

response to major national emergency events to relevant stakeholders and partners, including the Pandemic.

Voluntary and Community Sector National Critical Incident Response Framework

39. Separate to the framework established by the Act, is the Voluntary and Community Sector National Critical Incident Response Framework, referred to at paragraph 24 above. This was created in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire and led to the establishment of VCSEP and the National Emergencies Trust. Together, these groups aim to improve coordination across the voluntary sector for an effective, joined up and human-centred approach in preparing for, responding to, or recovering from, any national disaster or critical incident.

C. UK government pandemic planning and the BRC's involvement

Central and local government pandemic planning

40. To the best of my knowledge, the BRC had limited engagement with central government in relation to civil emergency planning, preparedness and resilience before the Pandemic, and less still with regard to pandemic planning specifically.
41. This is notwithstanding the fact that the National Risk Register had identified the UK as being at high risk of an influenza pandemic for many years. This is also notwithstanding the fact that many people in the BRC and in the government considered 2017 (which, as mentioned in paragraph 24 above, saw the Grenfell Tower fire, the Manchester Arena terror attack, and the London Bridge terror attack) to be a watershed year for emergency planning.
42. In the period between 2017 and early 2020, government emergency preparedness was organised by two offices: the Civil Contingencies Secretariat of the Cabinet Office (the **CCS**) was responsible for central government emergency planning; and the Resilience and Emergency Directorate (the **RED**) (within what is now the DLUHC) was responsible for co-ordinating the local government response to an emergency.
43. The BRC has long believed that increased engagement between the CCS and the voluntary sector would be beneficial for the UK's emergency preparedness. It is in that context that, in 2019, the BRC and other voluntary organisations sought to engage with the CCS. Our focus was on seeking to develop a strategy with the government for the voluntary sector to react to a range of emergencies based on the lessons learned from responding to the multiple emergency events of 2017. The intention was for the

voluntary sector to offer something more than the gold, silver and bronze model which usually dominates emergency responses, in particular to focus on the human aspects of recovery that are sometimes forgotten. The experience was somewhat dispiriting and there appeared to be a lack of curiosity on the part of the CCS regarding what the voluntary sector could provide.

44. I had also previously approached the RED in 2018 and received a more positive response, including a proposed approach to the CCS for a three-way meeting. However, this meeting did not materialise.
45. Overall, my sense is that, while intentions for collaborations between the UK government and the voluntary sector were well expressed in key documents, the practice of collaboration was intermittent, with often significant gaps between meetings which brought together the various stakeholders in emergency response. From my observations, the government was preoccupied with the risks associated with Brexit and committed significant resource to their efforts to manage those risks. This left limited capacity to plan for other known risks, including that of a pandemic. However, any resilient emergency response structure needs to be able to respond to multiple and simultaneous risks (as we experienced in 2017).
46. BRC's engagement with central government on emergency planning before the approaches in 2019 and 2018 I have just described, was limited. To the best of my knowledge, the BRC was not involved in the development of the Pandemic Influenza Communications Strategy. I had a passing awareness of the 2011 UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy, however, it is important to note that this strategy was developed for a pandemic on a far smaller scale and would have had limited applicability when tackling the actual Pandemic. I understand from my colleagues in crisis response roles within the BRC that some LRFs (and some of their devolved nation equivalents) were involved in Exercise Winter Willow and perhaps Exercise Cygnet or Exercise Cygnus (it is not clear which), and that the BRC had a passing involvement in those exercises to the extent of its involvement in the LRFs (or devolved nation equivalents). However, any involvement was limited and a number of years have passed since the relevant exercises, such that key BRC colleagues in crisis response roles at the time of the Pandemic had little to no recollection of these exercises, or any (other) influenza pandemic planning. My colleagues consistently recalled that emergency planning at local government level was focused on more 'typical' emergencies, such as floods and evacuations.