

## **A CONCISE NARRATIVE OF THE PERFORMANCE OF BRITISH TRANSPORT POLICE WITH RESPECT TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE MANCHESTER ARENA INQUIRY**

*This narrative follows the form suggested by the Inquiry Legal Team in its Note dated 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and addresses the ToR paragraphs identified in Annex 1 to that Note.*

*1 iii. The knowledge of the Security Service, the police and others about Salman Abedi, his radicalisation, and his relationship with relevant associates, including family members and others.*

British Transport Police [‘BTP’] knew nothing of Salman Abedi, his radicalisation or his associates before he murdered twenty two people and attempted to murder hundreds more. The same is true of Hashem Abedi. Neither of these murderers had previously come to BTP’s attention or featured in BTP records. From the ISC<sup>1</sup> and Anderson<sup>2</sup> reports into the 2017 attacks in London and Manchester, and from the detailed evidence in the criminal trial of Hashem Abedi<sup>3</sup>, it is clear that other CPs will be able to help the Chairman with the killers’ terrorist and family origins.

*1 iv. What intelligence and other relevant information on Salman Abedi and/or relevant associates was available to the Security Service, the police and others prior to the attack.*

BTP had no intelligence or other relevant information about either Abedi, or about their associates, before the attack. Again, from information which has since been made public it is clear that other CPs will be able to help the Chairman on this subject, and on those which follow under the same heading, in closed session.

*1 v. When such intelligence / information was available.*

See above.

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<sup>1</sup> INQ 000002

<sup>2</sup> INQ 000004

<sup>3</sup> See for instance family chart INQ 033849, SoE INQ 020160, Agreed Facts CPS209

*1 vi. The assessment, interpretation, dissemination and investigation of intelligence / information relating to Salman Abedi, including, if applicable, whether and how it was shared, who it was shared with, when it was shared, and with what effect (if any).*

See above.

*1 vii. What steps were (or were not) taken by the Security Service, the police and others in relation to Salman Abedi prior to the attack.*

See above.

*1 viii. The reasons for what was / was not done.*

See above.

*1 ix. The adequacy of the steps that were (or were not) taken.*

See above.

*1 x. The systems, policies and procedures applicable to the review, sharing and auctioning of intelligence and other relevant information on Salman Abedi prior to the attack.*

See above.

*1 xi. The adequacy of such systems, policies and procedures.*

See above.

*2 iv. What, if anything, was known by the Security Service, the police and others about the matters above (planning, preparation, etc), what steps were taken (if any), and their adequacy.*

BTP knew nothing of the plans and preparations for murder which the Abedis and their associates had made.

None of the murderers' attack planning, their bomb preparation, their purchase, storage and assembly of bomb components, their private calculations and machinations, brought them into contact with BTP.

In the five days after his return from Libya and before the murders, Salman Abedi made three reconnaissance visits to the Arena which brought him onto Network Rail property policed by BTP: on the 18<sup>th</sup> May between 18:18 and 18:39<sup>4</sup>, on the 21<sup>st</sup> May between 18:53 and 19:11<sup>5</sup>, and again on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May between 18:31 and 18:36<sup>6</sup>. Nothing that he did on those occasions drew him to the attention of BTP officers. At the time when he detonated his weapon Salman Abedi was still not known to BTP.

*3 i. Events immediately prior to and following the detonation of the explosive device.*

Prior to detonation

It is common knowledge now that Salman Abedi arrived at Manchester Victoria station, with his weapon in a rucksack on his back, at 20:30 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017. His movements on the Metrolink tram, on the Metrolink platforms, on the railway station concourse, in the station lavatories and the lift to the Arena level, can be tracked in CCTV footage which was recovered after the explosion. He was in the Arena Foyer for nineteen minutes between 20:51 and 21:10 and probably for an hour between 21:33 and 22:31. During that time he did not come to the attention of BTP officers.

BTP had eighteen officers on duty in central Manchester at the time of detonation. They were based at Piccadilly station, at Victoria station and at Peninsula House. There were four officers on duty in uniform at Manchester Victoria. As part of their role that evening they patrolled the railway station and the Arena surrounds<sup>7</sup>. The CCTV montage VG/50 captures the times and direction of some of their movements. During those patrols there were variously one, two or four officers within the Foyer between 18:25 and 19:20, between 19:59 and 20:10, between 20:39 and 20:40, and between 21:47 and 21:59.

At the moment of detonation all four officers were on the Victoria station concourse at the foot of the overbridge stairs with a clear view of audience dispersal onto public transport. Their instantaneous reaction to the explosion was to run towards the blast. They were the first police men and women at the scene. They tended to the dead, to the dying and to those who were saved. They carried the

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<sup>4</sup> See CCTV montage INQ CPS 220 pp13-26,

<sup>5</sup> See CCTV montage INQ CPS 220 pp76-80, Sequence of Events INQ CPS 157 p99

<sup>6</sup> See CCTV montage INQ CPS 220 pp94-97, Sequence of Events INQ CPS 157 p101

<sup>7</sup> BTP officers had policing powers beyond the railway station itself, in the Arena surrounds, including in the Foyer, because the freehold of those areas was owned by Network Rail.

wounded to the concourse, where they were treated by medics. They kept evacuating the Foyer until all the survivors had been rescued. They comforted the injured as they waited for ambulances.

Two of those officers had been in the Foyer, near the overbridge doors, at 18:34 when Salman Abedi on his third reconnaissance visit approached and then immediately left that area<sup>8</sup>. He seems deliberately to have avoided the officers.

When Abedi returned by tram to Victoria with his weaponised rucksack he spent ten minutes in a cubicle in the concourse lavatories. He must have avoided by a matter of seconds being in there when another two of the officers inspected the premises at 20:49. As he left, he walked past them on the concourse<sup>9</sup>. Nothing about him caught their attention.

Between 21:47 and 21:59 when two of the officers were in the Foyer with the Arena security staff, Salman Abedi was in that same area, out of sight and out of CCTV view, perhaps behind the raised area where members of the public saw and/or spoke to him<sup>10</sup>. Neither Abedi himself, nor any member of the public, nor any member of the Arena security team attracted the officers' attention to him in that period.

What would have happened if BTP officers had coincided with Salman Abedi in the lavatories at 20:40? Or if they had come across him in the Foyer just before 22:00? Or if, shortly before detonation, he had been pointed out to them by security staff or by a member of the public? Would the officers have spoken to him? How would Abedi have reacted? It is easy to guess but impossible to know.

An issue which BTP will invite the Chairman to consider is whether a police officer should have been in the Foyer and/or at other exit points around the Arena as the audience started to leave the concert. That had been envisaged by the sergeant who briefed the Piccadilly and Victoria deployment at the beginning of his shift<sup>11</sup>. When that moment came, the three police BTP community support officers and one constable at Victoria had taken up a position near the War Memorial (opposite the overbridge stairs) as the most effective vantage point for overseeing the mainline station and the Arena crowd exiting towards their trains, trams, taxis and buses. This meant that there was no officer in the Foyer itself when Abedi detonated his weapon, which may have reflected a reasonable judgement of where they were most likely, for this audience, to see and be seen. The fifth officer in the Victoria deployment had been occupied elsewhere on other duties.

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<sup>8</sup> INQ 31678\_13; INQ CPS 157 p95

<sup>9</sup> INQ 31678\_82

<sup>10</sup> INQ 6252\_3, INQ 5767\_7, INQ 23123\_2

<sup>11</sup> INQ 33320\_2, INQ 25538, INQ 12112

Following the detonation

See 3 iii below.

*3 iii. The immediate response to the detonation of the explosive device.*

In addition to the four BTP officers on site who ran instantly towards the smoke of the blast and the eleven officers who immediately deployed from Manchester Piccadilly and the three who ran down from BTP's Peninsula House offices, at least sixty two further officers and staff of BTP's Pennine Division attended the scene in the next three hours. On duty, off duty, they came from Warrington, Wigan, Liverpool, Preston, Leeds, Southport, Lancaster, Birkenhead, Chester, Crewe, Stoke, Doncaster, Sheffield, Middlesbrough, York, Bangor and Rhyl. Each has a personal story to tell. In that respect they are no different from the scores of survivors and security staff and Arena staff and ambulance workers and GMP officers and members of the public who in exactly the same way threw themselves into the communal rescue effort to the best of their abilities. It would take months of this Inquiry's time fully and publicly to acknowledge all the many acts of kindness and of selfless courage performed that night.

Within five minutes of the detonation eighteen BTP officers were at Victoria station and dealing with the immediate chaos of death and mutilation. By 23:00 a further twenty three BTP officers were on site<sup>12</sup>. By 23:30 this number had risen to fifty. In total more than eighty BTP officers and Scenes of Crime staff went to Victoria that night.

It was immediately obvious in the Foyer that a bomb had been detonated. BTP officers had policing powers there, and it was an area where BTP took the day to day policing lead. The Force Incident Manager in BTP Force Control Room in London (overseen by the Senior Duty Officer) took command of BTP's initial response. He initiated calls to BTP's Chief Officers, to GMP, to the Ambulance service, to the Fire Service and to Network Rail. He promptly declared a 'Major Incident'. He considered declaring 'Plato' but decided against it. That was a sound judgement: on the evidence available to him this was a suicide bomb, not a marauding terrorist with a firearm. He was unable to establish contact with his opposite number in the GMP Control Room – and the formal recognition by the two Gold Commanders that GMP was taking the lead in the police response was not officially

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<sup>12</sup> These figures are taken from the estimated arrival times in officers' notes and statements

approved until much later in the events – but he almost immediately knew that GMP and NWAS had deployed a large number of officers and medics to the scene. As early as 22:43 GMP armed officers were on site. As part of their role they protected the unarmed officers, medics and civilians who were fighting to rescue the injured.

The senior BTP officer in the Foyer in the aftermath was a sergeant. He was able to radio a formal METHANE report at 23:04, which largely confirmed what was already known in BTP Force Control Room. There was no facility to feed live CCTV footage from Manchester Victoria to the Force Control Room, but this sergeant provided METHANE updates at 23:17 and 23:25. At 23:29 he provided a situation report to the GMP Chief Inspector on scene. Soon after midnight he did the same for the BTP Chief Inspector who had self-deployed to Victoria from her home.

The principal concern of all at the scene was to rescue whomever could be saved by evacuating the injured from the Foyer into the care of medically trained personnel. That is what they did. And that is what they achieved. In just over an hour after the explosion the last living casualty had been carried to the concourse. With the possible exception of one deceased, Mr John Atkinson, and subject to further information about his circumstances, the Chairman's blast experts have confirmed that none of those who died could have been saved from the murderous effects of Abedi's bomb. What this means, subject to hearing evidence of Mr Atkinson's situation, is that all, or all but one, of the lives which were saveable, were saved.

That is not to say that everything that BTP and its officers did that night could not be bettered. The urgent imperative to save life, in appalling circumstances, created a significant gap between JESIP guidance and practical reality. Communication between the different emergency services was tested beyond breaking point. Joint situational awareness between the different control rooms was not achieved in the way that JESIP expects. As with the other emergency services, BTP's actions in relation to searches and cordons and *rendez-vous* points and manuals and plans and decision logs will be vigorously deconstructed in the second part of the Inquiry. BTP expects to extract valuable learning from that process over and above the lessons which it has already registered from its own retrospective dissection of the events. The consequential changes already made by BTP have been described for the Chairman by a senior officer in a witness statement, but BTP is confident that additional improvements will be identified during the Inquiry process.

*4 ii. The security provided by relevant public / State organisations.*

Day to day, BTP took the lead in providing policing for the Arena and its immediate surroundings, just as GMP did for the area beyond.

For concerts and other events, the Arena management commissioned its own security staff and assessed the numbers and arrangements which it required for each particular audience. Upcoming Arena events were discussed in advance with BTP so that police numbers outside the Arena could be tailored to the audience volume and profile and to any information about risks which those attending might pose. The allocation of five officers at the Arena and Victoria station for the Arianna Grande concert was a usual response to a low key event where no police intelligence or other information anticipated a specific problem. BTP's good working relationship with SMG and Showsec continues to this day. Documented risk assessments are now conducted by BTP for each Arena event. They apply a four-tier system of risk evaluation, so that any event carrying a heightened level of risk has a Gold Silver Bronze command structure in place and the policing requirements are recorded in a full Operational Order. A qualified Event Commander is posted on scene for events graded Amber or above, and key areas of patrol may be allocated.

For the Arena itself, counter terrorism advice and guidance was provided by GMP Counter Terror Security Advisors [CTSAs] as part of GMP's citywide assessment of the many 'crowded places' of Manchester. Counter terror training was made available to the Arena staff by both GMP and BTP CTSAs and CTAAs. This was an effective arrangement which continues to this day. Before May 2017 SMG held biannual planning meetings with BTP, GMP, Showsec, Emergency Training, Network Rail, GMRS and the Ambulance service to review past events and consider security and safety for future events. Meetings with BTP now take place every month.

*4 iv. The planning, preparation, arrangements and communication (if any) between the above security providers prior to the attack, including (but not limited to) their roles and responsibilities for risk identification, person and bag-checking, and responding to a terrorist and/or mass casualty incident.*

**Risk identification**

See 4 ii above.

The good working relationship between SMG and Showsec and BTP before the attack, including the quality of their information sharing and communication, has been described in an expert report

commissioned by the Chairman. BTP hopes that the Inquiry's examination of the authors of that report will generate ideas which may enhance that relationship.

Person and bag checking at a commercial event will not ordinarily be a policing responsibility, but all BTP officers receive training on recognising suspicious objects and behaviour as part of their basic training. Specialist behavioural detection training is provided to a small group of officers who are used for specific operations involving organised crime and counter terrorism. Today, all briefings to officers on patrol at the Arena contain a Counter Terror awareness element, and since 2017 every officer in the Pennines subdivision has received revised CT Awareness training as part of a team training day.

#### Responding to mass casualties

An issue which BTP will invite the Chairman to consider is how best to equip police officers for treating the sort of injuries which they may face when an attacker has specifically set out to create maximum mutilation. First aid kits on the night were overwhelmed by the injuries caused by Abedi's choice of weapon. Following the Arena attack and the other terror attacks of 2017 BTP instructed an accident and emergency consultant to advise on improvements to first aid equipment. Each BTP response vehicle is now equipped with an additional grab bag containing multiple bandages, dressings and other equipment; each BTP officer now carries two dressings designed to stem heavy blood flow.

*4 v. The adequacy of (i-iv) above, including their compliance with relevant planning, preparation, policies, systems and practices.*

In May 2017 BTP did not itself design, test or maintain any location specific emergency plans; it augmented existing emergency plans held by train operators at railway stations. Today, a national Superintendent role has been created to design and build a 'Protect and Prepare' strategy which includes the introduction of detailed emergency plans to a standard template for key buildings and structures in the railway environment.

An issue which BTP will invite the Chairman to consider is the absence in May 2017 of a bespoke multi-agency emergency plan for responding to a major incident at the Arena. That absence may have made no practical difference to the effectiveness of BTP's response to Abedi's bomb, but a bespoke plan would plainly have been a prudent safeguard to complement BTP's Major Incident Manual at any critical incident. A contingency plan was subsequently completed in December 2017 by GMP, who

consulted BTP and other interested parties, and has been reviewed annually since then. The current iteration has been provided to the Chairman and may be capable of improvement in the light of evidence which the Inquiry will hear.

*4 vi. The impact, if any, of any inadequacies in the security arrangements, including whether any inadequacies contributed to the extent of the loss of life that occurred.*

See 3 iii and 4 v above.

*5 i. Planning and preparation for responding to terrorist and mass casualty incidents, including inter-agency planning, preparation and exercises prior to the attack.*

BTP is one of the members of the Greater Manchester Resilience Forum. As at May 2017 the GMRF played an important role in preparing for emergencies which might arise in Manchester. As a national police force BTP is represented on forty two Local Resilience Forums across the whole UK. This demand makes it hard for senior officers to attend all LRF meetings.

BTP maintains a Major Incident Manual which sets out its command structure for all major incidents. For obvious reasons this Manual needs to be able to accommodate serious emergencies on the railway network wherever in the UK they may occur. In May 2017 the latest iteration of the Manual, incorporating the core JESIP vocabulary, had not been signed off by all BTP departments, but all of BTP's officers in command roles had received NCALT JESIP training, and the responsibilities of those command roles were appended to the existing Manual and largely replicated the JESIP Interoperability Framework. JESIP principles and nomenclature are today embodied in all BTP's core Plans and Manuals and are reflected in the vocabulary which they use.

BTP delivers and participates in regular exercises by which preparedness is tested for responding to major incidents including terrorism and mass casualties. This is a significant expense for a widely spread force but BTP is committed to the value of those exercises.

*5 ii. Policies, systems and practices relevant to the above.*

See 5 i above.

*5 iii. The operational responses of relevant emergency services, those contracted to provide first aid to concert-goers, the operator of the Arena venue, and relevant security providers, including their adequacy and compliance with relevant planning, preparation, policies, systems and practices.*

The operational response of BTP to this bomb attack was the sum of the operational responses of its individual officers. BTP believes that the overall response to the Arena attack by its officers and staff was extremely good. BTP is confident that each of its officers did their best on the night and that they performed at a level of professionalism of which they should be proud. To the particular officers already described above should be added the search teams and dog handlers who established the safety of the site, the identification and scenes of crime officers who recovered the bodies of the deceased from the Foyer to the temporary mortuary, and all the Control Room operators in Birmingham and London. All played their parts in the communal effort.

And yet each officer will, quite properly, have asked him/herself “Could I, should I, have done more or better?” BTP as a police force has asked itself the same question.

At a micro-, personal level BTP will invite the Chairman to analyse the real time choices faced by police officers in their rescue efforts: how to decide whether to tend to the injured person in front of you or instead to push on towards the epicentre in case there be someone there who needs you even more; how to know whether to persevere with CPR for an unresponsive casualty in the hope that they may be brought back to life or instead to move to the next; how to decide whether to save life here and now or to step back and provide a report to your control room.

At a macro-, organisational level BTP will invite the Chairman to analyse the real time choices faced by police officers in command and control roles: where best to locate Silver; whom best to appoint as Bronze; whether to prioritise rank or proximity in those appointments; how to maintain inter-agency communication when every emergency service is at full stretch.

This Inquiry is of course not bound by the conclusions of the Kerslake Review, but it was striking then and it is noteworthy now that of Lord Kerslake’s many multi-agency recommendations following his investigations none was directed at BTP. That did not stop BTP from performing an internal review based on the learning points within the Kerslake report which it identified as resonating with its own operations.

BTP has digested its own internal review, and Lord Kerslake’s analysis, and the revised contents of a policing report commissioned by the Chairman. In its search for improvement, BTP will invite the Chairman to consider a number of the specific judgement calls made by BTP on the night, to see how

they measure up against the various hindsight critiques. BTP believes that its officers' judgements were understandable in real time, but it would welcome the Chairman's insights on the following. None of these questions bears directly on the deaths of the twenty two people who were murdered, but they may be relevant to optimising BTP's response to future terrorist attacks.

- A. At 23:34, once Tactical command had been passed from the FIM to the senior on call officer of C Division, an hour after the explosion, after virtually all casualties had been evacuated from the Foyer, might it have been better for BTP Silver to drive towards Manchester rather than stepping into the Force Control Room in Birmingham where he happened to be?
- B. May the answer to that question depend on embedding BTP Liaison Silver at GMP Force HQ?
- C. Might it have been better to appoint someone other than the Head of Operations for C Division to proceed to the Arena to take over Bronze Command given that he was in Blackpool, not 'on call' and ultimately not able to get to the scene until 01:00?
- D. Might it have been practicable, notwithstanding BTP's limited personnel and wide spread across many counties in each Division, to get an officer of Inspector rank to the scene in the first hour after the explosion?

*5 iv. The inter-agency liaison, communication and decision-making between relevant emergency services, and with others, including their adequacy and compliance with relevant planning, preparation, policies, systems and practices.*

The unanimous experience of every police force in every UK mass murder terror attack to this day has been that inter-agency liaison in the urgency of immediate response throws up communication problems. Systems and processes and human reactions which may be workable on paper or in multi-agency training exercises, do not perform in the same way in reaction to the real life devastation of a bomb site with mass casualties. The Abedi attack provides another illustration of the gaps between theories and realities.

Information sharing was far from perfect. The Inquiry will of course want to examine why this was and how it might be improved in future.

On the ground, at the scene, BTP officers and GMP officers and Ambulance staff liaised and communicated and made the complementary decisions, face to face and side by side, which helped to save the lives of those who survived. In the multi-agency debrief workshops organised by GMRF after

the event, participants described the overall response of the emergency services as comprehensive and very effective. Many departures from the JESIP paradigm have of course since been identified and are acknowledged by BTP: the absence of a Forward Control Point at the scene; the failure to communicate formal declarations made by individual control rooms; gaps and delays in information sharing between control rooms; a failure to share METHANE information in concise METHANE form; imperfect joint situational awareness. And yet, even without stretchers or inter-agency ‘talk groups’, it is clear that co-location of police and medics at the scene ensured that the movement of patients from the Foyer to the concourse was swift and effective, and that medics, Arena staff, and civilians were reassured by the presence of a large number of armed and unarmed police officers. Formal JESIP structures and methodology were lacking, but in immediate practical terms communication and co-ordination at the scene was effective.

In the Force Control Room, BTP’s FIM quickly and correctly identified from the reports coming in that there was a Major Incident in progress at the Arena. He declared a Major Incident. He contacted GMP, Ambulance, Fire, Network Rail, Northern Rail, Metrolink and Army EOD. He sought and received a METHANE report from the senior BTP officer at the scene. He ensured that more senior officers were alerted and briefed. The two BTP Control Rooms in London and Birmingham combined electronically as an effective single virtual room. ‘Business as usual’ radio traffic was separated off to prevent it from cluttering the airwaves. Initial contact between the several services’ control rooms was quickly established but became overwhelmed by volume of traffic and information and tasks. BTP’s FIM would have liked to have speak directly to GMP’s FDO, but every attempt to make this connection was unsuccessful. Similar problems were experienced later when BTP Silver tried to speak directly to GMP Silver.

The timeline of BTP’s response on the ground and in its Control Rooms can be pieced together from Control Works Log 615, from the recordings of radio and telephone calls and from the times (where the content is not recorded) of the many calls to and from its own officers and other agencies. Standing back from that timeline now it is clear to BTP that some of the challenges identified in multi-agency training exercises and in other mass terror events emerged again on the night: in particular the failure to perfect shared situational awareness among co-located agencies. BTP will invite the Chairman to consider yet again if and how this perennial difficulty may be remedied.

*5 v. The impact, if any, of any inadequacies in planning, preparation and/or the emergency response, including whether any inadequacies undermined the ability of the response to save life and/or contributed to the extent of the loss of life that occurred.*

For the reasons identified at 3 iii above the ability of the BTP response to save life was not in this event undermined by any inadequacies in planning or preparation. According to the blast experts, and with the possible exception of Mr John Atkinson, the loss of life which occurred was exclusively a deadly function of the bomb itself.

*7 iii. Survivability, including whether any inadequacies in the emergency response contributed to individual deaths and/or whether any of the deaths could have been prevented.*

See 3 iii above.

**Patrick Gibbs QC**

**Mariel Irvine, Solicitors**

**27 August 2020**