as coordinated and targeted as possible. There is no room for complacency on the part of charities, any more than on the part of local or national government.

Those of us in leadership roles across the voluntary sector should therefore reflect on the recommendations of this and other similar reviews, such as those undertaken by the British Red Cross and London Funders. And we must then deliver concrete action. No one involved in the weeks and months following the disaster could help but be humbled by the dignity of the survivors of this tragedy, and their determination to be heard. We owe it to them to learn the right lessons, fast.

David Holdsworth

Deputy Chief Executive and Registrar
Charity Commission for England and Wales

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Acronyms

AMMCHC	Al Manaar Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre
BME	Black Minority Ethnic
CoE	Church of England
FBO	Faith Based Organisations
GMRU	Grenfell Muslim Response Unit
KCSC.	Kensington and Chelsea Social Council
KCTMO	Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation
LET.	London Emergency Trust
LRF	London Resilience Forum
NKLC	North Kensington Law Centre
NAVCA.	National Association for Voluntary Community Action
NZF	National Zakat Foundation
RBKC	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
RPT	Rugby Portobello Trust
VSCPF	Voluntary Sector Civil Protection Forum

Executive Summary:

In the early hours of 14 June 2017, a devastating fire broke out in the Grenfell Tower apartment block in North Kensington, west London. The consequences of this event made it one of the worst disasters since the Second World War. It resulted in the deaths of seventy two people, rendered hundreds homeless and has had lasting effects on thousands of traumatised residents from the Tower, throughout the Lancaster West Estate and into the wider community of North Kensington.

The consequences of the disaster were compounded by the weak leadership of the response initially led by the local council, which was slow to provide direction, coordination and information and to address multiple pressing needs. Particularly in the first few weeks, this void was filled mainly by the community itself, supported by an array of local organisations and businesses, as well as individual volunteers and representatives from external organisations. Assistance was concentrated around nearby churches, mosques and clubs, which provided shelter, received and distributed the huge amounts of food, water and clothing donated by the public and offered comfort to large numbers of distressed people suddenly rendered homeless.

In the first few chaotic days and weeks, there were examples of timely, effective action, much of it from local organisations with no experience or training in emergency response, complemented at times by key expertise from outside. This included mass food distributions, including Halal meals; mechanisms to coordinate and distribute cash grants to survivors; rapidly channelled donor funding to local organisations; cultural and faith-sensitive support including around bereavement, clothing and language. Voluntary agencies, both faith-based and secular, were also pivotal in facilitating meetings in trusted spaces between community members and those tasked with leading efforts to cater to their needs.

One year on from the fire, many housing needs are still unmet, the collective trauma is undiminished for many and local businesses and people's working lives are continuing to be negatively affected. This has been an unusually major and complex emergency in an



Memorial wall with messages from the community

ethnically diverse area with a long history of deprivation and neglect. Organisations leading the response, including voluntary agencies with strong expertise in this field, were poorly equipped to deal with the complexity of the emergency, while organisations better attuned to the needs of the affected community, both local and external, were poorly embedded in the leadership of the response.

It would be easy to dismiss Grenfell as a one-off, compounded by the failings of a particularly flawed local authority but there are aspects that could play out again at a time when the frequency of disasters in the UK is likely to increase due to climate change, vulnerability to terror attacks and the inherent risks of life in crowded, unequal cities. This report, commissioned by Muslim Aid with the Al Manaar Centre and supported by local organisations, explores the role of the voluntary sector in the response, including faith-based organisations, with a view to informing the work of the sector and those who act with it, and feeding into wider thinking on the future of the voluntary sector's emergency preparedness and response, in London and beyond. Key issues include:



Volunteers off-load donations outside Notting Hill Methodist Church

Drawing on local capacities. In a major, complex disaster, local secular and faith organisations may well not have experience in emergency response, but they can draw on their local rootedness to act quickly and sensitively in line with the needs of communities they understand. In the Grenfell response, local organisations were key to tackling short-term needs and are playing a vital role in the longer term. This must be more completely and systematically embraced, both across the sector and by government.

Context matters. Emergency responses in highly heterogeneous inner-city areas like North Kensington need to take local contexts into account. Disaster response systems, behaviours and interventions all need to be tailored to specific local socio-economic and cultural dynamics in the short and longer term.

Building partnerships. Established emergency organisations have extensive experience and expertise, but they lack capacities that other entities, both local and national, may be able to offer. Partnerships between national and local actors bring reciprocal benefits both in short- and longer-term responses. Local actors cannot do without technical, strategic and financial support, while national players benefit from local understanding, links and trust from communities.

The added value of faith-based organisations. A variety of Muslim and Christian organisations have played critical leadership roles in the Grenfell response, offering trusted, expert assistance to local communities. The extensive physical presence of faith organisations at the heart of the UK's diverse communities needs to be properly recognised and harnessed as a vital element of contemporary emergency capacity.

Strengthening coordination. There were good examples of coordination in the Grenfell response, for example between Muslim charities, between funders and those who collaborated around cash grant distribution. Overall links across the sector and between the sector and government were weak, reflecting the lack of effective mechanisms to facilitate the involvement of the full range of actors engaged in emergencies at local level and beyond.

Investing long-term. Grenfell has generated complex or 'chronic' challenges, including around housing, mental health and livelihoods. To address these, interventions identified in association with residents must be supported as part of long-term recovery plans. Only so much though can be achieved through service provision and the sector must also be prepared to speak out more when confronted by injustice.

Developing effective funding mechanisms. The London Funders group and others that came together under the umbrella of the Charity Commission provided rapid, flexible, coordinated and transparent grants to affected communities and voluntary sector-run projects. There were challenges around targeting and the longer-term availability of resources. Lessons need to be learnt to ensure that funding for future emergencies is rapid, strategic and transparent.

Enhancing preparedness. Developing emergency preparedness capacities is a considerable challenge in the UK, as few secular or faith organisations have nationwide networks, and fewer still have the capacity to support preparedness work. New approaches and a different mix of organisations need to be brought into play if the sector is to become better equipped to respond when future disasters strike.

About this report

This report has been produced by Muslim Aid in association with the Al Manaar Cultural Heritage Centre, with the support of the Clement James Centre, the Rugby Portobello Trust and the Notting Hill Methodist Church. Muslim Aid is a London-based charity working in the UK and internationally with experience in emergency response. Until the response to the Grenfell Tower disaster, the overlap between its UK work and emergency response had not been high. It is important that Muslim charities make sense of their role in an event where they and the communities they represent were so central, and the implications for them going forward. The report highlights the contributions made by Muslim actors, but its scope is broad, and the paper was developed with the intent of undertaking a review of the sector as a whole. In doing so, it is hoped that the report will provide useful insights and be of practical benefit to a wide range of organisations and individuals working locally, as well as those operating across London and nationally, whether from the sector itself or those working with it.

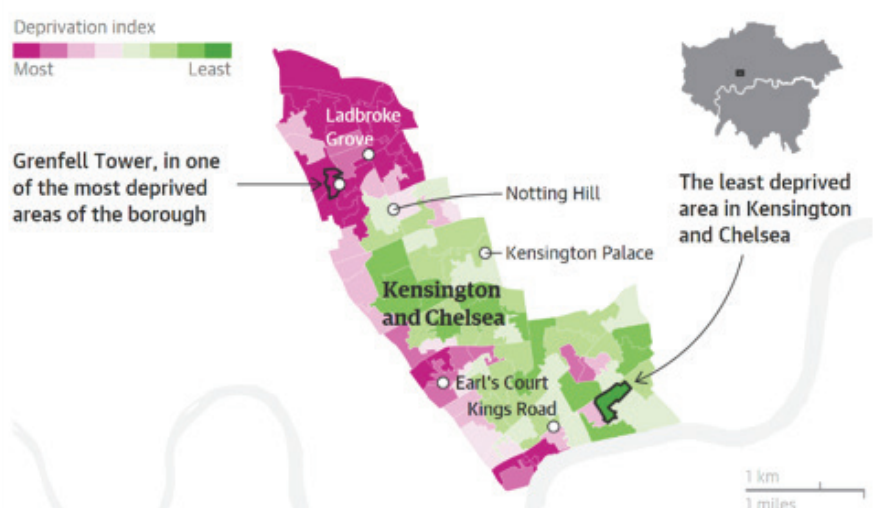
The report draws on the perspectives of representatives from a wide array of organisations involved in the response, as well as other key informants, including residents and funders. Interviews were conducted between mid-January and mid-April 2018. The scope of the paper is necessarily limited; it does not, for instance, review the role of community organisations in the response. Faith-based organisations (FBOs) are though very much in focus, and for the purposes of the report are considered part of the voluntary sector, though the specificities of their character and contribution are highlighted where relevant. The term 'voluntary' is recognised to be problematic since many of the organisations under consideration consist of paid professionals and some may have few if any volunteers. The alternative terms 'third sector' or 'not-for-profit' are not used partly because they are not commonly employed in discussions of emergency response in the UK.

1. Background

The Lancaster West Estate in context

Grenfell Tower is part of the Lancaster West Estate, a development built in the 1970s to replace sub-standard housing in the Notting Dale Ward of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC). From its origins as an urban settlement in the mid-19th century deprivation and marginalisation have been a persistent characteristic of the area. Today the borough is one of the wealthiest in the country, with the highest median income of £140,000 in the UK, but it is also one of the most unequal with the highest levels of income inequality and of differentials in life expectancy in the entire country⁽¹⁾. The 2015 Index for Deprivation shows the Lancaster West neighbourhood is amongst the 10% most deprived in England⁽²⁾. High levels of child poverty, health deprivation and overcrowding all contribute to such a statistic.

The area has also been home to a shifting mix of communities. A significant proportion of the early residents were Irish migrants drawn by the prospects of work on the expanding rail networks who lived in crowded, rented accommodation. The area went through many subsequent changes, both physical and socio-cultural. North Kensington experienced much bomb damage during World War Two and many slum dwellings were demolished from the 1950s and replaced by council housing. The area was one of the first to become home to the so called 'Windrush' generation of African-Caribbean migrants in



(1) <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/healthylifeexpectancyatbirthandage65byupper-tier-local-authority-and-read deprivation/england2012to2014>

(2) The English Index of Multiple Deprivation <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015> produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government ranks the 'neighbourhood' or LSOAs containing Lancaster West Estate – one of 107 neighbourhoods in Kensington and Chelsea – as 3,171 out of 32,844 neighbourhoods in England.

the early 1950s, which later was at the epicentre of the racially motivated Notting Hill riots as well as being at the heart of the community which gave rise to the Notting Hill Carnival. More recently it has become home to communities of Moroccans, Somalis, Iraqis and Ethiopians. They along with the other residents of North Kensington find themselves living in densely populated areas while a short distance away in the south of the borough is a world of second homes for the super-rich in streets where it is not uncommon that one in five properties is sitting empty.

The Lancaster West Estate was supposed to be part of a much larger regeneration plan, conceived in the late 1960s. This never materialised and ultimately the 24-storey Grenfell Tower and three Walkways, Hurstway, Testerton and Barandon (also known as the 'finger blocks'), were all that were constructed, although the completion of the Estate did coincide with the construction of the Westway highway on large tracts of North Kensington. The estate has seen a number of modifications over the years, including to the layout of the Walkways and to the entrances to the Tower as part of a strategy to manage local crime. Most recently, between 2015 and 2016 the Tower was renovated and its exterior reclad, changes that were fiercely contested by residents groups at the time for their lack of attention to health and safety⁽³⁾. Moreover the fire that ripped through the cladding on the Tower inspired a recent review of building regulations which has called for an overhaul of the construction industry to ensure that safety is put above cutting costs⁽⁴⁾.

The local voluntary sector presence

A voluntary sector presence in the Notting Dale area can be traced back to at least the 1860s, when the St Clement's and St Francis of Assisi churches were founded. Both were set up to support local social and spiritual needs, and each established schools which continue to serve the community today. The 1880s



Hundreds of volunteers gather outside the Rugby Portobello Trust

⁽³⁾ See the Grenfell Action Group's Newsletter of January 2016: <https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2016/01/24/grenfell-tower-still-a-fire-risk/>

⁽⁴⁾ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/668831/Independent_Review_of_Building_Regulations_and_Fire_Safety_web_accessible.pdf

saw the establishment of the Rugby and Harrow Clubs, set up by benefactors from these two major public schools to address social needs, particularly among young people. The work started by all four of these institutions continues today, albeit often in very different forms. St Clement's, for example, has merged with St James Church and has given rise to the independent Clement James Centre, which provides a wide range of services for young people and adults ⁽⁵⁾. The old Rugby Club has been absorbed in a merger of three local organisations to form the Rugby Portobello Trust (RPT)⁽⁶⁾, which offers services for young people and parents. The Harrow Club, still rooted in Notting Dale, provides an extensive range of activities and services for young people.

Other voluntary organisations are of more recent provenance. The Kensington and Chelsea Social Council (KCSC), which maintains a register of the hundreds of organisations active in the borough, lists 98 registered voluntary and community organisations in its Grenfell Voluntary Sector Services Directory, engaged in wellbeing and health, youth and children's services, anti-poverty action, housing and legal support ⁽⁷⁾. Key local players include the Westway Trust, started as a residents' campaigning organisation at the time of the construction of the Westway. It is now an umbrella organisation with 60 affiliated member organisations. The North Kensington Law Centre, located within the Lancaster West Estate, provides legal support to local communities. Opened in 1970, the Centre was the first of its kind in England. The Al Manaar Cultural Heritage Centre, opened in 2001 less than a mile from the Lancaster West Estate, serves the spiritual, economic, social and cultural needs of the local Muslim community. Other faith-based and secular organisations in and around the Lancaster West Estate cater to specific groups, including women, LGBT and people with disabilities, as well as particular communities, such as Eritreans, Iraqis, Moroccans and Somalis. There are also local branches of national organisations including Age UK and Relate. While the great majority predate the Grenfell Tower fire, one key informant noted that, at one point in 2017, 280 organisations online had 'Grenfell' in their name, compared with only three prior to the fire.

(5) It also hosts the headquarters of IntoUniversity (<https://intouniversity.org/>), which helps disadvantaged young people into university.

(6) RPT was set up in 2003, when the Rugby Club (established in 1889) merged with the Portobello Trust, set up in 1986 around youth unemployment, and the homelessness charity Portobello Houseshare. In 2009 RPT merged with P3 (<https://www.p3charity.org/>).

(7) <https://www.kcsc.org.uk/news/grenfell-voluntary-sector-service-directory>

2. The voluntary sector response to the Grenfell Tower fire

The immediate response: the first days

The fire in Grenfell Tower broke out shortly before 1 a.m. on 14 June. Significantly, this was towards the end of Ramadan; Muslim residents were still either returning from night-time prayers or taking their pre-dawn Suhur meal, and were among the first to raise the alarm. On the night of the fire voluntary organisations close to the Lancaster West Estate opened their doors to residents escaping the burning Tower. Latymer Community Church opened at around 2 a.m., and others including the Harrow Club, St Clement's Church and the Clement James Centre and the Rugby Portobello Trust, all within a few hundred metres of the Estate, followed shortly afterwards. The

Al Manaar Centre, a little further away, was open by 6 a.m.⁽⁸⁾ Distressed residents from both the Tower and the Walkways, who had been evacuated by the emergency services, suddenly found themselves on the streets with nowhere to go as large areas around the Estate were cordoned off. One resident from the Tower, who had previously

experienced displacement due to conflict in northern Uganda, commented: 'it was like a war zone'. Some went to friends and neighbours, but many found their way to local centres, where they were received by staff and a rapidly growing number of volunteers. There they found a sympathetic welcome, a space away from the mayhem on the streets and light refreshments.



Lotifa Begum, Muslim Aid, interviewed by the BBC



(8) The Notting Hill Methodist Church, which is little more than 100m from the Tower, was initially inside the area cordoned off by the police, and was only able to open at 9.30 a.m. once the cordon had been moved forward.

Assistance for people affected by the fire increased dramatically as news of the disaster spread. Individuals, organisations and businesses, both local and from further afield, offered their time, facilities and material support. Local organisations became the focus, both for volunteers and for the donations of water, food, clothing, blankets and toiletries that started to pour in. As well as assistance from the voluntary sector, businesses including Jamie Oliver restaurants, the Westfield Centre and Dysons offered food and other goods to affected residents, and their staff volunteered in the centres. Large voluntary organisations with experience in and a mandate for emergency response also became involved, notably the British Red Cross (BRC), but also the Salvation Army alongside smaller niche actors. Muslim organisations were strongly represented, reflecting the Muslim background of many of the area's residents. Some individuals and representatives of organisations had relevant skills, including medical doctors and trained counsellors from the organisations such as the Samaritans; others were trained to work in disasters, such as the Response Pastors,⁽⁹⁾ who worked in and around places of worship. While volunteers with local roots or of Muslim origin were well-placed to provide support, others were clearly uncomfortable and did not have the understanding of faith and culture needed to sensitively address people's needs. The leader of one local centre raised concerns about certain volunteers drafted in from outside the area, whom he eventually asked to leave.

Officials from various local authority bodies were also on the scene early on the first day. One centre reported meeting a staff member from a neighbouring council, who claimed to be a disasters expert. The Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO) had representatives in several locations including the Clement James Centre, the Latymer Community Church and the Methodist Church, where they compiled lists, sometimes handwritten, of residents from the Tower. Other local organisations

A faith-sensitive response

Food, clothing, culture, psychosocial support and spirituality were all among the particular needs of the many Muslims caught up in the aftermath of the disaster: wrestling with the spiritual implications of breaking the fast during Ramadan; finding ways of getting Halal-compliant food to people being accommodated in hotels and unable to cater to these needs; and identifying headscarves, or 'Abayas', that could be provided to women who had fled their homes were some of the many faith-sensitive roles that Muslim volunteers from Grenfell Muslim Response Unit and Muslim Aid played from bases at the Al Manaar Centre and the Rugby Portobello Trust.



People of Muslim faith pray outside respite centre

(9) This includes Street Pastors from the Ascension Trust <http://www.streetpastors.org/> and the Rapid Response Team of the Billy Graham Evangelical Association, which send in faith leaders trained in emergency response.

also began drawing up their own lists of people they had seen or had heard were safe. Several reported that their lists were confiscated by TMO representatives.

As the morning wore on and the number of people on the streets and in and around the centres increased, so did the challenges facing those at the heart of the initial response. Very few staff or volunteers had any background in or preparation for dealing with emergencies. Some local voluntary sector leaders tried to contact one another on the first day, though for many this proved difficult. One described how people were sent out on bicycles to convey information between centres. The sheer volume of donated goods such as water and clothing became a major logistical problem. Some centres started to decline in-kind donations well before the end of the first day, a decision that was not always well-received by the public. Managing the media was another major challenge highlighted by nearly all centre leaders. Some prevented journalists from entering their premises in the interests of residents' privacy. 'No media, no politicians, no pop stars' was the rule at one centre, while a 'press-free zone' was created in the square outside the Methodist Church. Others who did not take this step said that they regretted not having done so. Residents welcomed efforts to create protected spaces, which were of vital importance to protect the dignity of people who had lost so much, including loved ones. As one leader of the residents' group Grenfell United put it: 'They closed their doors and closed out the noise. They created a little bit of order for us in the chaos'. RBKC staff asked several centres to close down their operations towards the end of the first day, but these requests were ignored and most stayed open until after midnight, and would continue to do so for the next few days.

'One of the great contributions to emergency response in the UK is the presence of a building of a faith organisation accessible from almost every street in the UK.'

Ven. Luke Miller, Archdeacon of London and Chair of the London Faith Panel

By the afternoon of the first day questions were beginning to be asked about leadership from the local authorities. Those closest to the scene, whether residents or voluntary organisations, saw very little coordinated response from local or central government. Organisations were looking to be told how to direct their efforts; as one centre leader put it: 'I just wanted to be told what to do'. The main priorities were information on missing persons, as well as housing and accommodation. Council staff were seen and met, but it was only in the early evening that it transpired by word of mouth that the Westway Sports Centre had been opened as the official relief centre, where residents were asked to report and register for assistance. By then, hundreds of offers of accommodation had been made on-line or to local organisations such as the Rugby Portobello Trust.⁽¹⁰⁾ Many

(10) With the blessing of the local authorities, RPT also established a rest centre, but that decision was reversed just as it was working with Amazon to bring in a large number of beds.

people too afraid to go anywhere near the Tower due to the psychological and emotional trauma they had experienced stayed with friends and relatives. Local authority representatives started to arrange hotel accommodation for some, though others slept on donated mattresses in the main gym of the Westway, where they remained for several nights.

On the evening of the first day several centres had iftar meals and food provided to them so they could serve Iftar, the communal breaking of the fast, for the many residents and hundreds of volunteers observing Ramadan. This event, which often occurred in the streets and in which many non-Muslims participated, was repeated over subsequent days, creating a sense of community solidarity. Extensive support was provided by British Muslim organisations including the Ramadan Tent Project, which has provided thousands of open-air Iftar meals in London and other cities since 2011.



Street Iftar outside Rugby Portobello Trust

By the next morning, people's immediate priorities were clear: they wanted to know about loved ones, they needed a roof over their heads and they lacked belongings. All three were in short supply. One local leader told us that 'One of the most shocking things was that, for the first three days, there was no official information for families'. The British Red Cross and the Grenfell Muslim Response Unit (GMRU), an umbrella group of four Muslim charities, the Aziz Foundation, Islamic Relief, Muslim Aid and the National Zakat Foundation (NZF), set up helplines in an effort to fill this gap. Sleeping arrangements were chaotic: initial moves were under way to get people into hotels, but the majority were struggling to get the council to offer them any suitable temporary accommodation, and often had to resort to finding their own solutions. Many, particularly those with young children, complained that the temporary housing on offer was inadequate and unsafe.

The focus now started to shift from donated items to cash, with informal cash distributions in several centres, with early expert support from the National Zakat Foundation. Thousands of pounds were given to people in this way before a more systematic approach was developed.

On the frontline of the response

As soon as the fire started, volunteer teams were on the ground helping people find short-term accommodation, access to hot meals, sanitation, funeral services and counselling and adolescent services. The utter mayhem was a shock. I would expect this in a developing country, because almost always there is poor infrastructure. I honestly thought we had better disaster preparedness and response systems here in the UK.

Jehangir Malik OBE, Muslim Aid CEO



The principal problem was the continued lack of leadership and direction. As one centre manager put it: 'I wanted to be told where to find the disaster response manual'. The local authorities did not move rapidly or effectively in the first days after the fire. In the words of the initial report of the Independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce: 'RBKC failed its community on the night of 14th June and in the weeks following' ⁽¹¹⁾. There appears to have been an expectation among some that the British Red Cross would take responsibility for cross-sector coordination given its prominence within the UK's emergency response system, but the organisation has said that it held back from assuming this role in the belief that local actors would be better-placed to take it on. The first general meeting of the Kensington and Chelsea Social Council, the locally recognised voluntary sector 'infrastructure' body,⁽¹²⁾ was held more than a week after the fire. The Council had assumed that the borough council would arrange a meeting itself (and had been assured to that effect by RBKC staff).

In the absence of direction from the local authority, there were spontaneous attempts to impose some order over what remained an

(11) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/657336/171031_Independent_Grenfell_Recovery_Taskforce_initial_report.pdf, p. 1.

(12) Infrastructure organisations are membership charities that help others to set up and run charities and community groups. They are federated under NACVA (<https://www.navca.org.uk/>).

essentially chaotic picture. The glut of donated items needed managing, and enterprising volunteers organised supplies in the centres into categories and ensured that private space remained available for distressed survivors. Local businesses provided warehousing space; in one example, the owners of a club under renovation near the Al Manaar Centre handed over their premises as a pop-up warehouse after being approached for help by Muslim Aid. New challenges also emerged, including managing the presence of high-profile visitors, often with camera crews in tow. Most notable was the visit Prime Minister Theresa May made to meet survivors at St Clement's Church on 16 June, which was curtailed when a large crowd assembled outside to vent their anger at the perceived failings of the official response. A group of residents subsequently visited Downing Street accompanied by representatives from the local voluntary sector, including The Rt Revd Dr Graham Tomlin, the Anglican Bishop of Kensington, who has remained actively involved in the response.

Three days after the fire a more organised response finally started to emerge. On 16 June leadership of the response (or 'Gold Command') was assigned to a newly constituted Grenfell Fire Response Team. The team, headed by John Baradell, the Town Clerk for the City of London, included the British Red Cross and the chair of the Faith Panel of the London Resilience Forum. The first weekend also brought a reflective pause, with Friday prayers and services in local churches attended by people of all faiths and none.

Donated mattresses at Westway Sports Centre



Early response: the first weeks

In the days and weeks following the fire, new types of assistance, new stakeholders and different working relationships kicked in as the authorities tried to assert control of the situation. Voluntary organisations continued to play key roles. The main focus of attention remained housing, replacing personal belongings and the emotional well-being of the people caught up in the disaster. On Saturday 17 June Prime Minister May announced a commitment to house all residents within three weeks. While ultimately unachievable, the move did galvanise efforts by local authorities to find hotels and other temporary accommodation for residents whose homes had been destroyed or who were unable or unwilling to return home out of fear for their own safety or because of the psychological trauma they had suffered. There was growing dissatisfaction with what was being offered, and the voluntary sector provided people with legal and other forms of advice on housing issues, alongside professionals giving pro bono support.

Funding appeals by individuals, charitable organisations and other specialist funds attracted considerable public support. Some of the largest recipients included the London Evening Standard's Dispossessed Fund, the British Red Cross London Fire Appeal and the Kensington and Chelsea Foundation. Pressure quickly grew for these funds to be disbursed, though early experiences of handing over money were fraught with complications, including accessing funds from banks and ensuring that the money was going to the right people. Steps were taken over the weekend after the fire to establish a unified system for managing funds following expressions of concern both from the giving public and from recipients. Prominent in this effort was the London Emergencies Trust (LET), which had experience of grant-making to victims of the terror attacks in London and Manchester earlier in the year. LET worked with others, notably the Rugby Portobello Trust (RPT), supported by its umbrella body P3, and the National Zakat Foundation, which specialises in managing and distributing cash grants in the UK, and a coordinated and transparent system began to emerge. More than £20 million was distributed in cash grants by the LET and the RPT to the bereaved, injured and displaced. Another £6 million was distributed by other fund-raising organisations or retained for future projects. A total of £35,000 is shown in the Charity Commission accounts as having been used to meet infrastructure costs.⁽¹³⁾

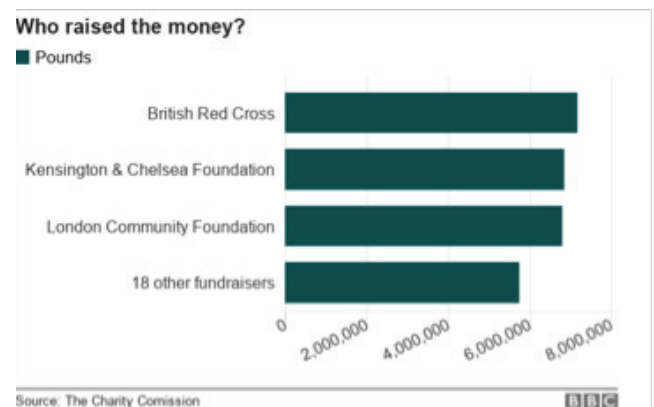


Volunteers from all backgrounds sort donations

(13) Detailed information on funds raised and spent by the sector is produced by the Charity Commission: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691577/Grenfell_Charitable_Funds_Report__19_03_18.pdf

Huge volumes of in-kind donations also continued to arrive, leaving many charities with much more stock than they knew what to do with. Towards the end of June, the British Red Cross established the Shop for Grenfell initiative to sort through almost 100 tonnes of goods. The best items were distributed to survivors, with other saleable goods passed on to Red Cross shops or recycled, raising over £220,000 for the London Fire Fund, which in turn fed into the cash distributions coordinated by the LET and RPT.⁽¹⁴⁾ The initiative was received with more than a little hostility by residents suspicious of seeing donated goods resold, prompting a BBC investigation into what happened to donations.⁽¹⁵⁾

A range of organisations offered specialist support to bereaved families, including Cruse Bereavement Care, Winston's Wish, which works with children and young people, and Muslim organisations such as Eden Care, the Gardens of Peace and the Muslim Bereavement Support Service. The GMRU coordinated with Muslim families, some of whom had arrived from overseas, and with mosques, hospitals, funeral directors and those overseeing burials. More than half of the people who died in the Tower were of Muslim origin. The first funeral after the fire, for Mohammad Al-haj Ali, a 23-year-old Syrian refugee who had been living in the Tower with his brother, took place on 21 June at the East London Mosque.



This period also saw numerous public meetings between the authorities and residents. Encounters were largely in places of worship, at the Notting Hill Methodist Church just 100m or so from the Tower, with other high-profile meetings at St Clement's, the Al Manaar Centre, the Westway Centre and Latymer Church. These locations were chosen partly for convenience, but also because places of worship were trusted by local people in a context where trust was a commodity in relatively short supply. As well as providing venues for meetings, faith communities also started to interact with each other and strengthen ties locally. Links were forged between Christian churches in the area and the Al Manaar Centre, with outside support from other organisations, including synagogues. According to the director of the Al Manaar Centre, one of the most helpful financial contributions came from St John's Church, Notting Hill, which made a specific contribution to the Centre's running costs.

(14) "Who raised the money" graph - see previous footnote

(15) 'Grenfell Tower: What Has Happened to the Donations?' (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42821900>)



The first and principal responders to the plight of the people affected by the Grenfell Tower fire were friends, neighbours and local voluntary organisations with deep experience of working with the local community



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Long-term response and recovery

Since the first wave of activity, the voluntary sector has remained deeply involved in supporting people affected by the fire. Many local organisations in particular have seen their work transformed as a result of engaging with the emergency and its aftermath. RPT, for instance, has considerably increased or adapted its range of services to cater to the specific needs of people affected by the disaster. There has also been an increase in the involvement of specialist external agencies such as Place2Be, a children's charity providing support for emotional well-being in schools. A number of new organisations have also been created. Some are dubious about the added value of some of this activity, described by one residents' representative as 'yoga for Grenfell'.

Mental health has attracted particular support, reflecting the scale and depth of the trauma people living in the vicinity of the Estate have experienced and the very visible reminder of that trauma in the shape of the burnt-out Tower. Dozens of organisations are listed on the KCSC Grenfell Directory as providing counselling, mentoring, well-being or support services. Some are tailored to particular groups, such as children, young people and migrants. Health professionals from the National Health Service (NHS) and specialists such as Cruse Bereavement and the Samaritans are actively engaged, often in association with local organisations. A wide range of assistance has been provided, including opportunities for families and individuals to take breaks away from the area with more than £1 million in support from London Funders, the membership network for funders and investors in London's civil society.⁽¹⁶⁾ However, concerns have been raised about the quality and consistency of much of this support, and some affected people may be falling through the cracks, including older people and certain groups of men. According to the interim report of the Independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce, early attempts by the Grenfell Fire Response Team to provide a Key Worker service were 'discredited' as a result of 'a distinct lack of clear vision for what the Key Worker role should have been'. Although Key Workers are meant to act as a single point of contact for each individual or family, the Taskforce's second report found that some people were still being supported by more than one staff member. Efforts have been made to coordinate mental health support. The NHS, for example, is

(16) A total of £1,078,656 was awarded to 61 local organisations for a wide variety of activities for children and young people in North Kensington over the summer holidays. Funders included John Lyon's Charity, the Big Lottery Fund, The Tudor Trust, BBC Children in Need, City Bridge Trust, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Kensington & Chelsea Foundation and the Department for Education.

developing a partnership with key voluntary organisations involved in this area, including Midaye (a Somali women's organisation), Making Communities Work and Grow (MCWG), Al Manaar and Family Action.

Youth services have been another important focus for the voluntary sector in the Notting Dale area. A number of organisations have supported creative, sporting and learning activities, in some cases in association with local schools. London Funders provided a second round of funding worth £634,384 to 29 organisations for school activities. There is of course a major overlap with the large body of dedicated support to young people around mental well-being.

Housing remains a major unresolved problem. The time it has taken to find appropriate new accommodation or provide satisfactory arrangements for people who were evacuated or chose to leave has extended far beyond original expectations. Some residents are still in hotels. Support has been extended to people living in the buildings closest to the Lancaster West Estate (Bramley House, Treadgold House and Verity Close), and several local organisations are continuing to provide legal support and other forms of advice, including the North Kensington Law Centre and Citizens Advice, which together received almost £300,000 from London Funders.⁽¹⁷⁾ They and the Westway Trust have been supported in this work by the housing and homeless charity Shelter.



Monthly vigil outside Notting Hill Methodist Church

The negative impact of the fire also extends to local businesses. The Portobello Business Centre, which estimates that 85 local businesses have been affected, highlights reduced footfall, lack of premises, the trauma experienced by staff and the local community and road closures. While financial assistance has been provided to local businesses by the Mayor of London's Office and RBKC, the Centre is pressing for a broader package of support. People's ability to work has also been affected. Some local charities are exploring creative ways to get local residents into new areas of work, including a training scheme, supported by the Kensington and Chelsea Trust in partnership with Clement James and several major companies, to

(17) <http://londonfunders.org.uk/trust-and-foundation-funding-and-support-community-groups-affected-grenfell-fire>

fast-track local people into the IT sector.

Voluntary organisations involved in the response to the Grenfell fire have played a wide variety of roles both at local and national level, either as intermediaries between the community and the authorities or as spokespersons on issues associated with the disaster. These organisations are treading a fine line between affected communities and those with official responsibility for their welfare. At times this has involved taking a back seat and letting residents do the talking, and on other occasions it has meant facilitating the voice of residents, including compiling submissions to the Grenfell Tower inquiry, as Al Manaar did. Some voluntary sector organisations have provided active support to residents' groups that existed prior to the fire, such as the Lancaster West Residents Association, and to others that emerged subsequently, including Grenfell United. They have also engaged in direct advocacy around issues such as the impact of cash grants on people's benefits, amnesties for undocumented residents and housing. Various government bodies have also called on the local voluntary sector to input into the consultative processes and mechanisms put in

place after the fire. The British Red Cross acted as the voluntary sector representative on the London Fire Response Team that took over Gold Command, and the CEO of Barnardo's, Javed Khan, was one of the four members of the Independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce. The main council-supported entity promoting community relations with residents and access to government services, the Grenfell Support Team based at the Curve community centre, includes several representatives from the local voluntary sector in its five-strong governance group⁽¹⁸⁾. Both local and national organisations involved in the response have been invited to take part in the Charity Commission-appointed National Critical Incident Response working group, which is looking into how the voluntary sector and central government can better respond to disasters in the UK based on key lessons from Grenfell and other recent large-scale domestic disasters.⁽¹⁹⁾

Leyla's story: trauma impacting livelihoods

Leyla has lived in the UK for decades, having left war-torn Uganda to make a new life for herself. An independent working woman, on the night of 14 June her world was once again 'turned upside down'. Leyla works in palliative care, but now finds it impossible to give of herself as she used to and has stopped working. She can be regularly found with other friends in the Al Manaar kitchens preparing Halal meals for people still in hotel accommodation. She wants to do something else with her life. She is thinking of starting up a food business with her friend Miriam, but so far she says hasn't had the support or inclination to develop that plan.

(18) Services advertised are the NHS, UK Visas and Immigration, HM Passport Office, Jobcentre Plus, the Post Office, Adults' and Children's Social Care and Housing (<https://grenfellsupport.org.uk/>)

(19) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charity-sector-comes-together-to-co-ordinate-future-response-to-national-critical-incidents>. The working group includes the British Red Cross, Clement James, LET, Muslim Aid, NZF and RPT.

3. Key issues

Grenfell: a one-off or part of a pattern?

The scale and nature of the Grenfell Tower disaster have few parallels in post-war Britain. This was the deadliest structural fire in the UK for more than 70 years; dozens of people died, thousands more were traumatised and hundreds made homeless. The sheer number of volunteers who descended on the area, and people's generosity in donating both goods and money, also has few if any parallels in recent UK history.

While the precise circumstances may prove unique, the disaster also highlighted deep-seated societal and institutional stresses. Factors that exacerbated the crisis are common to other disasters, in both the developed and the developing world. The most deprived in society are hardest hit in emergencies, a reality the Grenfell disaster demonstrates in our own backyard. Official bodies charged with leading emergencies are often overwhelmed, incompetent or worse, and this is not the first instance in the UK where serious mistakes were made by those responsible for managing a crisis, as the families and friends of the victims of the Hillsborough disaster will testify. With the effects of climate change, the threat of terror attacks and high levels of inequality in the UK, there are good grounds to believe that large-scale disasters are becoming increasingly likely; that marginalised communities will suffer disproportionately; and that the bodies charged with responding will often be ill-equipped to do so. All of this suggests that the lessons of Grenfell should be learnt quickly.

The voluntary sector in the spotlight

The response of the voluntary sector to the immediate needs of local people has been widely praised. The second report from the Independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce in March 2018 upgraded its assessment of the sector's performance from 'impressive' to 'exemplary', and commended voluntary organisations for their 'trusted support'. Much of the praise has been directed towards local organisations that had no prior experience of disaster response, but which acted quickly and shouldered much of the responsibility for the early response. Praise is not universal, and there is significant ongoing disquiet among residents about how certain organisations have 'profited' from the funds raised in the name of the people of Grenfell. Overall, though, the Grenfell disaster highlights the critical role that the voluntary sector can play in disaster response in the UK. That said, the disaster also exposed a number of challenges facing the emergency 'resilience' system in the UK at multiple levels, including within the voluntary sector and in its relations with other stakeholders. These merit close examination.

Support to local organisations

The first and principal responders to the plight of the people affected by the Grenfell Tower fire were friends, neighbours and local voluntary organisations with deep experience of working with the local community. The latter's role and importance has been strengthened due to their prominence in the response, which in turn has enhanced trust. It is reasonable to assume that they will continue to play this role for the foreseeable future, particularly in the light of the mistrust which has left relations with government bodies so fractured – a situation that the second report of the Independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce suggests will take years to repair.

Important contributions were made from across the voluntary sector. Organisations such as the London Emergencies Trust, organisations dealing with bereavement or acute trauma, the fundraising muscle of the British Red Cross and the faith-sensitive capabilities of Muslim charities all brought relevant and critical external expertise. That said, the dynamics around which types of organisation need to be included in emergency systems is much in focus the world over. It is increasingly recognised in international development forums that there is a disparity in the support provided to frontline local actors as against more established agencies.⁽²⁰⁾ This was arguably in evidence in North Kensington. The British Red Cross for one has acknowledged that it was slow to engage effectively with frontline local actors, and that it needs to do more to support community groups⁽²¹⁾.

One of the lessons of Grenfell, and of disaster responses more generally, is the need for meaningful partnerships with local actors engaged on the frontline of emergency response and recovery. Significant funding support for local organisations has come from



Many funerals took place at the Al Manaar and East London Mosques

The Al Manaar Cultural Heritage Centre

The Al Manaar Cultural Heritage Centre was established in 2001 as a mosque and community centre. It was from the Centre that a number of residents were returning when the fire was first noticed and the alarm raised. From the outset of the response The Centre catered to the needs of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, its halls filled with relief items; its kitchens turned over to women to come together and find mutual support in preparing Halal food for survivors and people sequestered in hotels; and the mosque and other rooms offering spiritual and other forms of faith-sensitive support and guidance. The Centre has been used for meetings with officials, as a convening space for gathering community inputs into the Commission of Inquiry and to host government and voluntary sector service providers. Al Manaar is widely recognised to be at the heart of an invigorated local inter-faith network that is playing an important role in supporting community recovery.

(20) See for example 'Time to Let Go: A Three-point Proposal to Change the Humanitarian System', ODI, 2015 (<https://www.odi.org/hpg/remake-aid/>).

(21) British Red Cross 'Harnessing the power of kindness for communities in crisis: Towards a more effective response to emergencies in the UK.'

the London Funders group, initially through the Community Core Costs Fund, which provided grants of up to £20,000 to 100 organisations in July 2017. This was followed by a smaller set of grants through the Anchor Core Costs Fund, which provided £814,717 to eight local organisations with three more infrastructure grants to those coordinating the work of smaller organisations⁽²²⁾. While the initial tranches may have been spread too thin, reflecting a lack of awareness of capabilities across the sector, core funding is critical to help local organisations scale up during emergencies. There is clearly a need for continuing support to agencies in the recovery stage, including faith organisations of all hues, which are often short of resources. Funding needs to be supplemented by other forms of capacity strengthening support to help agencies define their individual or collective roles or strategies in continuing to support affected people.

Diversity

Notting Dale is a historically underprivileged inner-city area with a diverse mix of residents. While the identity of some actors, principally Muslim charities, was reflective of the make-up of local communities, mainstream emergency organisations were less attuned; the CEO of the British Red Cross, for example, has publicly acknowledged that its volunteers, staffing and leadership are 'nowhere near as diverse as we need to be'⁽²³⁾. Looking ahead, while future

GMRU: collaborative action from Muslim charities

The Grenfell Muslim Response Unit (GMRU) draws on the individual and collective capacities of four of the UK's major Muslim charitable organisations: the Aziz Foundation, Islamic Relief, Muslim Aid and the National Zakat Foundation (NZF). One of the collaboration's first acts was to set up an emergency helpline within 48 hours of the fire, which received over 1,500 calls. The expertise of NZF meant that GMRU was a key and trusted partner in making cash grants. Initially members' own funds were used, though later it was given responsibility alongside Rugby Portobello Trust to distribute grants from the Evening Standard's Dispossessed Fund. GMRU set up in the Westway centre before moving to the Curve. It has provided a wide range of services, including housing and legal support; coordination of burials and bereavement support through case workers, who act as liaison points for affected families and community members; and support to food distributions, working with a wide range of voluntary, private sector and government partners. They have hosted workshops, art therapy classes and fire safety training for children in partnership with the London Fire Brigade.



Grenfell Muslim Response Unit and British Red Cross conduct financial assessments to make grants for bereaved families

(22) The eight anchor organisations were: the Al Manaar Centre, Clement James Centre, Dolgano Neighbourhood Trust, the Harrow Club, Latymer Community Church, Rugby Portobello Trust, Westway Trust and Grenfell United with KCSC, the K&C Foundation and Migrants Organise receiving the infrastructure grant List of the London Funders Anchor Core Cost Funds <http://londonfunders.org.uk/trust-and-foundation-funding-and-support-community-groups-affected-grenfell-fire>

(23) <https://www.thinknpc.org/blog/what-the-red-cross-learned-at-grenfell/>

emergencies will strike in a wide range of contexts, those steering thinking and practice in the voluntary sector in London and the wider UK need to ensure that the sector better reflects the diversity within British society. Experience from elsewhere demonstrates how different communities can be differently affected by the same types of disaster, and unless their realities are embraced, the road to recovery can be a tortuous one. The ongoing impacts of Hurricane Katrina on the people of New Orleans provide one powerful recent example⁽²⁴⁾.

Advocacy

There is a strong sense of injustice among the residents of Lancaster West about the treatment they have received, related both to the circumstances of the fire but also to historical grievances against the authorities, which the response to the disaster only served to exacerbate. Promises were made that people's housing difficulties would be addressed in a matter of weeks, and nearly a year on many residents still find themselves in hotels, provides a stark illustration of the ways in which the community feels let down. The assessment of the Interim Taskforce highlights the sense of neglect local people feel towards the council. Relations are improving thanks to more sensitive initiatives, including the way the Curve centre is being run, but that does not change the underlying and pervasive feeling of profound dissatisfaction. The extent to which these grievances can be addressed through voluntary sector service provision is of course limited, albeit important. The sector also needs to speak out and support others to do so. This has been done in a variety of ways, through support to residents' groups and through direct or indirect interaction with decision-makers, including at the highest levels. However, there is a shared sense among residents' organisations that the voluntary sector should be doing more in this regard. Fair or not, given uncertainty about the motives of at least some in the sector and the belief that not everyone is being entirely selfless, it is important that voluntary organisations give their backing to the voices and grievances of the people they exist to support.



Tributes from the public

Long-term recovery

A year after the Grenfell Tower disaster, many of the scars are still very raw. Issues that residents were told would be addressed quickly have dragged on, while others are only now being recognised long after the attention of the media has largely moved on and the bulk of resources has been spent. While the authorities are much more in

(24) There is a wealth of literature on the varied impacts of disasters on different communities, including from the University of Colorado's Natural Hazards Centre (<https://hazards.colorado.edu/news/research-counts/beware-of-recovering-the-worst-parts-race-class-and-gender-guidelines-for-a-just-recovery>)

control than they were at the beginning of the crisis, trust between a broad swathe of people who lived in and around the Lancaster West Estate and the local government has been badly damaged. In contrast, the stock of the local voluntary sector and its prominence locally is generally high. As such, the voluntary sector has an important role to play in supporting the welfare of people in North Kensington for the foreseeable future⁽²⁵⁾.

The reactive phase is long since over, and it is now time to take stock and plan for the future. While some organisations have decided to essentially go back to what they were doing prior to the fire others are still playing an expanded role. While there is a place for both, and the focus on particular minority groups needs to be protected, there is probably now a need to channel the majority of support to key actors that have proved their value over time, and to initiatives reflecting the core needs of the community, if change is to be achieved at scale.

One of the most widespread and deep-seated challenges is around mental health and its multiple complex manifestations, including reported increased drug abuse, anti-social or violent behaviour, particularly among young people, and acute depression across age groups. There is concern that certain groups may be overlooked, such as older men who are culturally not comfortable airing their feelings, young Muslims who do not attend the mosque or people from smaller minority communities. Issues around jobs and employment are also coming to the fore. Here there are promising and innovative initiatives backed by a range of stakeholders, including the IT project mentioned above. It is critical that support for these organisations does not dry up as attention drifts away. One of the few guaranteed sources of income sits with the Kensington and Chelsea Foundation, which has retained £1.6 million which it intends to invest in initiatives to improve the lives of residents over the next 2–3 years. Alongside the need for continuing funding, there is also a need for strategy development, both for individual organisations and when working collaboratively. Funders backing organisations or new initiatives must ensure high levels of public accountability to address community concerns about the inappropriate use of funds. Publishing information on funds received and spent by the Charity Commission provides a useful precedent for this.

Coordination and leadership

In the course of the response there were several examples of effective coordination between voluntary agencies, including collaboration around cash transfers and the coming together of the four agencies

(25) London Funders released an evaluation of work undertaken around the Grenfell and other recent UK disasters in April 2018 ('The Possible, Not the Perfect: Learning from the Funder Responses to Emergencies', https://www.ivar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/IVAR022-Learning-from-Emergency-responses-report_Low-Res-1.pdf).

in the GMRU. One local organisation, Semenye, organised meetings of local BME groups, and there was coordination between advice organisations such as Citizens Advice and the NKLC. Links between faith-based organisations have deepened, fostering mutual solidarity and promoting inter-faith dialogue and action, including a six-month inter-faith event at St Paul's Cathedral. However, these positive experiences took place in an overall context of weak leadership and coordination. Principal leadership should have come from the local authority as the original Gold Command, though this was almost entirely lacking at first. The voluntary sector did not come together as one either. As noted, the British Red Cross did consider putting itself forward to play a coordination role for the voluntary sector early on but decided not to impose itself in the expectation that a local voluntary sector council would be better placed. The Kensington and Chelsea Social Council only acted once it was clear that nothing was happening, but the first (apparently very angry) meeting was only held at the end of the second week after the fire. By this point the Red Cross had been invited onto the new Gold Command structure, in line with its mandate as a formally recognised part of the UK's emergency response system.

Many frontline actors did not find the early meetings called by the Grenfell Fire Response Team accessible or inclusive, a situation that was not helped by the level of anger being expressed by certain individuals. One key centre leader described being prevented from attending the first Gold Command meeting, and others who did get in were only given the opportunity to state their names and organisational affiliation. Overall, the narrative mirrors experiences from disasters elsewhere in the world, where local actors often find themselves marginalised in emergency coordination structures, either by not being invited or not being made to feel part of the club if they do get through the door. In this regard, the potential for a local convening body such as the Kensington and Chelsea Social Council to play a more significant leadership role for the sector seems to have been overlooked. Openness to voluntary sector leadership has improved with the successor body to the Grenfell Fire Response Team, Grenfell Support, although the March 2018 report of the Independent Grenfell Response Taskforce still recommends that the council should do much more to 'improve feedback loops with the many excellent voluntary and community sector groups operating in the area. The Council needs to move beyond the historical grant giving relationship and develop new interdependent ways of working'⁽²⁶⁾.

(26) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/692961/Second_report_from_the_Independent_Grenfell_Recovery_Taskforce.pdf, p. 11.

Government-led preparedness and response

The aftermath of the Grenfell disaster needs to be considered against the mechanisms that govern formal emergency response and their relationship to the voluntary sector. Under the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act, the voluntary sector is considered a Category 2 responder. Category 1 responders – principally the emergency services, health providers and local authorities – need to ‘have regard’ for the work of the voluntary sector. The most senior level of interaction takes place in the Voluntary Sector Civil Protection Forum (VSCPF), established by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the Cabinet Office and the British Red Cross to ‘provide a framework for engagement between the government, emergency services, local authorities and voluntary organisations’⁽²⁷⁾. The VSCPF consists of 12

institutions, five state actors and seven from the voluntary sector⁽²⁸⁾. Below this the key bodies are the Local Resilience Forums (LRFs), of which there are nine in England, including one for London. These are mandated by the 2004 Act to take responsibility for coordinating emergency preparedness, response and recovery at the local level⁽²⁹⁾. The Act also requires LRFs to include a voluntary sector representative. In practice this is often the British Red Cross, although LRFs can have their own Voluntary Sector panels, and in the case of London a separate Faith Panel, a representative of which sits on the Voluntary Sector panel.



(27) <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/voluntary-sector-civil-protection-forum>

(28) The voluntary sector agencies are the British Red Cross, Cruse Bereavement, Radio Amateurs Emergency Network, the Royal Voluntary Service, the Salvation Army, St John Ambulance and Victim Support.

(29) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62277/The_role_of_Local_Resilience_Forum-A_reference_document_v2_July_2013.pdf

The London Resilience Forum highlights the importance of ensuring that ‘the city and its communities [are] resilient in the face of the likely disruptive challenges of the 21st century’⁽³⁰⁾. It focuses on two facets of resilience: acute shocks, where the response is generally short-lived and intense, and chronic stresses extending over many years. The key sector resource is the 2012 London Voluntary Sector Capabilities Document⁽³¹⁾. This sets out a wide range of services or functions covering welfare, psychosocial aftercare, medical support, search and rescue, transport, communications, documentation and administration and finance. Actors cited as having responsibilities include the British Red Cross, St John Ambulance, the Salvation Army and the Royal Volunteer Society, alongside Citizens Advice, Cruse, the RSPCA and ‘Faith Communities’. The document emphasises that it ‘does not cover all elements of the voluntary sector that operate within London – it is restricted to those organisations with a pan-London presence and a specific emergency response role’. The London Faith Sector Panel adopts an inclusive approach, including in terms of representation across a wide number of faiths, regardless of capacity. This also applies to its way of working, with the emphasis on a bottom-up approach to planning, according to the chair.

The capacities of those leading London’s voluntary sector emergency structures have several limitations. By their own admission they only speak for those with capacity across London. The North Kensington disaster showed that those on the frontline of response were by and large not those with such reach. There may also be important shortcomings for those at the forefront of the London resilience system regarding responding to chronic rather than acute emergencies.

Tackling some of the bigger questions about the future leadership of voluntary sector emergency preparedness and response for London and beyond is an area requiring focused attention from key players. The National Critical Incident Response working group convened by the Charity Commission in early 2018 has a mandate to look at the lessons learnt by the sector across the various serious incidents during 2017, including the Manchester and London terror attacks and the Grenfell disaster. The group, which comprises a much broader spectrum of actors than is represented in the London Voluntary Sector Capabilities Document, is well placed to consider the cross-cutting challenges of relevance and capacity facing the sector.

(30) https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_resilience_partnership_strategy_2016.pdf

(31) https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/gla_migrate_files_destination/archives/london-prepared-Voluntary-sector-capabilities-documentv-v4_0.pdf

In-kind aid and the role of cash

The generosity of the public in providing goods in-kind was heart-warming. Food, water, clothing and other items such as mobile phones were important in the very early stages. However, overall the usefulness of in-kind donations was limited; the volume of assistance received created major logistical challenges, and handling it perhaps even distracted from other more pressing needs. While a small number of centres such as the Christian Tabernacle have continued to distribute in-kind aid, showing that there are households which are still in need, the overall usefulness of donated goods was significantly less than the amount available.

Managing cash donations also proved difficult. It took time for the system to get up and running, provoking considerable criticism. Once funds started to be distributed they were effectively channelled to provide people with the flexible assistance they needed. Distribution was led by RPT/P3 and LET, agencies with experience, know-how and resources in this area. They were backed up by the coordinating work of the Charity Commission, which promoted transparency to the public about how donated funds were being used. This provides a useful working model that can be drawn upon in future. Plans for developing a single UK fund for public contributions to emergencies, with parallels to the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), are under consideration. The Grenfell experience mirrors learning and practice from emergency response internationally, which has seen a shift away from providing bulky and inflexible food and non-food relief items towards cash transfers. There are multiple lessons here about the relative value of cash versus goods in-kind and the importance of having established expertise. This should inform future emergency response work in the UK.

How prepared can we be?

Responders on the frontline of the Grenfell Tower disaster faced a wide variety of challenges. When disaster struck they were anticipating direction from the local authorities, but the extent to which they were left to their own devices was perhaps unprecedented and is unlikely to be repeated any time soon. Other challenges – emergency centre management, handling relief goods, first aid support, psychosocial support and information management – are likely to confront the voluntary sector again in a future disaster, particularly a rapid-onset emergency. Relying on a few agencies with national capacities and mandates has proved inadequate, and there are

opportunities to draw on a more diverse pool of organisations with proven expertise in areas such as cash distribution, pastoral care and specialist psychosocial care. It is not realistic to expect that non-specialist local voluntary organisations can be prepared for a major disaster en masse, and the majority of potential stakeholders will never have to engage in any form of emergency response work. Pragmatic consideration of the preparedness approaches that can be adopted to broaden out national capacity is therefore required. This includes identifying which actors should be the focus of capacity development, at what level and in what aspects of preparedness. Institutions with a nationwide presence and hierarchical structures, as is the case for a number of faith organisations such as the Church of England, are in principle well placed to meet the needs of their constituencies⁽³²⁾, even if they lack full-time standing capacity. As this emergency shows, there is an important role for Muslim organisations, albeit they do not have strong overarching national structures. In terms of secular voluntary organisations, the options for developing and supporting the capacities of the wide array of local actors are even more limited and challenging.

Access

One of the complaints made by local organisations concerned the difficulties they faced in accessing decision-makers and locations where assistance was needed. Some residents have said that the emergency services treated the event as if it was a terror attack and aggressively restricted access. Representatives of local organisations at the heart of the response repeatedly mentioned difficulties crossing the cordon, accessing the Westway Centre and participating in Gold Command meetings. Recognition of the role of voluntary sector actors appears to be limited in official circles, with only a select number of mainstream organisations enjoying privileged access. Those on the frontline of any response must be able to access decision-makers much more readily than was the case after the Grenfell fire.

Accreditation for voluntary sector leaders

A lack of accreditation was an important obstacle to an effective response. One church leader frustrated at not being able to pass through a police cordon early on in the response highlighted the convention of faith leaders using high-viz jackets with 'Chaplain' emblazoned on the back to enable them to access disaster areas. For their part, law enforcement agencies have legitimate concerns about who is given accreditation. According to the Venerable Luke Miller, the best solution for the time being is to develop personal contacts with local emergency officials, until a more mutually acceptable solution can be found.

(32) The Church of England is part of a federated church and faith network across London with a central point person in the Archdeacon of London.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

The harrowing events that took place in and around Grenfell Tower in the early hours of 14 June have taken a heavy toll on the local community, and the healing process will be long and difficult. The institutional response to the disaster was badly flawed in the first crucial days, and the damage that resulted has been difficult to repair. The voluntary sector including faith-based organisations was very much on the frontline, backed by the generosity of the public and private sector and government funding. There were extraordinary examples of effective action in very challenging circumstances, as well high-class professional support for people affected by the disaster, including from many public servants.

There is also a need to recognise that, in certain respects, the voluntary sector came up short, with some systems, structures and approaches not fit for purpose. British society has moved on, and institutions that have served the UK well in the past need modernising. Leadership needs refreshing and new actors need to come forward to ensure that the voluntary sector reflects today's realities and understands and is capable of tackling today's challenges.

A year on, it is time to take stock, listen to the community, look ahead and plan and develop partnerships to address deep-seated, long-term challenges in areas such as mental health, jobs and employment and housing. With many of the consequences of the fire still unresolved, it is vital that future action is informed by what has been learnt from the response so far. This applies both to working with the people of North Kensington to address their needs, and shaping wider thinking and practice in emergency preparedness, response and resilience, in London and the rest of the UK. The Grenfell Tower disaster must be a wake-up call to those in a position to effect change and find twenty-first century solutions to twenty-first century challenges.

Tailoring responses to local realities

Involving local actors in UK emergency response

The Grenfell Tower response has demonstrated the critical importance of local actors. Key local actors must be identified at the outset of a response, to enable them to play complementary roles to other organisations in the sector and to work effectively with affected communities and local authorities. This will require financial and other support, both in the short and the long term. A number of larger national organisations should look to partner with local actors. Sometimes the former have their own local chapters or branches, though not all, particularly FBOs, have adequate capacities and resources to support them. Specialist providers can support non-specialists in areas such as centre management or coordination. Longer term funding is critical but must be done transparently and accountably and be open to scrutiny by residents and others as is the case with the mechanisms developed by the Charity Commission.

Embracing diversity in the UK voluntary sector

The community affected by the fire was highly heterogeneous, and this was reflected in people's different linguistic, religious, cultural, physical and psychological needs. Catering to this diversity requires organisational identities and cultures that are attuned with it, highlighting the critical importance, both of enhancing the diversity of volunteers, staff and leadership in mainstream emergency response actors, and embracing the contributions of others.

Bringing Muslim organisations into the mainstream of UK disaster management

The majority of the victims of the Grenfell Tower fire were Muslim, and both local and national Muslim organisations played a critical role in the response. The specific needs and sensitivities of Muslim communities need to be understood and reflected in mainstream organisations, and partnerships built across the sector to help facilitate this. It also needs to be recognised that the Muslim community, which has relatively little experience of engaging in UK emergency response, faces challenges itself in strengthening its capacity to promote effective preparedness and provide support during a response. Frontline organisations such as Al Manaar and the charities in the GMRU have gained rich experience, which should inform thinking including with others working in this space, such as Muslim representatives on resilience fora such as the London Faith Panel.

Understanding the impact of disasters on deprived or marginalised communities in the UK

Disasters have variable impacts on different communities, both within a specific community and across different communities. It was predictable that the consequences for a community experiencing the levels of pre-existing deprivation and marginalisation such as existed in the Lancaster West Estate would be profound and that the path to recovery complex, as is proving to be the case in areas such as mental health, livelihoods and marginalised youth. There is an urgent need for ongoing analysis of the complex short- and longer-term effects the fallout from the disaster is having on residents in and around Grenfell Tower, particularly vulnerable groups. This can be used to inform ongoing action by local government and the voluntary sector. Understanding of the nexus between emergencies and deprivation and marginalisation should inform the thinking and capacities of the sector for future response.

Advocacy

It is hard to escape the conclusion that a series of injustices have been visited upon the people of the Lancaster West Estate over an extended period of time, and that the response to the disaster has done little to change this. While much is beyond the scope of the voluntary sector to address, there is a need for continued representations and support for community representatives to make their voices heard. It is essential that advocacy features prominently and deliberately in the work of voluntary sector organisations at both local and higher levels.

Coordination around a critical incident

Shaping coordination to optimise capability

The Grenfell experience suggests the need for flexibility to foster effective voluntary sector collaboration at local level. While Gold Command needs to maintain coordination across all aspects of an emergency response, there may be value, as in the case of the Grenfell response, in providing the sector with autonomous spaces to coordinate which then link into formal multi-sector fora. The choice of leadership of voluntary sector coordination is critical. Logically, it should come from a voluntary sector agency with standing capacity for emergency response. However, there are limitations to what an outside agency can offer, particularly in terms of understanding the capacities and needs of local actors.

Strengthening the London Resilience Forum

The members of the London Resilience Forum represent a particular subset of the secular voluntary sector. The Forum's commitment to ensuring resilience in line with the disruptive challenges of the 21st century might be furthered by ensuring that stakeholders participating in the group are more reflective of the diversity of contemporary London and consistent with the dual mandate of the Forum. In addition to consideration of the role of other organisations with a national profile, there is a need to consider mechanisms for engaging local organisations that do not have umbrella bodies.

Enhancing collaboration between voluntary and faith-based organisations

The London Faith Sector Panel is strong in terms of the representation of faith constituencies, and there are good links with faith networks at borough level. Links between the faith and secular voluntary panels are limited, with one representative sitting in the other's meetings. Faith groups' efforts are not helped by the fact that most have few if any dedicated personnel to work on resilience and response. The Grenfell disaster highlights complementarities between faith-based and secular organisations, and more might be done at higher levels to foster these complementarities and share learning and planning in London and elsewhere.

Developing preparedness and response capacities

Cash in emergencies

The importance of cash grants as a flexible and cost-effective resource to employ in emergencies is increasingly acknowledged, and its relevance to the needs of affected people in the UK has been amply demonstrated in the Grenfell response. Lessons from these distributions need to be captured and guidelines for future cash distributions developed for the UK.

Managing public donations

The plight of people affected by the fire spurred an incredibly generous outpouring of support from the public. However, the large amounts of in-kind support, both food and non-food items, created logistical challenges for the local authorities and voluntary and faith-based organisations that received them. In future, larger-scale disasters the amount of in-kind support received must be managed and limited, and the public urged to contribute through cash donations.

Funding mechanisms for UK disaster response

The generation and management of funds was among the more effective elements of the response to the Grenfell Tower disaster that need to be built upon. London Funders and those working with the Charity Commission acted collaboratively, with speed, relevance and transparency. There were some shortcomings around targeting of organisations and challenges around holding back funds. There remains a need to generate and effectively manage funds to allow voluntary organisations to play a full role in supporting the complex needs of the people of the area for a considerable period of time.

Preparedness across the voluntary sector

The challenge and importance of building effective preparedness for response has been brought into sharp relief in the wake of the Grenfell fire. The shortcomings of the council in this regard have contributed to the long-lasting effects still being experienced by Grenfell's former residents, adding to the complex trauma people in the area have suffered and complicating their already disrupted lives. Creating appropriate standby capacity is highly challenging in a context such as the UK, which faces relatively few, relatively small-scale emergencies. However, without it the consequences for people caught up in a crisis can be catastrophic. The voluntary sector needs to learn from experiences such as Grenfell, identify the capacities required by local actors and find ways to develop the preparedness of local secular and faith-based actors so that they can better manage the kinds of challenges faced across different phases of the Grenfell response.



WITH THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

