

OPUS2

Manchester Arena Inquiry

Day 117

June 16, 2021

Opus 2 - Official Court Reporters

Phone: +44 (0)20 3008 5900

Email: transcripts@opus2.com

Website: <https://www.opus2.com>

Wednesday, 16 June 2021

(9.29 am)

MR PAUL ARGYLE (continued)

Questions from MR DE LA POER (continued)

SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes, Mr de la Poer.

Thank you for coming back.

MR DE LA POER: Mr Argyle, we had reached the fourth of four

matters which ostensibly had been left over from your attendance on 1 February of this year, namely Exercise Winchester Accord. I know that you had the opportunity to speak to a member of the inquiry legal team this morning, following up my request to you yesterday to review what you'd previously said, and I understand the position is this: that in combination of what you said on 1 February, what you said yesterday, and what is contained in your fourth statement, the comments that you think you need to make about Exercise Winchester Accord are captured; is that correct?

A. That's correct.

Q. So what we will do then is we will deal with Exercise Winchester Accord through your fourth witness statement and perhaps you could turn that up now because there are three matters which you deal with in there; is that right?

A. That's right, yes.

1

Q. So we will deal with each of those three matters.

The first is this. You were asked in the course of questioning on 1 February how a disagreement between members of the resilience forum might be resolved and you deal with this in your fourth statement at paragraphs 3 to 7. Can I seek to summarise it in this way, Mr Argyle?

First, there has only ever been a single occasion in your tenure that you can think of where there was a disagreement; is that right?

A. That's right, yes.

Q. And in fact you took steps to bring those who were involved in the disagreement together, but they resolved it between themselves before such a meeting was necessary?

A. Effectively, yes.

Q. Is that right?

A. Yes.

Q. So that's the practice, but in theory you indicate that you do think that there are sufficient mechanisms in place within the resilience forum to resolve a dispute if it arises; is that right?

A. Within the forum or supporting structures, yes.

Q. All right. Just speak to that then, please.

A. The resilience forum is made up in the main by senior

2

members of organisations, but also we have access, if necessary, to go and speak to more senior people from those organisations if we needed to.

Also, the resilience forum is supported by a DCLG or MHCLG RED adviser. So you have a named adviser who attends all the meetings and can assist and can seek to give support, and also we're supported by the Civil Contingency Secretariat through the Cabinet Office. We have direct access to government departments.

So if we needed to speak to the government department of one of the partners to seek them to assist in resolving a dispute, we can do that as well.

Q. So is it your view that there are sufficient mechanisms in place, bearing in mind all those matters that you have identified, or does there need to be further provision made, and if so, what might that be?

A. I feel there is sufficient mechanisms.

SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Argyle, let's just bring this down to a practical thing.

On the night of 22 May there were different assessments of risk by the police, the Ambulance Service, and the Fire Service, and they approached that risk and what they could do in response to it in different ways.

The fact that that was going to happen or may happen

3

was something which was simply not known to your organisation?

A. In terms of the joint assessment of risk, that should be done on all multi-agency incidents. It is not necessarily all done. It may be that it's not so complex that actually each officer there can assess the risk adequately and they can work in harmony without having to say, "What's your assessment of the risk?" It may be fairly obvious.

In my experience of lots of incidents and debriefs, and actually a term I know I have heard here, but the word primacy can get talked about and often I have been in discussions to say -- and in nearly all incidents that isn't primacy, the police are in charge of their staff, fire in charge of their staff, ambulance in charge of their staff, etc, etc, but we come to a joint understanding.

The one exception, which we have discussed many in debriefs and in preparing is terrorist incidents, where the police clearly have primacy and it is not that I would expect them, for example, to direct fire officers to do things, or ambulance, etc, but they can say, "Don't do things, do not go in there", and we would obey that. It's very clear that at terrorist incidents they have primacy.

4

1 In terms of assessing risk, for example, limits of
2 exploitation, my view, very clear view, is that we need
3 to agree that, but it is the police who lead.

4 So the police may say, "This is the limit of
5 exploitation", and I may say, "I take your instruction
6 that we must not go beyond that but actually I want to
7 take a more defensive limit of exploitation and not go
8 quite as close as you are permitting us to". I'm not
9 saying they would, I'm just saying that would be the
10 relationship I would perceive.

11 Now, I'm talking about, at a planning, preparation
12 and post-incident reaction. What I can't say is
13 individuals. An organisational perception of risk is
14 then interpreted by the officer on the ground and that
15 is going to have variations.

16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So the police can say, "Don't go in
17 there", and all the organisations will follow that?

18 A. At a terrorist incident that is what I would expect.

19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: If the police say, "Well, actually it's
20 perfectly safe for you to go in there", the
21 organisations will not necessarily follow that?

22 A. I would expect them to because it's a trusted
23 relationship. But it is feasible that for a reason --
24 the police may say it's safe to go in there for their
25 perception; we may have a perception of a different risk

5

1 that the police are not expert in.

2 There could be toxic fumes that Fire Service are far
3 more expert than in than the police are expert in.

4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I understand that, and also maybe the
5 construction of buildings, so the risk of them falling
6 down, the Fire Service will be more expert.

7 I understand that.

8 I mean, it just is the reality that on the night of
9 22 May, whatever may be your view about people always
10 agreeing, we don't need any enforcement measures to do
11 it, they didn't agree on something which was absolutely
12 vital on the night.

13 A. It would help if you explained what they didn't agree
14 on.

15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. So the police in the City Room,
16 once the armed police had gone through and cleared the
17 area and ensured that there were no gunmen in there and
18 had a ring of gunmen round there to prevent anyone
19 getting back in, they couldn't guarantee there weren't
20 any secondary devices and they couldn't do that until
21 they got dogs in, which took a while. But as far as
22 Inspector Smith, the Bronze commander on the ground in
23 the City Room was concerned, it was safe enough for
24 unarmed police and unprotected police to work in there.

25 The Ambulance Service took a different view and

6

1 decided that it was not safe for ordinary paramedics to
2 work in there. They were, however, working down where
3 the casualty clearing station was on the station
4 concourse.

5 When the Fire Service arrived it was their immediate
6 response that it wasn't safe for them to work on the
7 concourse.

8 In an incident like this, this does seem to me to be
9 a real problem, and you are -- your organisation -- I am
10 not blaming you, so please... You are telling me, don't
11 worry, we'll all agree, we don't need anyone to say what
12 should happen or to lay it down because we are all
13 sensible people, we will all get together and agree.
14 But when it came to the incident there was no agreement
15 about an absolutely fundamental issue of whether it was
16 safe for people who were not protected to go into the
17 City Room. So --

18 A. I think joining those two conversations together, where
19 I was starting from was perhaps a disagreement about
20 policy, planning, preparation, but of course that can
21 manifest then in actions on the ground which is that
22 second point.

23 My expectation would be that if the risk -- if the
24 joint assessment of risk was done in a joined-up
25 mutually understood conversation, then I would expect

7

1 the leading agency who lead on the risk -- so in this
2 the police -- to pass that information on in a clearly
3 understandable way, and if those other agencies
4 understand it, to comply with it.

5 But also that needs to be done at the different
6 levels so that you can see -- if you -- you can seek
7 guidance from your superiors in your organisation. So
8 you need to have shared that -- ideally shared that
9 information at operational, tactical and strategic
10 level.

11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes.

12 A. There is a time delay in that, and you can't -- the
13 strategic level may not be set up in time for the people
14 on the ground to seek that support. So I would expect
15 them to follow that guidance from, in this situation,
16 the police.

17 In the same ways a you already took my point, if I
18 said, "I hear what you're saying but I actually don't
19 think it's safe for you to go in because I think the
20 building is going to collapse", and you should listen to
21 each other's expertise and make a dynamic decision.

22 There are -- there is also -- there can be a view of
23 directing somebody into a risk can be different to
24 volunteering to go into a risk, and the Health and
25 Safety Executive recognise acts of heroism where staff

8

1 can choose to go into very perilous situations that they
2 might not expect a manager to send them into.

3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. I really understand that. Of
4 course, they need to understand the risks before they
5 volunteer or not.

6 Okay. But do you see my problem on converting
7 (inaudible: coughing) ground into the -- when it
8 actually happens, that this sort of joined-up approach
9 didn't in reality happen.

10 And also maybe, and you tell me, are some
11 organisations more risk averse than others? Not the
12 people, not the individuals, but the actual
13 organisations.

14 A. Of course, it's hard to describe a whole organisation
15 because people vary, but I would say the Fire Service,
16 the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, are not
17 risk averse. When you go back to --

18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Sorry, can I -- I want to distinguish
19 between the individual firefighters and the commanders
20 and the policy of the organisation. So we've heard when
21 people are being trained, before you send those people
22 into that sort of situation, you need to be pretty sure
23 about their security, otherwise we can be facing
24 corporate manslaughter charges, let alone health and
25 safety charges, which can induce some sort of risk

9

1 aversion.

2 A. Can I give a reasonably long answer to say -- I would
3 say in the broader National Fire Service, the health and
4 safety culture was perceived to start to come into view
5 and create some thinking as you're alluding to. For
6 example, at Atherstone on Stour, when relatively junior
7 officers were prosecuted for corporate manslaughter, and
8 eventually found not guilty.

9 We took on, and particularly when I took on as
10 director of emergency response, we took on a strong
11 approach of introducing what we called a new
12 firefighting project. We ran incident command seminars.
13 We would bring in up to 100 junior officers at a time
14 and run training and exercising, virtual tabletop
15 processes, and explain to those staff that we expect
16 them to take dynamic risk assessments and, where
17 necessary, use operational discretion to deal with the
18 risks in front of them.

19 And they would seek support, to say: if I did that
20 decision, which may be slightly beyond what this policy
21 says I should do, is the organisation going to support
22 us? And we were repeatedly clear: yes, as long as
23 you've taken a sensible decision you need to do this.

24 So examples might be you have just seen a child fall
25 in the water. The policy may say you should not go

10

1 sub-surface. If you take a controlled decision to try
2 and do a rescue, we will support you. And other
3 scenarios.

4 We introduced live fire training far more than we
5 used to. Firefighters will train in real fires, and
6 firefighters will get some burns, which they didn't --
7 when I joined, you didn't go in real fires other than at
8 an incident because they thought it was too dangerous to
9 train in real fires. We massively increased real
10 firefighting. We built a training site in Bury to do
11 real training. Previously for line rescues, you could
12 only do it on a slope -- no, when you are doing
13 rescues, you do it vertically, so you will train
14 vertically. We pushed and pushed to say you will do
15 realistic training and you will take appropriate risk to
16 do your job.

17 Firefighters are totally comfortable with that and
18 actually wanted that and wanted those previous perceived
19 or real restrictions to be taken off, and we really
20 pursued real firefighting, modern firefighting
21 techniques.

22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. Sorry, Mr de la Poer.

23 MR DE LA POER: Not at all, sir.

24 What I'm proposing to do is to move on to your
25 second matter, Mr Argyle, which we can deal with very

11

1 briefly.

2 You were asked about Exercise Joint Enterprise.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. In summary, I think you indicated that's an MTFA
5 exercise at the Trafford Centre. The resilience forum
6 was not involved in that, but your view is, given what
7 its focus was, that that was appropriate; is that
8 correct?

9 A. It was appropriate to the direction -- the national
10 directions at the time, which was MTFA was a new
11 activity confined to a limited amount of organisations,
12 and that information shouldn't be shared with wider
13 partnership.

14 Q. So consistent with a national attitude?

15 A. Yes.

16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: What was the date of that roughly again?

17 A. 2012, was it?

18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you. We can check that,
19 obviously.

20 MR DE LA POER: Then finally we come to Exercise Winchester
21 Accord. Perhaps this is most easily dealt with by
22 looking at paragraphs 14 and 15 of your statement.

23 Rather than me suggesting anything to you, perhaps
24 you could just refresh your memory from what you say
25 there and seek to capture that for us, please.

12

1 A. Yes. I reiterated yesterday that it was two exercises
2 and I'm now aware that concerns or learning points were
3 raised in the live play debrief that were not shared
4 with the Greater Manchester Resilience Forum.

5 As I have tried to give my view previously, I don't
6 think all learning points from all exercises can be
7 passed to the resilience forum. That would become
8 unmanageable and untenable. But any significant points
9 should be, and if there's such a significant point that
10 they identified a potential breakdown in multi-agency
11 working through a significant breakdown in
12 communication, that should have been passed to the
13 resilience forum to resolve unless they were absolutely
14 clear they would resolve it without that help.

15 Q. Even if the resilience forum was not being solicited to
16 help resolve the problem, would you nonetheless expect
17 to be told of its existence and be told how it was being
18 fixed if it is as substantial, multi-agency
19 communication issue?

20 A. In reality, I wouldn't be surprised if I wasn't but
21 I think your point, I would take that. Even if people
22 identified a significant problem and felt they had all
23 the tools to solve it, I think that should be passed to
24 the resilience forum so that they can be assured it's
25 being -- if there's a problem, it is being addressed,

13

1 but also then to be able to check that it's been
2 addressed, not just perceived to be addressed.

3 Q. If it is all dealt with internally, doesn't that risk
4 not making sure that the emergency service partners
5 firstly know that the risk has been recognised, know
6 what steps are being taken, give an input on how they
7 think it might be improved? Isn't that the whole
8 essence of multi-agency working and isn't the resilience
9 forum exactly the place to do that?

10 A. Yes.

11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Argyle, I'm sure you are aware,
12 I don't want anyone to misunderstand this, I regard this
13 as a very serious issue. The evidence I have heard
14 suggests that problems were shown up by Winchester
15 Accord which were not solved, which then recurred, and
16 had a significant effect during what happened on 22 May.
17 Your organisation is partly there to resolve those sort
18 of problems. They were never drawn to your attention.
19 And not only were they not solved, but the mechanism
20 which had been set up in order to solve these problems
21 was never utilised. Whose responsibility is that?

22 A. There is a responsibility of category 1 and 2 responders
23 to share relevant information with each other, to be
24 able to plan, prepare and respond to incidents. So the
25 organisations who identify the problem have a duty to

14

1 share that information to make sure it's resolved to
2 comply with the Civil Contingencies Act.

3 MR DE LA POER: At what level within the organisation does
4 that duty vest? Is it upon the resilience forum
5 representative to bring that forward? Is it upon the
6 chief officer of the organisation to see that it is
7 done? How does it work in practice in terms of coming
8 down to actual communication by a particular person or
9 a group of people so that it is properly shared?

10 A. The duty is on the organisation and of course
11 organisations are hierarchical. So the duty in its
12 highest form sits at the highest level, which would have
13 been the Fire Authority or actually by this time the
14 very newly the combined authority. They were very new.
15 But at the time of the exercise, the Fire Authority, who
16 would then lead down to the chief fire officer,
17 corporate team, etc.

18 In reality, there was a need for anyone in the
19 organisation identifying the problem to share that
20 information upwards to the appropriate level. I'm not
21 leaving the blame at that level of person who identified
22 the problem. Of course that has to be two-way and
23 management have to put something in place that
24 encourages that learning, encourages that sharing of
25 information. So at any point an officer of any level

15

1 could identify a significant issue and there has to be
2 a structure in place to allow that information to be
3 shared upwards.

4 I think then that would need to come to -- if it
5 needs to be shared through the resilience forum, bearing
6 in mind the resilience forum is the partners, so they
7 have to -- you could discharge your duties by sharing
8 that information not physically in the resilience forum
9 meeting, but sharing it with all the partners. You
10 could resolve your -- discharge your duty as you have
11 shared the information appropriately. But it would be
12 helpful to share that through the resilience forum if it
13 is such a significant multi-agency challenge.

14 So I would say that should be passed to your
15 representative who goes to that meeting, for them to be
16 able to own it, take to that meeting, put it on that
17 meeting's agenda to make sure it's resolved. So it
18 should conduit up to the person who goes to the meeting.
19 That would be ideal.

20 Q. Let's just understand how these meetings can work.
21 Let's say, and we will take an example very close to
22 home, the FDO as a single point of failure, getting
23 overwhelmed, being unable to engage in multi-agency
24 communication effectively.

25 Does the resilience forum representative for GMP

16

1 come to the resilience forum once they've captured that,
 2 understood it, and say, "Partners, this is the problem
 3 that we have, we're taking these steps to address it, we
 4 want you to know about it, we want you to know what
 5 we're doing, and we want you to help us to fix it"? Is
 6 it in its simplest form that sort of conversation?
 7 A. I would say yes, and that would be -- I would -- in the
 8 norm, that would be preceded by that debrief. So that
 9 conversation would have come out through the debrief,
 10 and it would be captured at the debrief and that debrief
 11 will have allocated owners and that can be taken through
 12 the resilience forum structures to resolve it in
 13 a multi-agency way rather than leaving it with a single
 14 agency, because sometimes an agency may perceive they
 15 can solve it, but don't understand that actually other
 16 agencies and partners may have some contribution to the
 17 solution and help them create a better solution. So it
 18 would be better to take that to the resilience
 19 development group and then to the resilience forum.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And you may say well as well: that's all
 21 very well, but we need to practice it to make sure it's
 22 works.
 23 A. Yes, and latterly -- that was what I was alluding to:
 24 not perceive it's done, let's test what you have put in
 25 place works.

17

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: When you say latterly, what do you mean?
 2 A. It may come on in my evidence later. Following the
 3 debriefs, etc, for this incident, we put in a far
 4 stronger learning process that then we wouldn't sign it
 5 off until it had been tested either at another exercise
 6 or at an incident.
 7 MR DE LA POER: And was that additional process put in place
 8 because there was a recognition that you could run an
 9 exercise, you could debrief effectively, you could
 10 capture that debrief effectively, and then inaccurate
 11 steps are subsequently taken to address it? Is that why
 12 you put in the more robust process of checking that the
 13 debrief had been translated into action?
 14 A. Yes, and that not through any negative point of view,
 15 but that somebody, some people had put a solution in
 16 place that they perceived solved the issue, but actually
 17 on greater scrutiny, it hadn't solved the issue. So
 18 yes, make a broader perspective that said: that solution
 19 has been put in place, let's now test it, do we agree
 20 the problem is solved?
 21 MR DE LA POER: Those are all the questions that I wished to
 22 ask you, Mr Argyle. Sir, unless you have any more
 23 questions at this stage.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, thank you very much.
 25 MR DE LA POER: I'll turn to the core participants, the

18

1 first of whom will be North West Fire Control and
 2 Mr Smith QC.
 3 Questions from MR SMITH
 4 MR SMITH: Mr Argyle, could I begin by asking you, if you
 5 would, to clarify one issue. Are you hearing me all
 6 right?
 7 A. Yes, thank you.
 8 Q. There was a slight echo and I just wanted to be clear
 9 that you could hear me.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We don't have an echo here, so I'm
 11 afraid the echo is at your end.
 12 MR SMITH: That's fine. As long as it isn't in the inquiry
 13 room --
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No.
 15 MR SMITH: -- and caused by me.
 16 I would just like you to clarify one matter, please,
 17 Mr Argyle, arising out of your conversation with the
 18 chief fire officer.
 19 You have indicated that the chief fire officer was
 20 concerned that he had not been told earlier and he took
 21 the view that Control or a senior officer should have
 22 informed him; is that correct?
 23 A. That's what I said, and I think that's how I recall what
 24 he told me, yes.
 25 Q. Were you aware at the time that Greater Manchester Fire

19

1 and Rescue Service' guidance to North West Fire Control
 2 was that where the duty group manager is informed of an
 3 incident, the duty group manager has the responsibility
 4 to inform the duty PO and APO?
 5 A. Yes, and that's why I said either Control or an officer.
 6 So that was my -- I would, by the policy, expect North
 7 West Fire Control to tell the duty GM and the duty GM to
 8 cascade that information upwards.
 9 However, on a very significant incident I would not
 10 find it unusual for the principal officer to be told
 11 something directly as quickly as possible, if possible.
 12 Q. Taking those words "if possible", the evidence which the
 13 chairman has and will have demonstrates that the duty
 14 group manager, Mr Nankivell, was informed by Control at
 15 22.52, but the first action that he took effectively was
 16 to contact the duty NILO, Station Manager Berry. That
 17 was a perfectly reasonable step for him to take
 18 initially; do you agree?
 19 A. Yes.
 20 Q. And he spoke to Mr Berry at just after 11 o'clock and
 21 spoke again to North West Fire Control at 11.06, before
 22 he then called the chief fire officer.
 23 That sequence, do you agree, was therefore perfectly
 24 reasonable in the circumstances that prevailed from the
 25 duty group manager's point of view?

20

1 A. The sequence, yes.
 2 Q. Can I turn to the creation of North West Fire Control,
 3 which is something that you were deeply involved in
 4 during your service with GMFRS.
 5 When you first gave evidence you were a little
 6 uncertain about one question that was asked of you, not
 7 by me, as to whether North West Fire Control was
 8 a category 1 responder or attended GMFRS meetings.
 9 I would just like you to clarify, if you would, that
 10 we know that North West Fire Control would not be
 11 a category 1 responder, but do you agree that any issue
 12 affecting the Fire Service control room would be dealt
 13 with normally by a representative of Greater Manchester
 14 Fire and Rescue Service on the forum?
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. And that's how any issues relating to the control room
 17 could be managed by GMRF?
 18 A. Yes.
 19 Q. Now, North West Fire Control was the creation, do you
 20 agree, of a local authority initiative as the owners and
 21 having responsibility under the Fire Services Act for
 22 the various Fire and Rescue Services?
 23 A. Are you saying that the North West Fire Control is
 24 a local authority organisation or that the Fire Services
 25 are?

21

1 Q. No, no. It was suggested in the course of evidence at
 2 one stage by Mr Dark that North West Fire Control
 3 created the combined control room for the four Fire and
 4 Rescue Services.
 5 Now, the situation is, isn't it, that the four Fire
 6 and Rescue Services and the Greater Manchester Combined
 7 Authority are effectively the shareholders who own North
 8 West Fire Control?
 9 A. Yes, it's effectively an arm's length organisation for
 10 the four Fire Services.
 11 Q. Exactly. Although saving money would be one consequence
 12 of combining the control rooms, the principal aim was to
 13 improve efficiency, wasn't it?
 14 A. I believe so, yes.
 15 Q. And yesterday you made reference to the fact that one
 16 step that was taken was to make use of advanced
 17 technology and to invest in advanced technology through
 18 the creation of the control room for the four Fire
 19 Services; is that correct?
 20 A. Yes, it's my understanding obviously that taking the
 21 opportunity to have a new Control, we would have the
 22 most -- well, I don't want to say the most -- but
 23 up-to-date technology, whereas other Fire Services will
 24 have older technology despite the fact they've been in
 25 place for longer, and dependent on whether they would

22

1 have got round to the point in time of renewing that
 2 technology. So yes, you would have newer technology and
 3 the benefits that come with that.
 4 Q. And one of the benefits is cost saving, isn't it, to
 5 share that technology among four Fire and Rescue
 6 Services?
 7 A. I would expect there to be savings, yes.
 8 Q. Mr Dark also expressed a preference for a Fire and
 9 Rescue Service having its own control room. Are you
 10 aware, without going into this in any way, that this is
 11 part of a long running debate involving the FBU?
 12 A. Not particularly. I didn't know it was a particularly
 13 strong agenda for FBU. Of course they will always try
 14 to protect members' jobs. So any project that will end
 15 up with there being less jobs, they will tend to resist.
 16 Q. It was also suggested during Mr Dark's evidence that
 17 there may have been compromises when the four Fire and
 18 Rescue Services combined with North West Fire Control so
 19 that some Fire and Rescue Services might have agreed to
 20 compromise or alter their processes in order to
 21 accommodate those of another Fire and Rescue Service; do
 22 you follow?
 23 A. I understand. Do you want me to answer that or not?
 24 Q. Well, I'm going to ask you a little bit more about it,
 25 but please, Mr Argyle, would you answer it because

23

1 you're the expert.
 2 A. You could use the word "compromise". I don't think that
 3 could be the best word. There was an ambition to seek
 4 to streamline where possible and where agreed.
 5 So if the four Fire Services dealt with an incident
 6 slightly differently, particularly in the initial
 7 phases, for example, the predetermined attendance, there
 8 would be discussion to say -- again, I'll make this up
 9 to an extent because I can't remember -- if Cheshire
 10 normally send two fire engines to a house fire prior to
 11 North West Fire Control, and Greater Manchester normally
 12 send four fire engines as the predetermined attendance,
 13 the discussion would be: why do we do that differently
 14 and should we consider all doing it the same, should we
 15 all send three, should we all send two?
 16 If there was an agreement that actually that should
 17 be the case, then you might end up with one action card.
 18 If you didn't want to change your policy and you said,
 19 no, we're sticking with three, or, we're sticking with
 20 two, so when an incident comes up that says a house
 21 fire, they know the address, it comes up and if it's
 22 Cheshire, they send two, if it's Greater Manchester,
 23 they send three. So that is not a compromise, it's
 24 a professional discussion about what we want.
 25 Q. So what this comes to next -- thank you, Mr Argyle -- is

24

1 that what was put in place, is this correct, was
2 a computer-aided dispatch system by North West Fire
3 Control, fund by the four Fire and Rescue Services which
4 allowed a single work flow for the control room staff
5 but configured for the different requirements of the
6 four Fire and Rescue Services?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. So that's to say when a call comes in from Cheshire, the
9 control room staff, because of the way the system is
10 configured, know immediately, because the system
11 generates the response, they know immediately how to
12 respond to Cheshire's call. Likewise, on similar facts,
13 there may be a slightly different or modified response
14 to Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service.

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. And that's how --

17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Smith, sorry, do you mind if
18 I interrupt for a moment.

19 MR SMITH: Not at all.

20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Let's just look a bit more at the
21 possibility of compromise taking place.

22 Was it considered that there might be a risk of
23 confusion, whatever may come up with the action cards
24 and where they are, if you had different systems for
25 each of the four authorities? So in other words was

25

1 there any pressure, not unfair pressure or pressure on
2 all of you, to say: well, it's actually much better if
3 we come up with the same practice, so let's see if we
4 can reach an agreement and if it means a bit of
5 compromise here and a bit of compromise there, that
6 would be better? Was that how it worked or not?

7 A. No, I never felt any pressure.

8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. You're the biggest, aren't you,
9 Manchester, by quite a long way?

10 A. I think it's about 48%, I think Mr Smith called it a
11 shareholder, about 48%.

12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Does that give you any extra strength,
13 pressure or whatever in the negotiations?

14 A. No, because I never saw a need to do that.

15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay.

16 A. But I would have said no in any case.

17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So if people, for example, saw the merit
18 of someone else's system and they said, that sounds
19 a good idea to us, let's go with that, but if they
20 think, well, we still think ours is best for our
21 particular locality, and things like that, they would
22 stick to what they were saying?

23 A. Yes. As an example which I have heard mentioned in
24 evidence, at Manchester Central, they said their
25 pre-alert. That wasn't in place when North West Fire

26

1 Control was initiated. It was a new project that
2 I initiated. I wanted to introduce pre-alerting to
3 speed up mobilisations. The other three didn't want
4 that. So Greater Manchester initiated pre-alerting.
5 That isn't relevant -- wasn't relevant in the other Fire
6 Services. I think some may have now followed, but at
7 the time there was no challenge about that other than
8 saying: we want that, right, okay, we'll deal with
9 putting in a new process just for Greater Manchester.

10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. Thank you, Mr Smith.

11 MR SMITH: Thank you, sir.

12 Just taking that example then, Mr Argyle, presumably
13 there was no difficulty in implementing your proposal
14 for pre-alerts for Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue
15 Service?

16 A. I would say the only issue was North West Fire Control
17 was relatively new and they had a schedule of things --
18 technological things they needed to go through. So when
19 I wanted that, it had to go on a schedule until it could
20 be done. Now, that would have been the case potentially
21 anyway. The one slight thing I would say is if it had
22 just been -- if it had just been Greater Manchester,
23 I could have put pressure on to prioritise it and have
24 it bumped up the agenda.

25 But actually there was more about an agreement to

27

1 say: well, we have already got a schedule of
2 technological work and so we agree you want this, it
3 goes on the schedule.

4 Q. Of course what you're making reference to is that it
5 seems to have worked perfectly on the night, didn't it,
6 the pre-alerts?

7 A. As far as I understand, yes.

8 Q. Thank you. In terms of compromise and cooperation, you
9 will also be aware, is this correct, of the existence of
10 what is known as the Regional Operations Group? The
11 shorthand is ops group.

12 A. For North West Fire Control?

13 Q. Yes.

14 A. Yes. I just need to refresh my memory there.

15 Q. Probably, yes, but can I help you about that. Is it
16 your understanding that every 6 weeks representatives
17 from the four Fire and Rescue Services would meet for
18 the purposes of the ops group meetings and committees to
19 discuss issues arising between the Fire and Rescue
20 Services with a view to improving, amending, altering or
21 changing any of the procedures?

22 A. I know they met regularly, and if you say 6 weeks -- and
23 of course I know there was a lot of work in between
24 that. So if something needed to be done in between
25 that, there was a very good relationship between Greater

28

1 Manchester Fire and North West Fire Control to have
 2 other in-between meetings as well. So yes, regular
 3 meetings.
 4 Q. Can I turn to the contractual arrangements very, very
 5 briefly, if I may.
 6 I don't expect you, Mr Argyle, even though you may
 7 be able to, to bring to mind immediately the contractual
 8 provisions. We can look at those later when North West
 9 Fire Control give evidence. But the contractual
 10 arrangements required, do you recall, North West Fire
 11 Control to mobilise crews and appliances in accordance
 12 with the mobilising policies, incident types,
 13 predetermined attendances that the various Fire and
 14 Rescue Services required North West Fire Control to
 15 mobilise to and respond to?
 16 A. Yes.
 17 Q. In other words, North West Fire Control doesn't have
 18 a command function, does it?
 19 A. No.
 20 Q. It doesn't have a discretion to choose if it takes the
 21 view that the circumstances required departure from
 22 an action plan or incident type if the facts require
 23 North West Fire Control to apply that incident type and
 24 plan?
 25 A. No, I would expect them to follow the action card. What

29

1 I would say is -- I wouldn't say it is odd that the way
 2 an incident is described to North West Fire Control when
 3 they receive a 999 call to be slightly confusing and
 4 they may ring an officer, the duty GM or a duty NILO, to
 5 say: what would you advise on this?
 6 Q. Yes.
 7 A. Although I said it wouldn't be odd, it would be fairly
 8 rare because it would be normal to send a predetermined
 9 attendance to nearly any incident, but there would be
 10 something a little it odd because sometimes people ring
 11 the Fire Service when they don't know who else to ring,
 12 so they might ring an officer to say: what should I do
 13 with this?
 14 Q. Do you agree that there can be circumstances in which
 15 experienced team leaders at North West Fire Control are
 16 questioning whether an explosion, bomb, Operation Plato
 17 or whatever it may be, action plan is appropriate for
 18 the information that's actually coming into the control
 19 room?
 20 A. I suppose, as I started my last answer, they receive
 21 information, often from a member of the public -- or it
 22 can be from another organisation -- so they need to
 23 understand what they're being told and sometimes if it's
 24 from the public they don't use the kind of language we
 25 would use. But I would expect, if they have

30

1 a perception of what the incident is, particularly if
 2 the information is coming from a trusted agent, to
 3 follow the action card.
 4 This could then ring up the duty GM, duty NILO, duty
 5 APO, and say, "This is what we've been told, this is
 6 what we are doing", to get guidance.
 7 Q. And what would be the reason why the control room would
 8 seek guidance from a senior Fire and Rescue Service
 9 officer?
 10 A. I think usually if more -- more if the call came from
 11 a member of the public and it was quite unusual.
 12 I don't think it would be very normal if the information
 13 was coming from ambulance or police typically. But they
 14 might if it seemed a very significant and rare incident.
 15 I couldn't give you an example of that.
 16 Q. Can I give you an example? And it may be, Mr Argyle,
 17 that because I think you have indicated in your
 18 statement you only have limited knowledge of the action
 19 plans, but could I just give you this example for you to
 20 consider?
 21 If Greater Manchester Police are to inform North
 22 West Fire Control that a bomb has exploded in a public
 23 place causing numerous casualties and that an RVP has
 24 been identified by the police remote from the incident,
 25 and there is no action plan to deal with all of those

31

1 circumstances combined, do you agree that it would be
 2 perfectly reasonable for the control room to contact
 3 a senior Fire and Rescue Service officer for guidance?
 4 A. I think the way you said that with all those situations
 5 combined isn't confusing to me. If they're told a bomb
 6 has exploded, people are injured, and the police have
 7 given an RVP, I would expect them to follow the bomb
 8 action plan. They could then ring up an officer and
 9 say, "This is what we have got, it's a significant
 10 incident", because sometimes an officer might say: well,
 11 I know the PDA -- and I'm making this up -- says send
 12 three pumps, that sounds so significant, send ten pumps
 13 as a precaution. And I know I'm doing a hypothetical
 14 response there, but I would expect them to follow the
 15 bomb action plan.
 16 Q. And were you aware that the bomb action plan required of
 17 North West Fire Control --
 18 A. Sorry, explosion.
 19 Q. I'm so sorry.
 20 A. You said the bomb had exploded, so an exploded bomb.
 21 Q. So which action plan were you choosing?
 22 A. Explosion.
 23 Q. Explosion?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. Not bomb?

32

1 A. Bomb, and I accept this could cause some confusion, was
2 used for unexploded bombs.

3 Q. And bomb threats?

4 A. Yes.

5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. Just — again, Mr Smith, I'm
6 really sorry, can you just let me pick up on that.

7 MR SMITH: Of course, sir, yes.

8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It's a bit indicative, if you don't mind
9 me saying, of the possible confusion that you first
10 opted for bomb even though you had told that people were
11 injured, which would indicate to most people that the
12 bomb had exploded in some way, maybe, and then you
13 changed your mind and said explosion which — you're the
14 man who put this all in action in the first place. So
15 is it a confusing situation?

16 A. Not to be defensive, I wouldn't say I didn't write the
17 action cards, and they came from historical action cards
18 in the first place.

19 Yes, I seem to have fallen into that trap. When —

20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm sure it wasn't a trap.

21 A. No, I don't mean that. When Mr Smith said a bomb has
22 exploded and people are injured, yes, I admit,
23 I subconsciously used the word "bomb" rather than
24 "explosion".

25 One of the rare occasions when a NILO would be rung

33

1 before a mobilisation would be an unexploded bomb
2 because actually the incident hasn't happened, and the
3 NILO will seek information from the FDO where they
4 should RV to stand by in case the bomb explodes.

5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes. Okay. We're going to be hearing
6 a lot about this in due course, no doubt.

7 MR SMITH: We are, sir, yes, and I'm not going to spend any
8 more time on it other than to ask one question on it, if
9 I may.

10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Please do, yes.

11 MR SMITH: Do you agree, therefore, Mr Argyle, that there is
12 scope for confusion over this issue that I have raised
13 and the facts in the context of the action plans?

14 A. You may think I have just shown that. I — my
15 perception is that control operators, particularly when
16 they bring the action plan up in front of them, know
17 exactly the difference between the two plans. So if
18 they bring up "explosion", they know what that is, and
19 if they bring up "bomb", they know what that is, that is
20 about a bomb threat.

21 If they believe they are dealing with a bomb that
22 has exploded, I would expect them to — even if they
23 brought up the bomb one first, they would think, "No,
24 that is for an unexploded bomb, I'll bring up the
25 explosion", and bring up the explosion action plan.

34

1 I would expect them to follow that.

2 Q. Before we leave this, if the rendezvous point remote
3 from the incident is identified by Greater Manchester
4 Police, how is the control room to respond to an action
5 plan that requires mobilisation to the incident scene?

6 A. If you're getting a — getting a call from another
7 agency and they tell you the RVP, that is where you
8 should go.

9 Q. Not to the scene?

10 A. You're being requested to an incident by another agency.
11 They're asking for your support and it would be normal
12 to go where they've asked you to attend.

13 It is very normal to say, "We've got an incident at
14 10 Smith Street, RV at the junction of Smith Street and
15 Jones Street", because sometimes you don't want to park
16 outside the incident. And it may not be obvious to the
17 control operator, or indeed the fire engines, attending
18 how remote the RV is.

19 The RV can be sometimes be 50 yards away or it could
20 be a mile away. Typically it is an RV close enough to
21 then deploy to the scene.

22 Q. I would just like to deal with a matter that you were
23 asked about by Mr de la Poer yesterday and that is the
24 issue of common action plans or otherwise between Fire
25 and Rescue Services.

35

1 As far as incident types are concerned, do you agree
2 that not all Fire and Rescue Services within the four
3 serviced by North West Fire Control will have the same
4 incident types, they may choose their own?

5 A. Yes, they could, yes.

6 Q. I just want to make this point that what each Fire and
7 Rescue Service has or does not have may be operationally
8 sensitive, so I'm not going to ask you any more
9 questions about it, but that needs to be borne in mind.

10 But the situation is that the four Fire and Rescue
11 Services in some instances can share responses, can they
12 not, or appliances in a shared response? In other
13 words, one Fire and Rescue Service might have to call on
14 another for support?

15 A. Yes, that's very common. And actually, particularly on
16 the border between two Fire Services, even Control — if
17 they get a house fire and they want to send two fire
18 engines, if one of the fire engines is in Cheshire and
19 one is in Greater Manchester, it's not even the Fire
20 Service who are choosing, Control will mobilise the
21 nearest two fire engines.

22 On a larger incident, if I was at a large incident
23 and I was to say, "Make pumps 20", because I want 20
24 fire engines, you might get 15 from Greater Manchester
25 and five from another service.

36

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's what's called mutual aid, as
 2 I understand it?
 3 A. Yes.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Would it include Merseyside as well,
 5 even though they are not part of the group? Would you
 6 go to them for mutual aid?
 7 A. Yes, in the same way we would go to West Yorkshire or
 8 Derbyshire.
 9 MR SMITH: So before we move away from North West Fire
 10 Control, could you also confirm for the chairman's
 11 assistance therefore that one of the officers appointed
 12 by GMFRS and by North West Fire Control for each
 13 organisation was a specific point of contact in order
 14 that there could be liaison between the two
 15 organisations?
 16 A. Yes.
 17 Q. And the chairman may wish to note that the current
 18 specific point of contact for the Fire and Rescue
 19 Service is Station Manager Berry.
 20 Finally, a cooperation agreement was reached, wasn't
 21 it, between the four Fire and Rescue Services whereby
 22 they agreed independently of North West Fire Control to
 23 work together and to apply certain principles with
 24 a view to ensuring that North West Fire Control had
 25 their respective support, a separate cooperation

37

1 agreement?
 2 A. I don't remember that in detail. I'm not contradicting
 3 that at all.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You just don't know about that?
 5 A. Maybe I have forgotten.
 6 MR SMITH: We have it on the system. We will come to it in
 7 due course.
 8 But each Fire and Rescue Service commits to
 9 providing sufficient resources to fund the operation?
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. I would like to turn finally to just two matters,
 12 please. Could I ask Mr Lopez to put up on the screen
 13 the GMRF multi-agency generic response plan which is
 14 {INQ012487/39}.
 15 Mr Lopez, if you could please take us to about the
 16 middle of the page. We see the second paragraph there:
 17 "Where terrorist action is suspected to be the cause
 18 of an emergency..."
 19 Can I take you to the very last sentence, please:
 20 "If there is the possibility that an emergency has
 21 been caused by terrorist action, then that will be taken
 22 as the working assumption until demonstrated otherwise."
 23 I think that can be taken from the screen, but
 24 I want to emphasise that this falls under the roles and
 25 responsibilities for Greater Manchester Police, not the

38

1 Fire Service.
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. I don't you to be misled about that.
 4 Do you consider that that guidance, relating as it
 5 does to Greater Manchester Police, is sensible guidance
 6 of general application? I'll read it again if I may:
 7 "If there is the possibility that an emergency has
 8 been caused by terrorist action, then that will be taken
 9 as the working assumption until demonstrated otherwise."
 10 A. Yes, that seems sensible, yes.
 11 Q. Would you agree that that would be a reasonable
 12 approach, looking at the situation when you were at
 13 Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, a reasonable
 14 approach for Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service
 15 officers to take in assessing and mobilising in response
 16 to an incident such as this?
 17 A. That this appeared to be a terrorist response and to
 18 treat it as such until it's confirmed it isn't, yes.
 19 Q. Yes. And do you agree that that would also be
 20 a reasonable approach for a fire control room to take,
 21 until they had information to the contrary?
 22 A. Yes.
 23 Q. Then the second matter, and final matter, arises from
 24 the Hawk River debrief report which is {INQ004529/1}.
 25 Mr Lopez, if you could put that on the screen again,

39

1 I would be grateful. Take us, if you would, please, to
 2 the second half of the page.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Can we have the reference again, please?
 4 MR SMITH: Yes, of course. It's {INQ004529/1}.
 5 I do hope — good. Thank you.
 6 I would like to take you to the words just below
 7 "irrelevant and sensitive". The Hawk River exercise
 8 took place on 1 March 2017. It reads, below those words
 9 "irrelevant and sensitive".
 10 "Like any critical or major incident, it is
 11 important that an MTFA is identified at the earliest
 12 opportunity. It is key all emergency responders react
 13 collaboratively with due consideration to the unique
 14 nature of the threat."
 15 And these are the words I would like to take you to,
 16 please, Mr Argyle:
 17 "It is also important to note that a Plato incident
 18 is distinct from any other form of firearms incident.
 19 The identification criteria that may indicate an attack
 20 of this nature is unfolding might include the
 21 following ..."
 22 The third bullet point is:
 23 "Indiscriminate targeting of people intended to
 24 cause mass casualties."
 25 And the fourth is:

40

1 "Explosive devices used".
 2 If Mr Lopez could take that from the screen, thank
 3 you.
 4 Do you agree that those two criteria alone are
 5 capable of being possible indicators of a developing
 6 potential MTFA or Plato incident?
 7 A. Yes. When you say alone, those two together or
 8 singularly?
 9 Q. Well —
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think together.
 11 MR SMITH: I have taken them together, yes.
 12 A. Yes.
 13 MR SMITH: Mr Argyle, can I thank you. Those are all the
 14 questions I have to ask you.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Just before you go, Mr Smith, I want to
 16 ask a couple of questions you may need to come back on.
 17 So let me ask them for a moment.
 18 MR SMITH: Of course.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: One of the things that having North West
 20 Fire Control deprives you of is co-location with GMFRS.
 21 A. And the Control staff, yes.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So in other contexts co-location is
 23 regarded as important. Would you regard it as important
 24 in relation to the control centre?
 25 A. It's definitely advantageous.

41

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: To have co-location?
 2 A. To have the ability to meet face to face.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: On balance do you regard the setting-up
 4 of NWFC as an advantage or a disadvantage or is it there
 5 are some good things, some less good things?
 6 A. I would say the latter.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Right, okay. And just one other thing:
 8 when you were responding to the actions that
 9 Mr Nankivell took as duty group manager and in relation
 10 to the chief fire officer, you were asked the order in
 11 which he did things, which as I understood it was to
 12 contact Mr Berry first, then he spoke to North West Fire
 13 Control second again, and then spoke to the chief fire
 14 officer. Is that your understanding of the sequence?
 15 A. That's what I feel I was told and asked, yes.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Right. You made a point of saying,
 17 "I agree the sequence is a reasonable one", and I just
 18 wonder whether you made that limitation to express the
 19 fact that it could have happened earlier or sooner or it
 20 was just the way you answered the question.
 21 A. No, I suppose I — although I was listening to the
 22 question, obviously, I couldn't — I couldn't get the
 23 times. I don't know how fast he did those things.
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So you weren't intending to make any
 25 adverse comment about that?

42

1 A. No.
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much.
 3 Mr Smith, did you want to come back on any of that?
 4 MR SMITH: Sir, there's one issue arising that has been
 5 raised in evidence before, and in this context of the
 6 first question might be of assistance to you.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 8 MR SMITH: Obviously, Mr Argyle, having the control room, if
 9 you like, just next door is bound to be an advantage for
 10 any Fire and Rescue Service, isn't it?
 11 A. I think so, yes.
 12 Q. One of the matters that has been ventilated so far is
 13 whether there would be any benefit in an officer from
 14 the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, for
 15 example, being permanently stationed at North West Fire
 16 Control. Could you see benefits from that?
 17 A. I can see benefits, yes.
 18 Q. Would you recommend it?
 19 A. As I was saying, as I talked about, there were intended
 20 to be nine regional Controls. Now, London took up one
 21 and I could start thinking, well, how do they cope
 22 because — but they are one Fire Service, so they could
 23 have one person in there or — you know, they can walk
 24 in.
 25 For our — for North West Fire Control, of course,

43

1 it's four Fire Services. I can understand it could be
 2 perceived as expensive or time-consuming to have four
 3 fire officers there 24/7, but of course you could
 4 construct their work that they have got work to do
 5 because they're not always going to be needing to
 6 support North West Fire Control.
 7 Would it be possible to have one fire officer there
 8 who had adequate knowledge to support any incident in
 9 any of the four Controls? I think that could be
 10 explored. So you could explore where whether you could
 11 have one fire officer to represent all four Fire
 12 Services or where you could have four fire officers and
 13 construct their working day that they can be fruitful as
 14 an employee as well as supporting Control.
 15 Q. So one officer could be effectively a liaison officer
 16 for three of the Fire and Rescue Services and employed
 17 by the fourth?
 18 A. I feel that would be feasible, yes. I don't think the
 19 differences are so dramatically different that they
 20 could not add a lot of value if you were a fire officer
 21 from any of those four services.
 22 Q. And that would have the advantage, wouldn't it, of the
 23 ability to immediately consult with somebody there on
 24 the ground at North West Fire Control?
 25 A. Yes, and there's — as we have done, we do in certain

44

1 peak periods, we do put an officer in there.
 2 MR SMITH: Yes, thank you, sir. That was all I intended to
 3 ask.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much, Mr Smith.
 5 MR DE LA POER: Sir, next, could I invite Mr Horwell on
 6 behalf of Greater Manchester Police.
 7 Questions from MR HORWELL
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Horwell.
 9 MR HORWELL: Mr Argyle, two topics.
 10 The record that we have of your interview for the
 11 Kerslake Review {INQ000283/1}, if that could be put up,
 12 please.
 13 Mr Argyle, this is one of the documents in your list
 14 and you are familiar with it, I hope?
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. We can see from the first page that this is the record
 17 of your interview on 13 December 2015 and if we could go
 18 to the second page {INQ000283/2}, please, and the large
 19 section, the large paragraph as it appears at the bottom
 20 of the page, starting with "Q. We talked to
 21 Dave Keelan".
 22 You're familiar with the long answer that you gave
 23 on page 2, Mr Argyle?
 24 A. Yes, I would have to re-read it to be 100% familiar with
 25 it, yes.

45

1 Q. Please. I don't want to take you at any disadvantage.
 2 Could you read that section to yourself? We can all see
 3 it.
 4 A. (Pause). Yes.
 5 Q. Thank you. If we can take that away from the screen for
 6 the moment, please.
 7 Mr Argyle, there are obviously two points there in
 8 which I have an interest:
 9 "To me, someone should have gone to the scene."
 10 In your view, who should have gone to the scene from
 11 fire?
 12 A. Ideally a predetermined attendance would have been
 13 mobilised to the scene.
 14 Q. And by that you mean — could you spell that out for us,
 15 please?
 16 A. Fire engines and any other resources that come on the
 17 action card for an explosion.
 18 Q. I know you've covered this very recently, but again, so
 19 that there is no misunderstanding, if GMP had provided
 20 an RVP, you would have expected that PDA to go to the
 21 RVP?
 22 A. Yes.
 23 Q. And secondly, in terms of an RVP selected by the Fire
 24 Service, you expressed in that answer your view that
 25 Manchester Central Fire Station in Thompson Street was

46

1 not too close to the scene.
 2 A. Just in background, to say, these notes were taken very
 3 quickly and I don't think they're comprehensive notes.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: They are notes rather than a transcript
 5 of what you said?
 6 A. Yes. They weren't showing them afterwards to say, "Do
 7 you agree this is what you have said?", you know.
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You must clarify what you meant to say
 9 and maybe what you did say if it is it's different from
 10 what's on there.
 11 MR HORWELL: Sir, can I just make it clear, we have looked
 12 for the full transcript and we cannot find it. So this
 13 note is the only evidence that we have of this
 14 interview.
 15 But of course I'll put the question again,
 16 Mr Argyle.
 17 You said there:
 18 "Being critical ..."
 19 Although I say "you said", this is what the record
 20 states, and it does not purport to be a verbatim record,
 21 Mr Argyle. But you are recorded as having said:
 22 "Being critical, Thompson Street was not too close."
 23 So I'm asking you about the nomination of an RVP in
 24 these circumstances and asking your views on that.
 25 Thompson Street as an RVP was not too close to this

47

1 incident, was it?
 2 A. I don't believe so, no.
 3 Q. No, thank you.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Horwell, I wanted to ask something to
 5 follow up on that if you don't mind.
 6 MR HORWELL: Yes, of course, please do.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You told us earlier that if the police
 8 gave an RVP, that's where you would expect people to go.
 9 Mr Berry took his own decision not to send people to
 10 that RVP, and where he sent him was further away than
 11 the Thompson Street one where you're saying would have
 12 been close enough.
 13 Was it the wrong decision of his, in your view, and
 14 he can give his own view in due course, was it the wrong
 15 decision not to send people to the police RVP?
 16 A. Obviously, sir, I've got hindsight and I have heard not
 17 as much as you and obviously I have heard different
 18 amounts of evidence: it is not a wrong decision, but
 19 I think Thompson Street would have been a better RVP,
 20 mainly because actually when you want to move forward,
 21 it's more helpful to be able to move forward a mile than
 22 3 miles. And so to — so talking about Thompson
 23 Street —
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, we are talking about the cathedral
 25 one, the nominated RVP.

48

1 A. Normally you would attend the RVP nominated. This is
 2 hindsight knowledge. I understand that Andy Berry was
 3 concerned that this was an MTFA and was the person
 4 nominating that RVP, doing that, following a full risk
 5 assessment about a potential terrorist .
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. But you've also told me in
 7 terrorist attacks it is all agreed the police take the
 8 lead and we follow.
 9 So here are the police, the FDO, taking the lead,
 10 nominating the cathedral car park, and the Fire Service
 11 just disregard it. Is that how it should operate?
 12 Actually, so did everybody else, so don't worry about
 13 that. Nobody went to that RVP, as it turned out.
 14 A. I was just thinking, if it was the FDO who nominated it,
 15 I would expect --
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think the answer to that is --
 17 MR HORWELL: Sir, the RVP of the cathedral car park was
 18 nominated by Inspector Smith, the Bronze commander in
 19 the City Room.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thanks for reminding me of that, and
 21 Mr de la Poer has just reminded me too.
 22 A. I would, with hindsight, and me not being under that
 23 pressure, find it very normal to go to the RVP nominated
 24 by the police. I suppose in this scenario, as an
 25 example, to hypothesise, if the RVP had come from the

49

1 Ambulance Service, not that we don't trust the Ambulance
 2 Service, in this scenario, and if we're thinking about
 3 MTFA, the police are who you need the information off.
 4 So I would expect you to go where the police ask you to
 5 go.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Yes.
 7 A. It is not outside of an officer's ability to challenge
 8 that and seek further information.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. Thank you, Mr Horwell.
 10 MR HORWELL: Thank you, sir.
 11 Second topic, Mr Argyle, Winchester Accord.
 12 You said in evidence yesterday that you ran
 13 a parallel exercise in Winchester Accord and I just want
 14 to ask you, please, to explain what you meant by that.
 15 It may purely be semantics, but the evidence has
 16 indicated that Winchester Accord was a live exercise
 17 over 3 days. There were three phases to it: the attack
 18 phase, which was during the course of the first night
 19 and went into the second day, and then there was
 20 a [REDACTED]. One exercise, one
 21 terrorist attack, one operation, but with those three
 22 phases to it.
 23 I did not understand what you meant yesterday by
 24 running a parallel exercise because all of the evidence
 25 indicates that this was one joined-up exercise. So

50

1 could you please explain that?
 2 A. Yes, and I think I said, when I gave evidence first,
 3 I didn't remember the exercise and this is by me going
 4 and looking at the information and recalling the
 5 information that came to Manchester Resilience Forum,
 6 and obviously I have subsequently been enlightened by
 7 hearing Inspector June Roby's evidence.
 8 So as far as I understand, an initial exercise,
 9 an opportunity taken to add on a second exercise with
 10 different -- a different organisation process. Clearly
 11 related and adjoined, but exercise running two separate
 12 ways.
 13 I don't think how long the second exercise ran for,
 14 the SCC exercise. I don't know if that ran for the
 15 whole 3 days, if it ran for one afternoon. I don't have
 16 that full knowledge.
 17 My main knowledge is of the debrief coming to the
 18 resilience forum.
 19 Q. Yes. That part of the exercise which concerned the SCC,
 20 it was all part of Winchester Accord, Mr Argyle. It
 21 wasn't run as a separate exercise, it was all part of
 22 Winchester Accord. But as you weren't involved in the
 23 exercise, perhaps we should leave this evidence to
 24 others. There's a witness to come who was directly
 25 involved in the SCC element of Winchester Accord, and

51

1 I'm sure you would accept she knows much better than you
 2 would as to what part that played in the exercise.
 3 A. I'm sure. I was advised and can see from the associated
 4 paper that GMRF were not involved in the live play
 5 exercise, but they were involved in the SCC part of the
 6 exercise.
 7 Q. I'll leave it -- I'll leave it to that witness. I'm
 8 sure she can give a full explanation.
 9 One further document, please, and if it could be put
 10 on the screen: {INQ004521/1}.
 11 Mr Argyle, again, I'm sure this is a document with
 12 which you are very familiar; is that right?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. If we can keep it on the screen just for a little
 15 longer, please, this is the -- a style of document with
 16 which we are very familiar. It's the College of
 17 Policing form for a structured debrief report, and we
 18 can see in the very first line this debrief was
 19 commissioned by the GMRF. The dates of Winchester
 20 Accord are given, 9 to 10 May, and the date of the
 21 debrief was 23 May.
 22 So if we can put that down for the moment, please.
 23 This debrief, having been commissioned by the GMRF,
 24 was obviously made available to the GMRF, Mr Argyle?
 25 A. Yes, it was reported to the GMRF, yes.

52

1 Q. And you read this debrief yourself?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. And you would have expected those who were concerned
 4 with this in the GMRF, they would also have read it?
 5 A. Yes, they all get the papers beforehand, read them
 6 before the meeting.
 7 Q. It follows from what you have said, Mr Argyle, that all
 8 of the areas for improvement that were set out in that
 9 debrief following Exercise Winchester Accord, they were
 10 all familiar to you, you all had sight of them. That
 11 includes you and all those on the GMRF who read this
 12 debrief report.
 13 A. Yes, they read those action points, yes.
 14 MR HORWELL: Sir, that's all I ask, thank you.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much, Mr Horwell.
 16 MR DE LA POER: Sir, next can I turn to Ms Ailes who is
 17 taking the lead on behalf of the families, and as I do
 18 so, can I just indicate that we've been going for
 19 80 minutes now, so if she could find a convenient moment
 20 around 11 o'clock for a break.
 21 Questions from MS AILES
 22 MS AILES: Mr Argyle, you were questioned last time for the
 23 families by Mr Atkinson. I'm very sorry he can't be
 24 here today. No disrespect is intended at all.
 25 Can I start by asking you very briefly indeed about

53

1 the MTFa capability that you were instrumental in
 2 developing.
 3 You've been asked about the dispute with the Fire
 4 Brigades Union. I can assure the chairman, I have no
 5 interest in asking you about the rights and wrongs of
 6 that dispute, but one supplementary question.
 7 Did the existence of that dispute in any way either
 8 delay or obstruct the process of getting the MTFa
 9 capability up and running to any extent?
 10 A. No.
 11 Q. Can we turn to Winchester Accord, please.
 12 You've made the point, and it was the part of your
 13 statement that was put to you by Mr Greaney on the last
 14 occasion, that you can only act on the information that
 15 you have and that GMRF can only act on the information
 16 that it's given.
 17 Can I say at the outset, I fully accept the
 18 irrefutable logic of the fact that you can't know things
 19 you haven't been informed about, so I'm asking this
 20 question with the benefit of hindsight.
 21 Knowing what we know now, don't we, we know that
 22 what happened in Winchester Accord is that a declaration
 23 of Operation Plato by the police was not communicated to
 24 partner agencies, both to the Fire and Rescue Service
 25 and the Ambulance Service, and that because the training

54

1 indicated they should not self-deploy, they didn't.
 2 You're aware now that that's the position?
 3 A. I'm aware now, yes.
 4 Q. And are you equally aware now that that ultimately
 5 appears to be an issue that goes back to the role of the
 6 force duty officer and the issue of the force duty
 7 officer becoming overloaded?
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. From the evidence of Inspector June Roby we heard
 10 effectively that it was well understood within the
 11 police that there was a risk that the FDO was
 12 overwhelmed and certainly she appreciated that
 13 personally.
 14 You, of course, aren't police officer. Was that
 15 something that you considered was understood within GMRF
 16 at the time?
 17 A. No. And personally, as a fire officer who may have
 18 needed to speak to the FDO on previous incident, I had
 19 no true understanding of how the FDO worked.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think she went even further than that.
 21 The risk of overloading, I thought it was recognised
 22 that it was inevitable that the FDO would be overloaded
 23 and therefore get as much done as you can before you're
 24 overloaded.
 25 MS AILES: And it would follow that you weren't aware of

55

1 that?
 2 A. No, I wasn't.
 3 Q. I'm conscious when I say GMRF, the resilience forum,
 4 that's a term that's used to refer to your group at the
 5 top and that there are then sub-groups.
 6 A. Yes.
 7 Q. Do you know now whether it was understood that the FDO
 8 was inevitably going to be overloaded within those
 9 sub-groups?
 10 A. I don't know that. Clearly police officers who work in
 11 multi-agency working attend some sub-groups, so those
 12 police officers may have known. I'm not aware that they
 13 shared that information with other agencies.
 14 Q. You were shown yesterday the summary of
 15 Operation Winchester Accord which is within the
 16 multi-agency debrief, the Operation Newtown debrief.
 17 A. Yes.
 18 Q. We can get it up if you would like to see it again, but
 19 I think you accepted that the information about
 20 Winchester Accord that was in there was lifted from the
 21 original debrief that you had seen, but you would
 22 certainly accept that that doesn't cover the full-scale
 23 of what we now know were the failings that Winchester
 24 Accord identified?
 25 A. No, and in the two debriefs there are more learning --

56

1 there were just two learning points. There were more
 2 learning points in the SCC exercise as well as the live
 3 play exercise, and as we just were shown, that SCC
 4 exercise ran for 6 hours and there were more learning
 5 points.
 6 Q. Absolutely, and I'm going to cherry-pick because I think
 7 if we go through everything that might have been
 8 a learning outcome from Winchester Accord, we will be
 9 here all day, and I know that we have another witness
 10 who we have to get through.
 11 There was some debate between you and Mr Atkinson on
 12 the last occasion about the fact that not everything
 13 that comes out of an exercise needs to go to the main
 14 forum.
 15 Do we agree that the learning that I have identified
 16 that should have come out of Winchester Accord or the
 17 problem, rather, is something that the main forum needed
 18 to know about?
 19 A. I think so, yes.
 20 Q. And do we agree that there have been other outcomes or
 21 other problems identified by learning exercises which
 22 have also not gone to the main forum but which
 23 potentially should have done?
 24 A. I would suspect so, yes.
 25 Q. Could we look, please, at {INQ040039/1}. This is the

57

1 tracker that was being used to implement the lessons
 2 learned. I know, and you said in your statement, that
 3 you weren't aware of it at the time because this was
 4 being done by the Resilience Development Group which is
 5 one of the sub-groups.
 6 A. Yes.
 7 Q. But you do reference it in your statement, so I take it
 8 that you've since seen it?
 9 A. Yes, and I was generically aware of the tracker, just
 10 not the specifics of this.
 11 Q. And I would like to ask you about the generics in the
 12 first instance, please.
 13 We see on the first page various bits of outlining,
 14 but the bit I want to take you to is the bit in colours.
 15 The priority of the action is allocated by the
 16 Resilience Development Group as either low, colour coded
 17 green, medium, coded amber, or high, coded red.
 18 Was there any process of bringing to the full
 19 forum's attention high-coded/red priority actions?
 20 A. As you've seen from the Winchester Accord debrief, the
 21 debriefs were brought to the resilience forum. The
 22 learning points identified and the resilience forum had
 23 the opportunity to challenge whether they agreed or
 24 disagreed with the learning points and whether they were
 25 being addressed.

58

1 I don't recall there being a specific mechanism to
 2 say red actions or amber actions on the tracker have
 3 a routine process to go to the resilience forum.
 4 Q. And the reason I'm asking you the question is you have
 5 said, and I don't dispute, that not everything could
 6 command the attention of a quarterly forum, which is
 7 also looking at fires, power outages, flooding, a whole
 8 host of other risks.
 9 We've agreed that there were matters that needed to
 10 go to that forum, but there doesn't seem to have been
 11 any process of highlighting for that forum's attention
 12 the particular matters that were so significant that
 13 they needed to be brought with a red warning light and
 14 a siren.
 15 A. I start off by agreeing with you, but the staff who work
 16 on RDG and other sub-groups are in very routine and
 17 regular contact with their senior staff and their
 18 representatives on the resilience forum. It is not —
 19 it is not a formal barrier. So people on RDG — as an
 20 example, and only as an example, I would see them very
 21 regularly and have the opportunity for them to raise
 22 things if they felt they needed to.
 23 Q. Would you accept with hindsight that that was perhaps an
 24 inappropriate degree of informality for something as
 25 important as this?

59

1 A. I mean, that is — the key method of dealing with this
 2 is that RDG — first, the actions are agreed from
 3 a debrief. They're analysed by RDG. The resilience
 4 forum look at those and either agree or disagree with
 5 them and charge, usually RDG, to progress the delivery
 6 of them according to the timelines allocated. So if
 7 they're red, it's — okay, we've seen the action needed,
 8 it has been coded as red, you know how you're going to
 9 deliver that, go away and deliver it.
 10 If they fail to deliver or come across a barrier in
 11 delivering it, they can come back to seek support.
 12 Q. Could I ask if we could go on to page 3, please,
 13 Mr Lopez. {INQ040039/3}. That's to say that we do have
 14 some actions there and they are not actions from
 15 Winchester Accord that do have priorities allocated.
 16 But if we can go on to {INQ040039/5} as an example,
 17 please, we see there a series of actions arising out of
 18 Winchester Accord to which no timescale and no priority
 19 appears to have been added. Would you take it from me
 20 that that's replicated across the rest of the
 21 recommendations arising from Winchester Accord?
 22 So it would appear from that that the process of
 23 identifying the high priority actions has not even been
 24 carried out; do you accept that?
 25 A. I take — I'm willing to take from you that that's the

60

1 case.
 2 Could you just show me -- is there a date that this
 3 was produced?
 4 Q. This is the one referred to in your statement. Of
 5 course, I accept that it's a rolling database, so we
 6 are -- no doubt it evolved. But the date of update that
 7 we have on {INQ040039/3}, if we go back to that, is
 8 22 June 2016.
 9 A. So I'm having to speculate to an extent, but what
 10 I expect that to be is the exercise has happened, the
 11 debrief has happened, put the learning points on the
 12 tracker. At the next meeting the RDG need to discuss
 13 them and prioritise them, and then they can colour code
 14 them. So they need to be put on the tracker for then
 15 the process to be done.
 16 Q. I see. We can take that down. Thank you, Mr Lopez.
 17 Operation Winchester Accord, the debrief itself, not
 18 the tracker we have just seen, was looked at by the full
 19 forum on 16 September 2016, and I would like to go back
 20 to what was signed off, in other words the document that
 21 Mr Horwell has just taken you to, {INQ012539/1}.
 22 He was asking you about the fact that this was one
 23 three-day live exercise. Just building on that, when we
 24 look at the debrief summary and the aim of the debrief,
 25 and I'm looking at the last line, the aim of the

61

1 structured debrief was to provide GMP with the means to
 2 debrief the exercise, specifically the activities in the
 3 SCC.
 4 If we then go over the page {INQ012539/2}, please --
 5 A. You can see that is a six-hour exercise, not a three-day
 6 exercise.
 7 Q. Could we go back to the previous page {INQ012539/1}.
 8 You're pointing out --
 9 A. The date of the event.
 10 Q. -- the 23.00, the 05.00?
 11 A. Yes.
 12 Q. Over the page {INQ012539/2}, please:
 13 "To test the SCC activation plan, were the plans
 14 used? Do the plans work? Are the protocols fit for
 15 purpose and are they easy to understand?"
 16 Do you have any understanding whether the first line
 17 of that implies that this was also the GMP debrief
 18 process?
 19 A. Could you just go through that point again.
 20 Q. Yes, the previous page {INQ012539/1}. So it's to
 21 provide GMP with a means to debrief the exercise?
 22 A. People design exercises and they have learned -- they
 23 have learning points they're trying to test or action
 24 points. So GMP have clearly written out, "These are
 25 learning points we want to test", and other partners can

62

1 say, "Can we put a learning point in as well?"
 2 So that would seem to me that GMP have decided they
 3 want to exercise the SCC, which of course then the rest
 4 of the GMRF will think, yes --
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Can I just make sure everyone remembers,
 6 because I'm not sure I do, probably, what the SCC is?
 7 It's the successor to the SCG; is that right?
 8 A. It's the strategic coordinating centre, so it is an
 9 enhancement. The SCG is, as you have come to
 10 understand, and typically with a bigger and long-running
 11 incident, rather than perhaps having one Gold commander,
 12 one Silver commander, you might need several people
 13 coming, they need desk space, and actually it was to
 14 take over effectively a whole floor of the police HQ.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And this deals with ongoing problems
 16 caused by a major incident, as it were?
 17 A. An example would be a wide area of flooding that might
 18 go on for days and days, and you need, really, officers
 19 to be there as their normal workplace.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 21 MS AILES: Sir, I'll finish with this document before we
 22 break, if I may.
 23 Could we go to {INQ012539/7}, please, Mr Lopez.
 24 Just by way of example, I would like to track
 25 through this document with one of the recommendations.

63

1 It's recommendation 1 which is:
 2 "SCG activation lists/processes need reviewing.
 3 Need another phone number for FDO."
 4 And the owner of that action is then Chief Inspector
 5 Booth. And there's a comment:
 6 "Consider putting FDO supervisors number in plans."
 7 If we could go back up in the document and look at
 8 what that recommendation is a response to, page 2,
 9 please {INQ012539/2}.
 10 So we can see the recommendation number in the third
 11 column, can't we, and we can see that recommendation 1
 12 is a response on this page to:
 13 "I felt I was informed late into the incident."
 14 On the next page, please {INQ012539/3}, two-thirds
 15 of the way down:
 16 "Never received a call-out."
 17 There is also a response to that. At the bottom of
 18 the page:
 19 "We self-activated but people were waiting for
 20 SCC/SCG."
 21 Over the page {INQ012539/4} again, please:
 22 "If the FDO is busy the person who answers the phone
 23 may not know what to do. We need a different route to
 24 the FDO for the setting up of the SCC."
 25 And then finally over the page {INQ012539/5}:

64

1 "Would have liked another phone number for the FDO
 2 as could hear the frustration from our Gold/Silver."
 3 Having looked at those, first of all, would you
 4 accept that the debrief report is addressing at least to
 5 some extent the question of the FDO being overwhelmed?
 6 A. Yes.
 7 Q. Would you further accept that the recommendations, "SCG
 8 activation lists/processes need reviewing", "Need
 9 another phone number for FDO", was not really an
 10 adequate response for the nature of that problem?
 11 A. I'm having to speculate slightly to say this debrief was
 12 about establishing the SCC. So people, even if they
 13 knew the fuller picture, were not talking about,
 14 "I wasn't mobilised to the incident, I wasn't sent to
 15 the incident, the FDO didn't tell the Fire Service,
 16 didn't tell the Ambulance Service". This would be
 17 people who were requested to go to the SCC or SCG,
 18 saying — some of them saying they weren't called.
 19 So yes, they haven't got the full picture, but what
 20 they're telling this debrief is that the FDO — some of
 21 them are saying, "The FDO didn't contact me", or,
 22 "I couldn't contact them", and, "We need another phone
 23 number to get through", which are — I accept would
 24 indicate a difficulty in communication with the FDO.
 25 Q. And would indicate a wider problem than just the need

65

1 for a phone number?
 2 A. With hindsight, yes. The people doing the debrief talk
 3 about the challenge. An option is suggested as the
 4 solution, and people seem to be suggesting, yes, that
 5 will solve the problem.
 6 Q. Certainly the question whether it would solve the
 7 problem was not one that the resilience forum subjected
 8 to any analysis?
 9 A. It was — to my knowledge it wasn't tested that that
 10 solution was adequate.
 11 Q. And would you say that as the chair and one of the
 12 people who received the paperwork for the resilience
 13 forum, the documentation that you were sent was not
 14 clear enough for you to be able to identify that problem
 15 from what you were given?
 16 A. It might be helpful to look at the minutes because
 17 there's a little bit of talk about what was discussed in
 18 the minutes, but yes, a challenge is that even on this
 19 debrief, which is looking at only one aspect of the
 20 exercise, there are quite a lot of action points and to
 21 have those fully and intelligently explained to the
 22 group, I can — may not happen to fully understand the
 23 gravity of the risk of some of those action points.
 24 Q. I'm happy to take you to the minutes if you would like
 25 to go to them. I was going to take you back to the

66

1 tracker which is {INQ040039/11}.
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. You promised us a break at some
 3 stage. Do you want to do it now?
 4 MS AILES: If I could just do this one document, we will do
 5 it after that.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Fine.
 7 MS AILES: Do you see — so it's entry 28 right in the
 8 middle of the page. 28 in the left — hand column. So the
 9 recommendation is:
 10 "SCG activation lists/processes need reviewing.
 11 Need another phone number for FDO."
 12 In the next column:
 13 "Consider putting FDO supervisors' numbers in
 14 plans."
 15 7 December 2016:
 16 "FDO."
 17 And then there's:
 18 "A number to be included in the plan. Complete."
 19 So do you accept from that that the action that was
 20 taken was simply to put in a phone number?
 21 A. Yes.
 22 Q. No action appears to have been taken in relation to
 23 wider SCG activation lists/processes?
 24 A. There was nothing clear from that, no.
 25 MS AILES: Thank you. If we could take a break now, sir.

67

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. Quarter of an hour. Thank you.
 2 (11.14 am)
 3 (A short break)
 4 (11.32 am)
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Ms Ailes.
 6 MS AILES: We have dealt with the response to Winchester
 7 Accord. I'm going to move to debriefs and processes
 8 following 22 May.
 9 You outlined those with Mr de la Poer yesterday.
 10 You personally were involved in speaking to individual
 11 firefighters. That then led to the GMRF task and finish
 12 group. There was then the multi-agency debrief and then
 13 there was — I think is it Arena Learning Outcomes
 14 Group, ALOG, which dealt with the responses to Kerslake
 15 and the outcomes of the debriefs.
 16 You're looking perplexed. Have I missed anything
 17 out?
 18 A. No — slightly. I would just say that the task and
 19 finish group wasn't initiated because I spoke to the
 20 firefighters: it was more from information from
 21 partners — other partners as well on the night.
 22 Q. It's all of it?
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Ms Ailes, while we are doing that, do
 24 you mind if I clarify this?
 25 You have indicated that there were notes made of

68

1 your interview with Kerslake and you didn't get a chance
2 to check them afterwards.

3 For the purposes of my review, is there anything
4 significant in what you're recorded as saying to
5 Kerslake that you disagree with, either because you
6 didn't say it or you thought better of it or whatever?

7 A. No, I don't think so. I think it's just that
8 I typically speak quite fast sometimes and for
9 a notetaker to keep up — and I think that's why on one
10 of the previous issues they abutted two issues that were
11 separate.

12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's perfectly all right, but as long
13 as in general terms you agree with the record of your
14 interview. Thank you.

15 MS AILES: That's obviously a lot of debrief and lessons
16 learned processes and in fact we're still in another
17 one, a lot more than there would be following an
18 exercise, considerably more?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Partly because of the public interest in learning
21 lessons after an actual attack, partly no doubt because
22 of the extent of public scrutiny, and partly because
23 there may be more lessons that can be learned from
24 a real event than from any training exercise. But
25 allowing for all of that, what I'm interested in is what

69

1 can be done to improve the lessons learned processes so
2 that we don't get to a stage where it's, sadly, a real
3 tragedy before we're going through so many processes of
4 identifying what the real lessons are. Does that make
5 sense?

6 A. It does, yes.

7 Q. In that connection are you aware of a statement that was
8 made by Mr Bailey, who I think was your successor as the
9 chair of the Greater Manchester Resilience Forum?

10 A. I have seen one — I have seen a statement from him,
11 yes.

12 Q. It should have been in the pack of documents.

13 A. Yes, I have seen one. If he's done more, I haven't seen
14 the others.

15 Q. It's in response to the inquiry's request, as he
16 outlines in that statement, for a brief statement from
17 GMRF that sets out the changes that have been made at
18 GMRF as a result of their own, that's the resilience
19 forum's, enquiries into their performance on 22 May 2017
20 or following internal or external investigations.

21 Lessons learned by the resilience forum would no
22 doubt be a process that would span your period as chair
23 after the attack and then him taking over from you. I'm
24 conscious that it's his statement, not yours, but at the
25 moment he's not due to give evidence, so can we see how

70

1 far we can get in terms of the lessons that the
2 resilience forum has learned?

3 To summarise the response that Mr Bailey gave to
4 that request, he pointed out that the inquiry's request
5 was for changes that have been made as a result of
6 enquiries into GMRF's performance on 22 May. He made
7 the point, fairly, that the resilience forum is not
8 itself a responder, and he then proceeded principally to
9 outline changes that have been made in terms of the
10 workings of police, fire and ambulance, both
11 individually and together, which is important.

12 As I have said, I want to focus on the process of
13 how the resilience forum could have done better in terms
14 of it learning lessons from events or from exercises and
15 what changes have been made in relation to that.

16 Now, I had, I confess, thought that Mr Bailey hadn't
17 addressed this, but having heard some of your evidence
18 to Mr de la Poer yesterday, it may be that I have —
19 I wasn't right about that. So could I just ask that we
20 look at Mr Bailey's statement. It's {INQ035430/1}, and
21 it is paragraphs 26 and 27 which are at {INQ035430/10}.

22 He's been talking about what was done in response to
23 the arena attack itself. He then goes on to say:

24 "In light of all the work done around multi-agency
25 learning, in 2020 the resilience forum further refined

71

1 its structures so as to ensure that any relevant
2 multi-agency lessons are dealt with in as efficient,
3 comprehensive and accountable a manner as possible. In
4 the revised structure, the ROG..."

5 Is that a successor of the Resilience Development
6 Group?

7 A. I'm not certain because it's after my time. Clearly it
8 will describe what that is earlier in the document, I'm
9 sure.

10 Q. "The ROG oversees a number of other GMRF groups,
11 including [what appears to be a delivery group]. That
12 then establishes individual task and finish groups as
13 required. That oversees the commissioning group for
14 exercising and training."

15 Which again appears to be a successor organisation
16 similar to the one that was in place at the time:

17 "This structure allows proper oversight of the
18 process by which the relevant lessons are implemented
19 and embedded into multi-agency training programmes."

20 First of all, can I ask, do you know whether he is
21 talking there specifically about learning from the arena
22 attacks or whether he is talking about lessons learned
23 from exercising more generally?

24 A. I would have to re-read the document. I would expect
25 that that is more generally and continuing.

72

1 Q. Are you in a position to enlighten us at all, bearing in
2 mind that these are changes introduced in 2020, as to
3 what the position now is in terms of lessons being
4 learned?
5 A. No.
6 Q. In the Operation Newtown debrief there is a process
7 which is described. It's described both by Mr Bailey
8 and indeed the passage from Mr Pilling's statement that
9 you quote, as:
10 "A quality assurance process over the debriefs from
11 the Manchester Arena attack."
12 That's how Operation Newtown is described.
13 Would you agree with me that the resilience forum
14 was not carrying out an independent quality assurance
15 process over debriefs prior to 22 May?
16 A. I mean -- it wouldn't be independent because they would
17 be effectively, if they were doing that, quality
18 assuring their own work. It goes to -- when you
19 start -- the resilience forum is the partners, and if
20 they're going to review the work of the partners, you
21 effectively are reviewing yourself unless you
22 commissioned somebody external to do that for you. But
23 I don't think that was the main point of your question.
24 Q. No, what I'm interested in is a process whereby people
25 collectively look at whether the debrief process has

73

1 pulled out all the issues that have emerged from an
2 exercise and all of the ways in which changes need to be
3 made to implement that.
4 A. I'd say there was a structure that was not -- that
5 I wouldn't stand behind as being incredibly rigorous.
6 There was a process, as you've heard, for the debrief to
7 happen, for -- of incidents or exercises, for those to
8 go on a tracker, and those debriefs to be brought to the
9 resilience forum.
10 That allows the resilience forum to challenge, and
11 to say, do we agree that those are the learning points,
12 and there is an opportunity to challenge that. There
13 was a process. I totally accept you could have a more
14 rigorous process.
15 Q. Was there any change to the process of scrutinising
16 lessons learned from exercises, as opposed to from the
17 attack itself, after the attack took place and under
18 your chairmanship?
19 A. Yes, in that, as you've already mentioned, the ALOG.
20 The ALOG was set up, as you rightly said, to follow
21 through the learning points from the incident, from the
22 attack. But then what happened was new other learning
23 points were added to the ALOG, and there was
24 a discussion about are we only doing learning from the
25 Manchester Arena attack or subsequently other -- it was

74

1 thought this is a useful and quality process, can we add
2 in new actions, and they started to be.
3 Q. So the A of ALOG obviously stands for arena. So in its
4 original conception it was entirely arena learning?
5 A. Yes.
6 Q. What was it that the ALOG added that didn't exist
7 before?
8 A. I would -- we -- a higher level of rank, I would call
9 that, in all organisations overseeing the tracker, and
10 then that brought extra resource and extra ability to
11 progress actions within organisations.
12 Q. So previously the tracker would have been something that
13 would have been looked at by the Resilience Development
14 Group?
15 A. Yes, and sometimes by the Exercising Coordinating Group,
16 but they were very similar people.
17 Q. Yes. It's replaced with the Arena Learning Outcomes
18 Group. That's then doing the same thing with a similar
19 tracker, but with a slightly higher rank of attendance.
20 That is what (overspeaking) --
21 A. I would say not replaced, but added to, because the
22 resilience development carried on. But as they would
23 get some new actions in the existing process, they would
24 say can they be added to the ALOG -- rather than us
25 carrying on owning them, the ALOG is there, and it seems

75

1 to be working, can we put the new actions on to the
2 ALOG's list.
3 Q. One of the outcomes of multi-agency debrief was that
4 there was an issue around the meaning and declaration of
5 Operation Plato. That obviously is part of national
6 policy, it's not local Greater Manchester policy.
7 The outcome of the debrief was that that was fed
8 back to the Home Office to look at, which it has done,
9 no doubt in conjunction with learning from other attacks
10 in 2017.
11 You say in your fourth statement at paragraph 7 --
12 and do tell me if you'd like us to look at it -- but the
13 comment that you make is that:
14 "Issues are more difficult to resolve in respect of
15 national policy than they are when it's simply a matter
16 of coordinating local agencies."
17 That's easy to understand. Were efforts made prior
18 to this attack to raise issues at a national level, in
19 particular with the Home Office, who I think were not
20 a part of the forum?
21 A. About?
22 Q. Anything. I mean, you've raised the issue that
23 disagreement is more difficult to resolve in respect of
24 national policy. I take it that there's experiences
25 you've had that underlie that.

76

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: My understanding was this question was
2 actually directed at the meaning of Operation Plato and
3 disagreements about that, which is Home Office policy,
4 and the suggestion is that there's not sufficient local
5 input into that sort of policy for people to understand
6 the difficulties that are caused on the ground. So was
7 that true in your view on Operation Plato? I hope
8 that's the question.

9 MS AILES: Yes.

10 A. Yes, because I have other examples that are not
11 relevant. As I gave evidence earlier, when we were
12 asked to develop capability within 8 weeks, different
13 cities were doing that together in a tri-service way,
14 but we would come together as -- we came together, the
15 areas came together, to help develop policy, and that
16 continued as the capability spread.

17 But the policy and doctrine started to be developed.
18 Of course, people were consulted and you gave feedback,
19 but as a policy and doctrine is owned to greater level
20 with more potential consultees, of course you give your
21 consultation feedback and it may or may not be taken on
22 board.

23 A pertinent example that I specifically remember,
24 when we were at that stage, in those early stages when
25 we were having discussions about attaining joint

77

1 situational awareness and dynamic risk assessment,
2 tri-service meeting of different cities together,
3 I remember asking, "Where will fire and ambulance" --
4 but, "Where will we get our information from to do that,
5 tri-service information to establish the limits of
6 exploitation, to establish zones", etc? And the answer
7 I was given: you will get that from the firearms Silver.

8 This is historical. This was -- we're talking
9 probably in 2011 or 2012. I remember raising that in
10 the room, saying we are not the experts, the firearms
11 officers in this room are experts, from my perception,
12 will I -- if I was that officer, will I get to speak to
13 that firearms Silver when I arrive or soon after, and
14 they said, "No, absolutely not, you may never see the
15 firearms Silver".

16 And we would raise that point continually, to say
17 I don't know where we'll get that information from and
18 the practicality is we'll seek the information on the
19 ground from the police officer that's in front of us or
20 seek from that person, "Where can I get this
21 information?"

22 But the doctrines continued to imply where you would
23 get that information from that seemed unrealistic.

24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: As was indeed true in May 2017. It was
25 still there. It was up to the fire officer to actually

78

1 say whether it would be safe for people to go in there
2 or not, whereas actually the logical person is the armed
3 police officer.

4 A. And then an associated point is it's highly relevant in
5 this case if it's highly relevant in lots of
6 multi-agency instances. My view of why we have NILOs is
7 they had -- it's to share information on how different
8 agencies work, to have a better understanding than
9 perhaps some commanders might to help them with what
10 another agency can do for you and vice versa. But of
11 course one of the reasons that they had to get [REDACTED]
12 [REDACTED] is to be trusted
13 in conversations, etc, about sensitive information the
14 police held.

15 But my view, why police and -- sorry, why fire,
16 I can't speak for ambulance -- often the information we
17 need in critical situations is from the police and the
18 NILO, or an officer, is often seeking that information
19 from a police officer who is incredibly busy doing
20 something, and I have several times suggested should the
21 police at a major incident allocate a NILO whose job it
22 is not to do anything else other than to communicate
23 with relevant agencies.

24 That is why fire have it. That's why ambulance have
25 it. And that's why we are often seeking the information

79

1 off other agencies.

2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And the answer to that was, when you put
3 it forward?

4 A. On several occasions, it's not feasible and probably too
5 expensive.

6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: But they never said to you the FDO
7 fulfils that function?

8 A. I was fully aware that's the person who a NILO typically
9 would go to. And I must admit, as I said in one of my
10 earlier answers, I didn't have a true understanding of
11 the FDO's full role.

12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.

13 MS AILES: Those are really valuable individual examples,
14 but is what they are examples of this? Where there was
15 an issue with a national policy, even in your very
16 senior role as assistant fire officer for the local Fire
17 and Rescue Service, it was very difficult for you to do
18 anything about challenges that you faced as a result of
19 the national policy?

20 A. Yes --

21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I wonder how fair this is. You were
22 given the opportunity to raise these issues. You think
23 you are right about them, but obviously someone
24 disagreed.

25 A. Yes, and there are -- two or three issues I would like

80

1 to tell you. One which is definitely operationally
 2 sensitive .
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You had better not tell me then. We
 4 will find it out from you in some other way.
 5 A. Okay.
 6 MS AILES: You said two or three --
 7 A. Well, the others were --
 8 Q. Is there one that wasn't operationally sensitive?
 9 A. They were operationally sensitive at the time.
 10 I believe they wouldn't be now, because the issue I was
 11 raising was historical and changed.
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Well. Let's see how we go and we will
 13 stop you if it's looking dangerous. Right. Off you go.
 14 A. When we were told at those initial stages, for example,
 15 to get this capability up in 8 weeks, and the capability
 16 was described, what it was to achieve, and that did
 17 change as time went on, one of the pressures -- we need
 18 to feedback, you need to tell us you've got this
 19 capability in place so we can tell the Prime Minister
 20 it's available, and I would ensure I fed back: we have
 21 now got in place a small limited capability that does
 22 not match the planning assumption.
 23 And something similar happened whether we developed
 24 a limited firefighting capability. It seemed the answer
 25 wanted was: we have a capability, not --

81

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We have an adequate capability?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. I understand that. Thank you.
 4 MS AILES: Just so that I understand what you're saying
 5 about that, is the point that you're making that you
 6 felt that from Central Government there was potentially
 7 an element of wanting the window--dressing and the full
 8 capability could follow on afterwards?
 9 A. I wouldn't -- I think it would be unfair to say
 10 window--dressing. I think it was a point of development,
 11 resource and time. Even if I'd been given more
 12 resource, I would have struggled to do much more in that
 13 time, but I didn't want to say: we have now got a full
 14 capability in place, the problem is solved.
 15 MS AILES: Thank you. Those are my questions.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 17 MR DE LA POER: Can I now turn to Mr Warnock QC on behalf of
 18 GMCA.
 19 MR WARNOCK: On reflection, I don't have any questions.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much. I'm very grateful.
 21 MR DE LA POER: Mr Argyle, that concludes our questioning.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm really grateful for the insights you
 23 have given me. Obviously there's a good deal arising
 24 from your evidence, so thank you for that.
 25 MR DE LA POER: Sir, the next step is for me to read

82

1 a statement. That's going to take, I estimate, about
 2 15 minutes. So it may be that Mr Argyle will wish to
 3 leave us rather than remain in the witness box
 4 throughout that.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: If you wish to leave, which I'm sure you
 6 will want to do, just get up and walk out.
 7 A. Thank you.
 8 (Pause)
 9 Witness statement of TIMOTHY JOHN SUTER (read)
 10 MR DE LA POER: Sir, the witness statement that I'm going to
 11 read is the first witness statement of Timothy John
 12 Suter, the solicitor to the inquiry. It is dated
 13 8 April 2021. It appears at {INQ041010}. It was
 14 disclosed to core participants as part of tranche 114 on
 15 14 April 2021.
 16 Before I begin reading it, sir, I should make clear
 17 a number of aspects in relation to it.
 18 The first is that this witness statement captures in
 19 summary form the response to the attack by a number of
 20 ShowSec personnel, so it will be describing the actions
 21 of name ShowSec personnel after the detonation.
 22 Next, in so describing, it will give some
 23 information in relation to the nature of injuries that
 24 those that they were assisting had received and we, that
 25 is to say the inquiry legal team, can well see how that

83

1 is capable of causing distress.
 2 Thirdly, that some of those who responded are
 3 witnesses from whom the inquiry has already heard in the
 4 course of chapter 7. A policy decision was taken not to
 5 adduce this evidence from them at that time, given the
 6 focus of chapter 7, but those who are listening should
 7 be aware that there will be names that they recognise
 8 and they may already have formed opinions about those
 9 people in respect of the duties that they were
 10 discharging before the detonation.
 11 So with all of that preamble, can I just pause for
 12 a moment, sir, in case there is anyone who does not want
 13 to hear what I'm about to say for any of the reasons
 14 that I have identified. If I just give a moment for
 15 people to make their arrangements and again repeat that
 16 I think it will take me about 15 minutes to read.
 17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So you're adducing this evidence in
 18 order to present some balance as to what happened over
 19 the night as far as ShowSec employees were concerned.
 20 It may talk of what ShowSec employees did after the
 21 blast, who may, during questioning and things like that,
 22 have been criticised for their performance before the
 23 blast took place.
 24 MR DE LA POER: Indeed, sir.
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And that may be something which some

84

1 people actually don't want to hear.
 2 MR DE LA POER: Yes, absolutely. So it is being adduced
 3 because it forms a proper part of chapter 10. It is an
 4 essential part of the narrative because it captures the
 5 actions of people who are not emergency responders.
 6 We, the inquiry legal team, have taken the view that
 7 there is no need to hear from these witnesses live, but
 8 that doesn't mean that what they did doesn't help tell
 9 part of the story and the witness statement will be
 10 published on the inquiry website in the usual way.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 12 MR DE LA POER: I hope that that is sufficient time for
 13 everyone to make their arrangements, and the witness
 14 statement begins:
 15 "I am instructed on behalf of the chairman,
 16 Sir John Saunders, as a solicitor to the inquiry into
 17 the 22 deaths arising from the bombing at the Manchester
 18 Arena on 22 May 2017. The inquiry's terms of reference
 19 require the chairman to investigate the emergency
 20 response to the arena attack, including the operational
 21 response of relevant emergency services, those
 22 contracted to provide first aid to concertgoers, the
 23 operator of the arena venue, and relevant security
 24 providers.
 25 "In order to assist the chairman and all core

85

1 participants, this statement is provided to summarise
 2 statements obtained from ShowSec International Limited
 3 staff who were working at the arena on 22 May 2017 and
 4 assisted with the emergency response.
 5 "This summary is not intended to be an exhaustive
 6 summary of all of the evidence provided by each witness,
 7 but rather to provide an overview of the efforts made by
 8 ShowSec staff who assist with the emergency response in
 9 the aftermath of the bombing.
 10 "All materials relied upon in this statement are
 11 held by the inquiry and are set out below by reference
 12 to their unique identifier.
 13 "ShowSec evidence.
 14 "David Middleton was a ShowSec safety steward
 15 supervisor. On 24 May 2017, Mr Middleton provided
 16 a handwritten witness statement {INQ011814/1} to set out
 17 his recollection of the events in the City Room. In
 18 that account he describes 'an enormous bang and a flash
 19 '
 20 "He says he was knocked to the ground by the
 21 explosion, picked up by a colleague, and dragged back
 22 into the arena. Mr Middleton's statement continues by
 23 explaining:
 24 "'We then started to divert people away from the
 25 City Room doors. When we had diverted people away,

86

1 I went back to the City Room doors to see if I could
 2 assist. I spoke to two males who had leg injuries.
 3 I advised them medics would be with them shortly. The
 4 police then demanded we left the building. We had been
 5 advised to make our way to a rendezvous point. On my
 6 way I met a number of people who were very distressed.
 7 I sat and held hands and talked to as many people as
 8 possible.'
 9 "In a witness statement dated 18 January 2018,
 10 Mr Middleton, at {INQ006465/1}, further detailed his
 11 recollection of the events of 22 May 2017. In
 12 particular he described how he heard:
 13 "'A female saying "Help me".'
 14 "And he made his way directly to her. He sat on her
 15 right-hand side and held her hand while he reassured her
 16 for 'what felt like a couple of minutes' before armed
 17 police told them to get out.
 18 "Mr Middleton also recalls seeing a white man in his
 19 30s with obvious leg injuries asking for help. He was
 20 trying to stand up but his leg clearly wasn't supporting
 21 him and he just fell back down. Mr Middleton apologised
 22 and told him he could not help him as he'd been told to
 23 get out.
 24 Finally, Mr Middleton finally refers to an encounter
 25 whilst on his way to the rendezvous point:

87

1 "'I saw a young girl on the pavement having a panic
 2 attack. She was with another young girl. They appeared
 3 to be 13/14 years old and both were his hysterical.
 4 I stopped to assist the girls whilst Dan carried on.
 5 I got a souvenir bag to help the girl breathe normally.'
 6 "Jordan Beak was a ShowSec supervisor. Mr Beak
 7 provided a handwritten witness statement dated
 8 30 May 2017 {INQ011960/1} in which he detailed helping
 9 a woman into a stairwell. He also recalled seeing
 10 a female with leg bandages. He said:
 11 "'[He] held her hand, calmed her down and just spoke
 12 to her.'
 13 "Later on Mr Beak described, with the help of
 14 several others and using a bike rack, carrying her out
 15 across the bridge and down some stairs and giving her
 16 a drink of water.
 17 "Mr Beak also provided a GMP witness statement dated
 18 22 June 2017 {INQ006521/1} in which he described how he:
 19 "' ... grabbed a load of T-shirts from the
 20 merchandise stall to cover people up and for dressings
 21 to be applied.'
 22 "Alongside a police officer he then:
 23 "' ... began treating the children by stopping
 24 injuries from bleeding as themselves could.'
 25 "Mr Beak and the police officer:

88

1 " ... went back into the City Room in order to treat
2 people after being in possession of a quantity of first
3 aid kits.'

4 "As he mentioned in his earlier statement, Mr Beak
5 also records seeing an adult female with an injury to
6 her right arm and leg. He bandaged the wounds and
7 stayed with her to reassure her, giving her some water
8 and having a general conversation to take her mind away
9 from what had happened, later assisting in placing the
10 female on a barrier and carrying her across the bridge
11 into the station.

12 "Daniel Perry was part of the ShowSec operations
13 team. Mr Perry provided a handwritten witness statement
14 dated 24 May 2017 {INQ011819/1}. In his witness
15 statement Mr Perry described assisting his colleague
16 after the blast as well as getting a staff line in to
17 divert people away from the arena.

18 "Thomas Rigby was the ShowSec operations manager.
19 In his GMP witness statement dated 16 January 2018
20 {INQ024776/1}, he described instructing a colleague to
21 'get all medical staff to the City Rooms' whilst he got
22 hold of his security supervisors on the ground and
23 instructed them to put a divert line in place at the
24 City Room and not to allow any public go that way and to
25 get all supervisors there as well.

89

1 "Mr Rigby provided a further statement on
2 12 November 2019 {INQ025754/1}. In this statement
3 Mr Rigby said that he sent out a general instruction for
4 all ShowSec staff in the City Room area with radios and
5 all ShowSec senior supervisors to switch radio channels,
6 and requested radio silence unless it was a priority
7 message relating to the emergency.

8 "Mr Rigby also made the decisions to have the
9 barriers removed so that people could go down the steps
10 and on to the centre floor of the auditorium, and
11 instructed any first –aid trained staff to go to the
12 City Room area to assist the injured.

13 "Megan Balmer was a part-time ShowSec steward.
14 Ms Balmer provided a handwritten witness statement dated
15 24 May 2017 {INQ011825/1} and a GMP witness statement
16 dated 10 October 2017 {INQ007196/1}.

17 "In her witness statements Ms Balmer described
18 releasing sets of doors in stages to try and reduce the
19 volume of people rushing out and had divers in place up
20 near to the City Room to prevent anyone going that way.
21 Ms Balmer also recalled providing assistance to various
22 casualties on the evening of the attack, including
23 redressing the arm of an injured female who was in the
24 stairwell 7 area. Ms Balmer also led this female out
25 via the bridge into the station, dressing a head wound

90

1 of a male casualty, speaking to another female casualty,
2 trying to keep her responsive, dressing the head of
3 a female casualty with some padding to soak up the blood
4 and bandaging it to keep it in place to staunch the
5 bleeding, assisting a female casualty that had
6 a tourniquet applied to her left leg which needed
7 tightening, which Ms Balmer did for her.

8 "When a male paramedic and Ms Balmer lifted this
9 casualty, Ms Balmer freed her right leg, and could see
10 it was bleeding heavily. She dressed this with
11 a medipad and the medic asked her to apply another
12 tourniquet to her right leg, which Ms Balmer did using
13 some ribbon from her own belt.

14 "She helped by applying pressure to wounds to
15 another female casualty's leg, Ms Balmer was talking
16 with her while applying pressure to her leg injuries.
17 She also assisted a colleague who was comforting
18 a female aged in her late 20s/early 30s. Ms Balmer held
19 her head and stroked her hair to try and comfort her
20 while medics treated her leg injuries.

21 "Usaama Irfan was a ShowSec steward. Mr Irfan
22 provided a GMP witness statement dated 14 October 2017
23 {INQ006687/1} in which he described telling people to
24 keep calm and exit through the door that he and his
25 colleagues were directing them to. He also conversed

91

1 with an older man and his grandson and asked the
2 grandson to carry on talking to his grandad.

3 "Steven Drummond was a ShowSec floor supervisor.
4 Mr Drummond provided a handwritten witness statement
5 dated 24 May 2017, {INQ011856/1}, and a GMP witness
6 statement dated 17 September 2017 {INQ005521/1}.

7 "In his statements, Mr Drummond described helping
8 people evacuate by showing people how to get to the back
9 gate. Mr Drummond also recalled taking a medical
10 stretcher to 'the disabled platform... for a little girl
11 with her parents.'

12 "Mr Drummond detailed spreading across one corridor,
13 making sure all his staff left, whilst some public also
14 followed, including a young child, who Mr Drummond had
15 to assist out.

16 "Akeel Butt was a ShowSec supervisor. Mr Butt
17 provided a handwritten witness statement dated
18 24 May 2017 {INQ011830/1}, as well as a GMP witness
19 statement on 19 September 2017 {INQ006051/1}.

20 "Following the blast, Mr Butt recalled that he began
21 to shout around, 'Stop pushing, walk, stay calm', for at
22 least 5 to 10 minutes.

23 "Mr Butt also referred to going around and
24 collecting people's personal effects that had been lost
25 and dropped in the rush, and later checking up on two

92

1 males on the concourse near the management suite doors.
 2 "Mr Butt explained that he helped anyone he could,
 3 tearing down some boards on the walls to make makeshift
 4 stretchers, covering bodies, moving bodies, and carrying
 5 those who couldn't walk from the concourse across the
 6 bridge and down the staircase to the waiting ambulances.
 7 "Shannon Barlow was a ShowSec steward. Ms Barlow
 8 filled out a GMP questionnaire dated 27 October 2017
 9 {INQ022412/1} in which she described assisting people
 10 trying to get out following the attack.
 11 "Saeed Hussein was a ShowSec SIA steward.
 12 Mr Hussein provided a handwritten witness statement
 13 dated 24 May 2017 {INQ011885/1}.
 14 "In his statement Mr Hussein described how he moved
 15 the stage left to help other staff to form a line to
 16 stop people running backstage, and later helped with
 17 a female having a panic attack, physically moving her
 18 down to safety to Whiskey Control.
 19 "Mr Hussein also referred to helping a medic with
 20 applying pressure to a wound of a male with a head
 21 injury.
 22 "Gemma Lawler was a part-time ShowSec steward.
 23 Ms Lawlor provided a handwritten witness statement dated
 24 24 May 2017 {INQ011805/1} and a GMP witness statement
 25 dated 18 September 2017 {INQ025063/1}.

93

1 "Within these statements Ms Lawler describes getting
 2 the majority of the public out of the blocks and out of
 3 the Trinity Way exit as quickly as possible. Ms Lawler
 4 then helped a colleague with a female casualty, got her
 5 a chair from inside the arena bowl, and just tried to
 6 comfort her and calm her down.
 7 "Jacob Critchley was a ShowSec steward.
 8 Mr Critchley completed a questionnaire for ShowSec
 9 witnesses {INQ025654/1} in which he referred to getting
 10 another ShowSec staff member to help a man with blood on
 11 him. Mr Critchley kept this casualty company and asked
 12 if he was okay."
 13 Sir, the statement concludes with a statement of
 14 truth and a signature and, as I have said, is dated
 15 8 April 2021.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you. Would you like a little time
 17 before the next witness?
 18 MR DE LA POER: Yes, sir. The next witness will be
 19 Mr Neil Gaskell. If I could have a few moments to speak
 20 to him, please, that would be welcomed.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Tell me when you're ready. Thank you.
 22 (12.14 pm)
 23 (A short break)
 24 (12.34 pm)
 25 MR DE LA POER: Sir, the gentlemen in the witness box is

94

1 Mr Gaskell. May we begin by having him sworn, please.
 2 MR NEIL GASKELL (sworn)
 3 Questions from MR DE LA POER
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you very much. Do take a seat,
 5 Mr Gaskell.
 6 A. Thanks.
 7 MR DE LA POER: So we will start, please, with your full
 8 name.
 9 A. Neil Gaskell.
 10 Q. Mr Gaskell, did you join GMFRS in May of 1989?
 11 A. That's correct.
 12 Q. And in 2005 were you promoted to the role of station
 13 officer?
 14 A. That's correct.
 15 Q. Which in modern terminology is a watch manager?
 16 A. Correct.
 17 Q. After a period in headquarters followed by a period in
 18 the Wigan borough, did you transfer to the Contingency
 19 Planning Unit in 2009?
 20 A. That's correct.
 21 Q. And did you remain at the Contingency Planning Unit for
 22 the remainder of your career?
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. And that career having ended with your retirement in
 25 May 2019?

95

1 A. That's correct.
 2 Q. We will come to this at the end of my questioning, but
 3 just to capture your career in summary at this stage,
 4 for the last 18 months of your career, namely between
 5 August 2017 and March 2019, were you seconded to the
 6 Home Office?
 7 A. That's correct: 21, sir.
 8 Q. Thank you. So we're going to turn now to the first
 9 substantive matter that I wish to ask you about, namely
 10 the development of the MTFA capability at Greater
 11 Manchester Fire and Rescue Service. Would you agree
 12 with me when I say that you have given us a good deal of
 13 information in your witness statement about that
 14 development?
 15 A. Yes, sir.
 16 Q. What I'm going to seek to do with you is to summarise
 17 it, but as there is a role which is relevant to the MTFA
 18 capability, we should begin by acknowledging, shouldn't
 19 we, Mr Gaskell, that the NILO role was a role that came
 20 into being in 2009; is that right?
 21 A. Correct, within Greater Manchester. It was established,
 22 I think, in 2001 in other regions of the UK, but 2009 in
 23 Greater Manchester.
 24 Q. And as we will see, when the MTFA capability came to be
 25 developed, the NILO role was identified as having a part

96

1 in that structure?
 2 A. That's correct.
 3 Q. So to that MTFA capability, which we've already heard
 4 introduced by Mr Argyle, but let's summarise it
 5 together. In 2011 was the scheme introduced?
 6 A. Yes.
 7 Q. In Greater Manchester?
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. And at the time that it was being developed to the point
 10 of it going live, did you become the MTFA lead?
 11 A. That's correct.
 12 Q. And in hierarchical terms, whilst you were the MTFA
 13 lead, was Mr Argyle the person providing strategic
 14 leadership on that project in his capacity as assistant
 15 chief fire officer?
 16 A. That's correct.
 17 Q. We are not going to rehearse the chronology of the
 18 development of the MTFA capability. We will do it in
 19 a different way, which is this: that by the time we
 20 reach May of 2017, was it your opinion, based upon the
 21 6 years of experience you'd had, both in Greater
 22 Manchester and in an awareness around the country, that
 23 Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service had one of
 24 the best, if not the best, MTFA capability nationally?
 25 A. Yes, sir, and I can back that up with independent audits

1 from a national governmental and NFCC level, yes.
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Can you all hear all right?
 3 A. Am I too quiet?
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Sorry?
 5 A. Am I speaking too quietly.
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: For me, but judges are congenitally
 7 always deaf. But I think people at the back are having
 8 a bit of difficulty too.
 9 A. I will speak up.
 10 MR DE LA POER: It's plainly not a competition, but the
 11 point really is this: that in terms of the standards of
 12 May 2017, the service that Greater Manchester Fire and
 13 Rescue Service were capable of delivering was at the
 14 very highest level within the country; is that fair?
 15 A. It's definitely fair to say it's at one of the highest
 16 levels, yes.
 17 Q. In order to get to that position, acknowledging, as you
 18 do in your statement, credit for those who assisted, did
 19 Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service have a hugely
 20 positive contribution from NWAS?
 21 A. Absolutely, yes.
 22 Q. And from GMP, in particular the firearms department?
 23 A. Again, absolutely.
 24 Q. And so from the point of view of the issues that the
 25 inquiry is focusing on in particular, multi-agency and

1 joined-up working, so far as the development of this
 2 capability was concerned, did that work in your view?
 3 A. Yes. So as of May 2017, we had a developed and
 4 established training structure both with NWAS and with
 5 GMP, tested and exercised on a regular basis, to the
 6 point where the exercises were not just trying to be on
 7 an ad hoc basis, we had got to a point where the
 8 training was actually included in the training needs
 9 analysis, so the pre-planning for the next year, so that
 10 the training could not be cancelled, it was there and
 11 established. Like I say, it could not be cancelled.
 12 Q. In terms of the capabilities that we're talking about,
 13 would it be right to say that when we talk of GMFRS's
 14 marauding firearms terrorist attack capability, we are
 15 talking about the Special Response Team?
 16 A. In 2017, yes.
 17 Q. And that was where my question was directed. So yes,
 18 thank you for ensuring that you were accurate.
 19 We have heard in the inquiry of a team called the
 20 Technical Response Unit.
 21 A. Yes.
 22 Q. Now, just help us from your perspective as MTFA lead: is
 23 it the case that the personnel in the SRT, the Special
 24 Response Team, were different personnel to the Technical
 25 Response Unit, or is there an overlap in those who

1 populate those teams?
 2 A. There's an overlap. So if I could explain, prior to --
 3 I think it was late 2013 -- we had what was termed an
 4 urban search and rescue capability that were on call and
 5 they supplemented the 2 [REDACTED]
 6 [REDACTED].
 7 In 2013, late 2013, corporately a decision was made
 8 to establish a Technical Rescue Unit or a TRU which was
 9 also going to be a [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
 10 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
 11 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
 12 [REDACTED] So in effect it increased the numbers of
 13 personnel that GMFRS had on duty to respond to
 14 a terrorist attack with the whole-- [REDACTED]
 15 [REDACTED] if that makes sense.
 16 Q. I think it does, but I'll reflect it back to you. So
 17 there were a cadre of people who are in the Special
 18 Response Team?
 19 A. Correct.
 20 Q. There were also a cadre of people in the Technical
 21 Response Unit, some of whom at least were capable of
 22 supplementing the Special Response Team?
 23 A. All of whom.
 24 Q. All of whom?
 25 A. Yes.

1 Q. And so the Special Response Team in that sense included
2 not only those people just in that team, but also all of
3 those who are in the Technical Response Unit?
4 A. Yes. So the SRT consisted of the Technical Response
5 Unit and the trained firefighters at the other station
6 and they collectively were deemed as the Special
7 Response Team.
8 Q. And all of this may seem somewhat academic, but we're
9 going to come and have a look at action cards which
10 speak of particular teams being deployed, so it's
11 important for us to understand what those teams had
12 a capability for, and I think what we've got to is that
13 if the Technical Response Unit is deployed, those people
14 are capable of responding, if required, to an MTFA?
15 A. That's correct.
16 Q. In terms of that response, we don't need to deal with
17 the detail of this, but firstly, did GMFRS's marauding
18 terrorist firearms attack capability have those who were
19 on the front line responding in appropriate personal
20 protective equipment?
21 A. Yes. The decision was made to discuss the ballistic PPE
22 that was worn by GMP firearms officers.
23 Q. I'll just stop you there. I can well see why my
24 question has invited you down this line. What's very
25 important is that we don't speak about technical

101

1 specifics.
2 A. Apologies.
3 Q. All that I want to establish is that there was an
4 enhanced level of PPE given to those people who might be
5 expected to respond to a terrorist incident?
6 A. That's correct.
7 Q. And by reason of that PPE and, no doubt, training, were
8 those who could respond to a terrorist incident able to
9 operate in areas which — and I don't mean this as any
10 disrespect to them — ordinary firefighters would not be
11 expected to work?
12 A. As per the JOPs 3 of 2017, yes.
13 Q. And if we were to draw an equivalence with another
14 emergency service, did the SRT effectively complement
15 the Hazardous Area Response Team of NWAS?
16 A. That's correct.
17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: While you just take a drink of water,
18 can I just clarify this about the training: you said
19 there was special training that took place and, as far
20 as you were concerned, adequate training took place with
21 NWAS and the police as well.
22 A. Correct.
23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Would I be right in thinking that
24 training concentrated on those people who were
25 specifically trained for an MTFA, namely your SRT, with

102

1 NWAS, their special units, and firearms police officers?
2 A. As of 2017, sir, yes, because —
3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. Did it include — again, with no
4 disrespect — ordinary police officers, ordinary
5 paramedics, ordinary firefighters?
6 A. No, sir.
7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Was that a deficiency in the training as
8 far as you're concerned? You can use the benefit of
9 hindsight, if you like.
10 A. So the benefit of hindsight is the revised MTA JOPs 1
11 and 2. The MTFA JOPs edition 3 didn't give commanders
12 the scope to do that because it was quite restrictive
13 and it was a bit of an inhibitor rather than an enabler
14 for commanders. So at the time, in May 2017, there was
15 no prescribed role nationally for non-specialist
16 responders, sir.
17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And does that mean that quite a lot of
18 non-specialist officers would simply not know what an
19 Operation Plato meant?
20 A. No, sir. So the JOPs says — the MTFA edition 3 JOPs
21 says that non-specialist responders could operate in
22 a cold zone, but they will be deployed to a rendezvous
23 point that was in the cold zone, but there was, and
24 I can obviously only speak from a GMFRS perspective, but
25 there was familiarisation training, there was online

103

1 packages, national DVDs, the Stay Safe principles.
2 So there was definitely an awareness of what that
3 was, but there wasn't any scope for them in to move
4 forward into a warm zone.
5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, okay, thank you.
6 A. At that point.
7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
8 MR DE LA POER: We're going to just look at — we have
9 looked at the protection and where they could operate in
10 principle.
11 So far as some specific aspects of what the SRT were
12 trained in and equipped with, were they trained in the
13 use of Skeds?
14 A. Yes.
15 Q. What is a Sked?
16 A. A Sked is a piece of equipment. It is a plastic, for
17 lack of a better word, plastic sledge that you can roll
18 up and carry under your arm when you're being deployed
19 into a scene. Once you get to a scene and a casualty
20 requires extrication, then you can put the casualty on
21 to a Sked. They get the quick-release buckles and it's
22 then becomes a drag stretcher where you can take
23 a person from a place of danger to a place where they
24 can get definitive care.
25 Q. One of the challenges presented to the responders on the

104

1 night of 22 May was a very substantial staircase.
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. Is a Sked an appropriate way of transporting a casualty
 4 down a staircase?
 5 A. So a Sked, once it's positioned correctly, because it
 6 comes under the feet, a Sked can be used for
 7 transitioning casualties of — to different floor
 8 levels, so yes.
 9 Q. Did the SRT train in using Skeds down staircases?
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. In addition to Skeds, there are, we understand, a number
 12 of other forms of stretcher that NWAS had available to
 13 it. Did the SRT receive any training in how to use the
 14 NWAS stretcher equipment?
 15 A. My experience, sir, is that I only observed NWAS using
 16 Skeds. So if there's another stretcher, it may be the
 17 ones that they use at RTCs, which is like a scoop
 18 stretcher, but I would say that a Sked is much more
 19 practical to use. I sort of recall that being used the
 20 majority of the time.
 21 Q. I don't doubt anything that you say, but we know that
 22 there were stretchers at the scene which weren't
 23 deployed and there is a question over whether or not it
 24 would have been appropriate to deploy them.
 25 I appreciate that your SRT were focused upon

105

1 training circumstances in which an MTFAs was occurring,
 2 but really what my question was seeking to get to, and
 3 I think you've answered it, is that the wider NWAS
 4 selection of casualty movement equipment wasn't
 5 something that formed part of the SRT training?
 6 A. It didn't, no.
 7 Q. Next, tourniquets. The inquiry has heard evidence, and
 8 I'll take, simply by way of example, that rank and file
 9 police officers did not in May of 2017 by and large
 10 receive training on the application of a tourniquet. So
 11 far as the SRT were concerned, did they receive training
 12 on how correctly to apply a tourniquet?
 13 A. That's correct.
 14 Q. Next, other items that might be used to treat blast
 15 injuries, and here I'm thinking of haemostatic dressings
 16 and so on. We don't need to detail them all, but did
 17 the SRT operatives receive training in the proper
 18 application of that sort of equipment?
 19 A. Yes, sir, and if I could just elaborate, within that
 20 training programme we spoke about earlier were a series
 21 of eight sessions per year on enhanced trauma care,
 22 where the actual focus was on the application of those
 23 dressings and tourniquets.
 24 Q. So they were trained in the use of those three
 25 categories of equipment. Did that equipment form part

106

1 of the standard issue available to them on deployment?
 2 A. Of the SRT crews? Yes.
 3 Q. Were the vehicles that the SRT might drive equipped with
 4 Skeds?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. So far as tourniquets were concerned, did individual
 7 operatives have as part of their personal equipment
 8 a tourniquet or tourniquets?
 9 A. So the SRT vehicle had several medic bags that they were
 10 taking with them that contained tourniquets. The reason
 11 I'm saying that is because the individuals had a utility
 12 belt which contained dressings and a tourniquet, but
 13 that was for personal use should they get injured. But
 14 they did have tourniquets on them, yes, as well.
 15 Q. So there was a personal utility belt plus a number of
 16 grab bags which they would be expected to take with them
 17 to the location of the incident?
 18 A. That's correct.
 19 Q. Just bringing this all together, having overseen the
 20 development of this to May of 2017, did you have any
 21 doubt at all that the SRT operatives were trained
 22 appropriately to respond to the immediate needs of
 23 people affected by a marauding terrorist firearm attack?
 24 A. I had no doubts whatsoever.
 25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Just let me ask you this, please.

107

1 In the training and the considerations, did it never
 2 occur to somebody that if there was a terrorist bomb
 3 attack, that might actually involve ordinary police
 4 officers, ordinary paramedics, actually being close by
 5 who might get themselves involved before these
 6 specialist teams turned up, and if so, what did the
 7 training say should happen?
 8 A. So it seems so obvious now, sir, but in 2017 the advice
 9 as per JOPs 3 was to extricate and to try and take
 10 people with you. There was no defined role for
 11 whether — certainly not for the Ambulance and Fire
 12 Service — for non-specialist responders in a warm zone.
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So it simply wasn't considered that they
 14 might be there when you arrived?
 15 A. It wasn't in the Joint Operating Principles, sir.
 16 Obviously with operational learning, then the JOPs have
 17 now hopefully reflected reality. But going back to
 18 2017, that sort of scenario certainly wasn't on my
 19 radar, sir, and I'm being honest there.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, absolutely. Thank you. Honesty is
 21 exactly what we want.
 22 MR DE LA POER: We can perhaps illustrate it in a slightly
 23 different way, the point the chairman was making.
 24 We know the number of exercises which took place,
 25 including a very large-scale live exercise at the

108

1 Trafford Centre, Exercise Winchester Accord. Did any of
 2 the scenarios for those planning exercise envisage
 3 ordinary members of the emergency services being present
 4 on scene when the specialists arrived or were they
 5 written in a way that assumed that the specialists would
 6 be the people to get there first?

7 A. They were written in exactly that way, that the
 8 non-specialists would be mobilised to a rendezvous point
 9 and then called forward as and when safe to do so.

10 Q. Can I invite you, please, to turn to paragraph 43 of
 11 your witness statement. We have touched on this
 12 already. In paragraphs 43 and 44, you deal with the
 13 idea of joint working and partnership. Was that
 14 something that GMFRS took seriously in your opinion?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. We're going to come to some of the detail in a moment.
 17 Was it your perception that the same attitude was held
 18 by GMP?

19 A. The training that I sort of developed with my
 20 counterpart in GMP, I can honestly say that I had an
 21 excellent relationship with a gentleman called
 22 Dave Whittle who has been in the box already and the
 23 engagement and the cooperation was second to none, to be
 24 honest with you.

25 If I had to be honest, the training that we carried

109

1 out at the training centre for GMP firearms, again, the
 2 training was excellent and we got a lot out of it
 3 because we had a NILO to do the command function.

4 If I had to say that the TFC role —

5 Q. The tactical firearms commander?

6 A. The tactical firearms commander at the training was
 7 generally carried out by firearms instructors at that
 8 location who were absolutely excellent with MTFA JOPs
 9 and JESIP. It was unusual to have a cadre TFC attend
 10 that training to take that role. So that's the
 11 difference, if I can make that definition.

12 Q. So there are a number of parts to that answer, but
 13 I think — does it come to this: that particular
 14 individuals that you worked with and the firearms
 15 department generally, a high level of cooperation and
 16 engagement, but that there were aspects, and I think you
 17 are identifying the TFC role holders, where perhaps the
 18 level of engagement from GMP was not as high as from
 19 others?

20 A. Yes.

21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You're saying it's instructors who did
 22 it rather than the people who would be doing it actually
 23 in reality?

24 A. Correct.

25 MR DE LA POER: Same question for NWAS: did you find that

110

1 NWAS's approach to joint working was of the same
 2 standard that you perceived GMFRS had?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Just two more short matters and then I'm going to invite
 5 the chairman to take a break because I'll have reached
 6 a natural point within my questioning.

7 Firstly, still under the heading of MTFA capability,
 8 the inquiry has heard evidence about the ongoing
 9 industrial relations dispute involving the Fire Brigades
 10 Union. We are not here, as has been said a number of
 11 times, to adjudicate on the rights or wrongs of that
 12 dispute.

13 The one issue where it may be, and we seek your
 14 input on it, is: did that dispute, so far as you could
 15 tell, have any effect on the MTFA capability in terms of
 16 its willingness to deploy?

17 A. Prior to —

18 Q. Prior to May 2017?

19 A. No. We had quite a strong stance and probably one of
 20 the few brigades where it had relatively no impact
 21 whatsoever.

22 Q. You may have just answered this question, but it's
 23 been — the same question has been asked in a slightly
 24 different way to other witnesses. Did it have any
 25 effect, whether on the rank and file or on the

111

1 commanders, in terms of the approach to risk assessment
 2 when it came to MTFAs?

3 A. I don't believe so, sir, no.

4 Q. Second short point to conclude this topic. There was
 5 an MTFA assurance visit in February of 2016; is that
 6 right?

7 A. Correct.

8 Q. And did you, together with others of your colleagues,
 9 participate in that?

10 A. Yes.

11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Could you tell me the date again?

12 MR DE LA POER: February 2016.

13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.

14 MR DE LA POER: Who was conducting the assurance visit?

15 A. It was a combination of CFRA and NFCC, but there was
 16 also a representative from government, not OSCT, but
 17 from government. So it was a purely independent
 18 assessment, but at quite a senior level.

19 Q. I've got some of those acronyms but not the first one.
 20 So we have got the National Fire Chiefs Council?

21 A. Yes, sorry, and the CFRA which is the chief fire and
 22 rescue adviser.

23 Q. And finally the Office for Security and
 24 Counter-terrorism?

25 A. Yes.

112

1 Q. And we've seen a document which identifies some of the
2 issues that were raised in that together with responses
3 by you and by Mr Argyle. I'm sure you know the document
4 I'm referring to.
5 A. I do, yes.
6 Q. So I don't need to bring it up.
7 So far as the issues that the inquiry is concerned
8 with, focusing particularly on the fact that the SRT did
9 not deploy on 22 May, were there any concerns raised in
10 that assurance visit which are relevant to that issue?
11 A. None whatsoever.
12 Q. And overall what was your impression about the feedback
13 that you were given in terms of the quality that was
14 being offered by GMFRS in February 2017?
15 A. The report and the assessment focused on nine key lines
16 of enquiry, eight of which were applicable to Greater
17 Manchester Fire and Rescue Service.
18 In all eight areas GMFRS were rated as effective,
19 which was in effect the best sort of rating that we
20 could get at the time.
21 So it was — for us it was an independent assessment
22 to say that, yes, we're doing things — we're doing
23 things good here.
24 Q. The final element to the assurance visit, and then I'll
25 invite the chairman to leave it there as it will provide

113

1 a segue into what we could do after lunch in terms of
2 NWFC.
3 Did NWFC participate in the assurance visit?
4 A. Yes.
5 Q. And in particular, and I'm sure if I don't take you to
6 it, others will, was there cause to complement to a very
7 high level the participation by Janine Carden in
8 particular?
9 A. Yes, Janine, if you like, was the figurehead, but the
10 purpose of the audit was to go and pay a visit to North
11 West Fire Control to look at the processes in place, the
12 action cards in place, and to ensure that they had the
13 adequate training to respond to an attack of this
14 nature.
15 Q. Were there any issues identified in that assurance visit
16 with North West Fire Control?
17 A. No, sir.
18 MR DE LA POER: Well, sir, if that's a convenient moment —
19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It is. This is going to sound like
20 a rather cynical question, but actually what you're
21 saying to me is that had GMFRS and their specialist
22 teams actually turned up at this, they would have
23 performed to a very high standard?
24 A. That's my belief, sir.
25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. An hour, thank you.

114

1 (1.05 pm)
2 (The lunch adjournment)
3 (2.09 pm)
4 MR DE LA POER: Mr Gaskell, my second substantive topic
5 relates to North West Fire Control and, as you make
6 clear in your witness statement, you were involved in
7 the development and delivery of training to North West
8 Fire Control; is that right?
9 A. That's correct.
10 Q. In parallel with that training there were action cards
11 which were provided to North West Fire Control by GMFRS;
12 is that correct?
13 A. That's also correct, yes.
14 Q. So with those two parts in mind, we're going to look at
15 first one and then the other.
16 Mr Lopez, please could we have on screen
17 {INQ033925/1}. We can see the heading of this
18 PowerPoint presentation includes your name as the person
19 delivering it; is that right?
20 A. That's correct.
21 Q. And as we understand it, this is the version of the
22 training in force from November 2015, so this would have
23 been the current training in May 2017; is that right?
24 A. I believe so, yes.
25 Q. You provide us with two presentations. There may be

115

1 some modest differences between them, but I think this
2 is the one that we need to be looking at.
3 A. This is the latter, is it?
4 Q. Yes?
5 A. Okay, that's correct.
6 Q. I'm not going to take you through the whole of it.
7 Others may take you to parts that I'm not going to take
8 you to, but can we please move forward to {INQ033925/13}
9 in the first instance.
10 This is a concept that Mr Argyle spoke to and it's
11 a notion that has existed in a different context
12 elsewhere. But so far as the training that was being
13 provided to North West Fire Control is concerned, were
14 you telling them that firearms incidents, including
15 active shooter incidents, are always a matter of police
16 primacy?
17 A. That's correct.
18 Q. And is what is meant by that is that where there is
19 a tri-service response, the police will be the lead
20 agency?
21 A. Correct.
22 Q. This is specific to MTFA incidents, which by their very
23 definition include a firearm. So far as the information
24 that was being provided to North West Fire Control was
25 concerned in relation to broader terrorist activity, so

116

1 not just that confined to a firearm, was the messaging
 2 the same as we see here, was it different, or do you not
 3 know?
 4 A. I would say that in the broader terms, North West Fire
 5 Control would in the first instance contact the NILO to
 6 see if that person is able to get any further
 7 intelligence /information prior to making a mobilisation.
 8 With regard to primacy, the police still have primacy in
 9 that instance.
 10 Q. We will come to the mechanics of what they are expected
 11 to do but I will try and re-frame my question because it
 12 was a clumsy one --
 13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: The police have primacy in any terrorist
 14 matter?
 15 A. That's correct, sir.
 16 MR DE LA POER: There we are.
 17 So that's what was being provided in this training.
 18 Let's have a look at {INQ033925/16}, please.
 19 Now, what it says here in relation to MTFAs is:
 20 "Should any contact be made to the Fire and Rescue
 21 Service for assistance or should they become aware of an
 22 incident involving firearms, then the on-duty NILO must
 23 be contacted in the first instance. This will usually
 24 be the responsibility of Fire Service Control.
 25 Possibility that initial call to FRS may be from GMP FDO

117

1 into NILO direct."
 2 We're going to need to examine in a little bit more
 3 detail what was being communicated to North West Fire
 4 Control about what is meant by "any contact". But we
 5 will just park that for the moment and continue through
 6 these slides and return to that.
 7 So if we can go to {INQ033925/17}, please:
 8 "If it is becoming clear or confirmation is given
 9 that this incident is involving marauding terrorists
 10 (MTFA) then the FRS plan written for this type of event
 11 must be activated (Op Plato).
 12 "Upon receiving a call relating to a firearms
 13 incident, follow the Op Plato action cards.
 14 "On notification of a firearms incident FRS Control
 15 will inform the on-duty NILO."
 16 Again, we're going to just hold in our minds
 17 together, Mr Gaskell, please, an adjunct of what I said
 18 about any contact. As it's framed here:
 19 "If it is becoming clear or confirmation is given."
 20 So again we are parking that as an issue to carry
 21 forward, please.
 22 Let's now have a look at {INQ033925/18} where we see
 23 the "Operation Plato (standby phase) marauding terrorist
 24 firearms attack active shooter action card"; is that
 25 right?

118

1 A. That's correct.
 2 Q. And this is one of three action cards prepared for
 3 Operation Plato; is that also correct?
 4 A. That's correct, yes.
 5 Q. Why is there a need for three, please?
 6 A. So the one that's on the screen now is the standby phase
 7 which in effect was prepared to inform the resources to
 8 get them to a state of readiness so that if it evolved
 9 that we had actually got a terrorist incident, then we
 10 weren't starting from an initial point of no starting
 11 point, if you like.
 12 So standby phase was there purely as a -- if you
 13 like, as a heads-up to get those resources standing by
 14 prior to the implementation phase.
 15 Q. And the first action according to this that is expected
 16 in those circumstances is:
 17 "If call not received from national inter-agency
 18 liaison agency, inform duty NILO, obtain address and
 19 seek advice."
 20 A. Correct.
 21 Q. Then there are a number of other actions, but in terms
 22 of the judgements around what deployments should occur,
 23 if this action card is being followed, once the NILO has
 24 been contacted, is it envisaged that the NILO will make
 25 those decisions?

119

1 A. The NILO will inform Control of the incident type.
 2 Q. Yes.
 3 A. And then the action card will then dictate what
 4 resources and what to do with the resources as in here.
 5 So I don't know if that makes sense or not because the
 6 NILO will be in a position to obtain the real-time
 7 information and intelligence from police that can then
 8 be acted upon within North West Fire Control.
 9 Q. So when it says "and seek advice", is that what you're
 10 envisaging, in other words: NILO, what do we do?
 11 A. Yes, it would be a discussion then with Control.
 12 Ultimately, this is for the -- you know, for the
 13 protection of our non-specialist responders that we
 14 don't send personnel into there unprotected. So the
 15 initial phase is to get that information and
 16 intelligence, speak with Control, and then to devise
 17 a plan of how we are going to respond.
 18 Q. Who is going to devise the plan?
 19 A. In the initial stages?
 20 Q. Yes.
 21 A. The NILO would give the information and, because of the
 22 training that's been given, we would speak with Control
 23 and, because the NILOs had a sound knowledge of the
 24 action cards, they would tell Control what resources to
 25 stand up and if a rendezvous point has been given to

120

1 mobilise them to that point.
 2 Q. We're speaking only generally now. We will come to the
 3 facts later, but we're just trying to understand how
 4 these operate in practice.
 5 You will remember that I have asked you to park two
 6 different facets of the same topic.
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. According to this action card, the relevant part is
 9 information from "fire crews, GMP, NWAS"; do you agree?
 10 A. Sorry, are you referring to --
 11 Q. "NWFC actions upon receiving information from..."
 12 And three sources of that information are
 13 identified. So we're going to go over the page
 14 {INQ033925/19}. We've mentioned that there are three.
 15 Is this the second of three?
 16 A. Correct.
 17 Q. "NWFC actions when informed that a firearms incident is
 18 ongoing and that the implementation phase should be
 19 applied.
 20 "Ensure all actions from Operation Plato standby
 21 phase have been carried out."
 22 So that is a reference back to the previous card?
 23 A. Correct.
 24 Q. And the first action on that is:
 25 "Inform the NILO, take advice"?

121

1 A. Correct.
 2 Q. What this action card doesn't indicate, unlike the
 3 previous one, is what the source of the information is.
 4 Do you see that? Whereas the first action card said
 5 "information from fire crew, NWAS or police", this one
 6 simply says "when informed".
 7 What training, if any, was provided to North West
 8 Fire Control in relation to the sources of information
 9 that were capable of being taken into account for this
 10 action card?
 11 A. So obviously this, in the timescale, further down the
 12 timeline of the incident. This is referring to the
 13 control rooms now actually speaking to each other.
 14 So the -- depending on what information the NILO has
 15 been able to glean from the police, then the control --
 16 it was a responsibility of control rooms to speak to
 17 each other and share information.
 18 Q. Does it come to this: that the sources of information
 19 that we are talking about in that first sentence are
 20 fire crews, police, ambulance?
 21 A. And the NILO as well.
 22 Q. And the NILO?
 23 A. The NILO would still be in contact as well.
 24 Q. I suppose looking at it another way, we are not talking
 25 about a member of the public phoning up and saying,

122

1 "This is a firearms incident"?
 2 A. No, because initially that information could be quite
 3 misleading.
 4 Q. Yes. Over the page {INQ033925/20}, please. Is this the
 5 final -- we don't need to look at this in any great
 6 detail, but you've mentioned three, they appear in the
 7 training. Is this the final action card for Operation
 8 Plato?
 9 A. Yes. This is the stand-down phase, yes, correct.
 10 Q. So what is it envisaged is happening on the ground to
 11 make this applicable?
 12 A. That the threat has now been neutralised and that in
 13 effect -- and this could be hours, this could be much
 14 longer, but the whole of the scene has been turned into
 15 a cold zone. There's no threat, no perceived threat,
 16 any more.
 17 Q. Thank you very much indeed, Mr Lopez. We can take that
 18 down.
 19 There is an issue within the inquiry as to whether
 20 or not on the North West Fire Control systems what we
 21 see there in that slide, in what is effectively
 22 a document, is how the North West Fire Control
 23 operatives see these action cards. Are you aware of
 24 that issue or are you aware of the fact that there may
 25 be a difference?

123

1 A. I'm not aware, sir, no.
 2 Q. Have you, Mr Gaskell, ever sat at a terminal in North
 3 West Fire Control to see how these action cards appear
 4 to the control room operatives?
 5 A. No, sir. I have sat in North West Fire Control to go
 6 through that action card like a paper copy, but
 7 I haven't actually sat at a desk, sir, no.
 8 Q. I just want to -- that's all that I want to show you
 9 from this training. We are going to have a look at some
 10 other action cards and indeed other aspects of GMFRS,
 11 but I want to pause now to see if we can capture what is
 12 being communicated to North West Fire Control staff.
 13 Those action cards are particular to an MTFA; is
 14 that right?
 15 A. That's correct.
 16 Q. And the first one indicates that the card is activated,
 17 it becomes live and relevant, when information is
 18 received from one of three agencies, either from within
 19 the Fire Service, from the police or from the Ambulance
 20 Service; is that right?
 21 A. Yes, any agency can declare a suspected incident, yes.
 22 Q. What about an incident in which the GMP control room
 23 contacts North West Fire Control and says, "We've had
 24 reports of shrapnel and possible gunshot injuries"? Is
 25 that enough to activate that action card so far as what

124

1 you were training North West Fire Control to do?
 2 A. In my experience, no, it's not, sir.
 3 Q. Well, not just your experience. You may not do it, but
 4 I'm interested, really, Mr Gaskell in what you are
 5 telling North West Fire Control if terms of what they
 6 should be doing.
 7 A. An incident with gunshot wounds, without wanting to
 8 sound blasé, because I'm not at all, but I don't think
 9 that's an unusual occurrence in Manchester, and if every
 10 time we got a report of gunshot wounds, shrapnel wounds,
 11 I think we would be in Plato quite regularly.
 12 Q. So is the effect of your answer that it's not enough for
 13 GMP, for example, to be reporting potential gunshot
 14 wounds, there needs to be a different quality of
 15 information being communicated in order to activate that
 16 action card?
 17 A. I think what I'm saying, sir, is that you spoke about
 18 the effects of the gunshot wounds. My interest would be
 19 in what is the attack methodology, because a marauding
 20 terrorist firearms attack relates to a deliberate
 21 terrorist activity which may not be the case if it is
 22 just gunshot wounds and it could be something completely
 23 different.
 24 Q. I understand. While I appreciate that may be your
 25 perspective, could I just ask you to focus on what was

125

1 being communicated in your training to North West Fire
 2 Control, because they may be the same, they may be not
 3 quite at detailed?
 4 A. Could I have the opportunity to respond to that?
 5 Q. Of course you can.
 6 A. So my training focused very much in close conjunction
 7 with the MTA or MTFA JOPs 3. Within the MTFA JOPs 3,
 8 there is a list in the early chapters of the possible
 9 indicators for an MTFA-type attack. Gunshot wounds or
 10 shrapnel wounds in isolation would not be in that list,
 11 sir.
 12 Q. What if it was: we think a bomb has gone off, there may
 13 be gunshot injuries?
 14 A. So I think that puts a different level on it, to be
 15 honest with you.
 16 Q. Yes.
 17 A. As a NILO, you know, I would be asking: what is the
 18 source of the explosion, is it a bomb, are there gunshot
 19 wounds? And then based on the information and the
 20 intelligence from GMP, are they declaring Plato?
 21 Obviously we can't declare Plato, but I would certainly
 22 be asking Control not to mobilise to scene.
 23 Q. You have answered that question as the NILO. As we will
 24 see, whether or not North West Fire Control contact the
 25 NILO first depends upon which action card they use.

126

1 A. Correct.
 2 Q. So there needs to be, do you agree, an evaluation of
 3 information by them before they can decide whether they
 4 are contacting the NILO to get that further specialist
 5 input?
 6 A. Certainly dialogue about the NILO because North West
 7 Fire Control do not make any command decisions.
 8 Q. Let's see if I can illustrate the point that I was
 9 seeking to make. I'm going to ask you to have a look at
 10 the document version of the explosion action card,
 11 {INQ004404/1}.
 12 If on the face of this document, Mr Gaskell, and
 13 unlike the previous ones, and indeed unlike the
 14 unexploded bomb action card, both of which have your
 15 name on various iterations, I don't believe your name
 16 appears on this particular one. Was that one that you
 17 were familiar with back in May of 2017 and prior to that
 18 when you were providing your training?
 19 A. Yes.
 20 Q. So in the event that the criteria is met, and we will
 21 discuss what that is, for this action card to be
 22 pursued, the first action is to send the TRU; is that
 23 correct?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. We can see that triggers, so in other words what might

127

1 cause this or what will cause this action card to be
 2 used, cause of explosion, could trigger different ITAPs.
 3 What is that?
 4 A. That's the — I am not sure. I'm thinking this a the AP
 5 must relate to action plan.
 6 Q. Right:
 7 "Gas, bomb, cylinders, chemical impact."
 8 A bomb that has exploded, and perhaps you will be
 9 able to think of a ready example, but I have yet to
 10 think of one, is bound to give rise to an expectation of
 11 a terrorist act; do you agree?
 12 A. Without — I would like to understand how you've got
 13 that very early information/intelligence that it's
 14 a bomb. It would be classed in my experience as an
 15 explosion.
 16 Q. All right. But if you're being told that an explanation
 17 or that a reasonable inference for it is that it is
 18 a bomb that has caused the explosion, does that put us
 19 in the category of thinking that this is or may very
 20 well be a terrorist incident?
 21 A. Yes, I would potentially say that that does, yes.
 22 Q. You see, what this is all really coming to, and there's
 23 a third action card to look at in a moment, is on the
 24 one hand we've got the action cards that you've been
 25 training on in relation to Plato and MTFA, in

128

1 conjunction with JOPs, and I'm sure you will be the
 2 first to agree that one of the potential identifiers of
 3 an MTFA is an exploded bomb within JOPs; do you agree
 4 with that?
 5 A. It does say about, yes.
 6 Q. And yet we have an action card here which has a very
 7 different first action if it is an exploded bomb.
 8 Again, do you agree with that?
 9 A. That action card says "bomb" and this action card
 10 relates to actions by the North West Fire Control
 11 post-explosion --
 12 Q. Yes.
 13 A. -- which means that you send resources to scene.
 14 Q. Yes.
 15 A. That is what the Fire and Rescue Service does. Yes,
 16 there could be a perceived risk that there could be
 17 a secondary device, but I would expect, if a device had
 18 exploded, for crews to make their way to the scene and
 19 meet with their counterparts from police and ambulance.
 20 Q. I suppose whether or not crews are sent to the scene
 21 depends upon whether or not North West Fire Control
 22 determine on the information they have that this is
 23 a bomb that has exploded, meaning that this is the
 24 relevant action card, or whether or not it is the MTFA
 25 action card which does not involve a deployment, instead

129

1 it involves speaking to the NILO who will seek to gather
 2 information and will give advice. Do you see that there
 3 are divergent reactions depending on how you interpret
 4 what may be the same and confusing information?
 5 A. I agree with the information that you've just -- you've
 6 just said. However, I would challenge that in those
 7 early stages you are not going to get the information
 8 that it's a bomb. It could be a gas explosion. It
 9 could be a cylinder, as it says in the action plan,
 10 and I would expect that a PDA would be mobilised to
 11 scene.
 12 Q. What if they thought that it was an MTFA?
 13 A. So not a bomb anymore?
 14 Q. Well, it's a bomb as part of an MTFA, as JOPs envisages.
 15 A. And this is where you cannot have an action plan,
 16 I don't think, that covers every eventuality. The
 17 golden thread through all these action plans are to
 18 contact the duty NILO with the hope that they can get
 19 some very early information/intelligence. The reality
 20 is that it's going to be a very confused scene for quite
 21 a number of minutes. I'm reiterating myself here, but
 22 I would expect with the information that a bomb has been
 23 detonated, I would expect resources to be mobilised to
 24 scene to meet with the other commanders.
 25 Q. How familiar are you, and I'm going to be careful here

130

1 not to try and capture -- thank you, I have just been
 2 told that ITAP is incident type action plan. Thank you.
 3 A. Thank you.
 4 Q. How familiar are you with the information that North
 5 West Fire Control was getting in the early stages of the
 6 incident? It's very important that you're absolutely
 7 frank about this. Do you think you are well sighted on
 8 that or do you think that you have just heard bits
 9 second-hand?
 10 A. I'm definitely not well-versed on it. I have heard bits
 11 second-hand and I would say I'm definitely not
 12 well-versed at all.
 13 Q. Then I'm not going to ask you then which action card, so
 14 far as you are concerned, should have been used by North
 15 West Fire Control, nor am I going to attempt to rehearse
 16 the various stages of information. The chairman has
 17 heard your evidence on these two action cards.
 18 I would just like to deal with one more, please,
 19 which is the bomb action card which was one that you had
 20 involvement in, and that is {INQ004360/1}.
 21 The triggers for this is:
 22 "Confirmed message from the police or other
 23 category 1 responder."
 24 It is headed "Bomb -- general". If we see
 25 {INQ004360/2} before returning to page 1, we can see

131

1 that there are various items in that box which are
 2 envisaged: bomb alerts, bomb threat and bomb alerts.
 3 Looking at those, is this action card for a bomb
 4 that has detonated or for an unexploded bomb or threat
 5 of one?
 6 A. This is absolutely for a bomb that has not detonated.
 7 Q. We can go -- we can see your name is there on one of the
 8 updates in 2014.
 9 If we go to the top now, again, it's an issue for
 10 the inquiry to explore about whether or not this can or
 11 might cause confusion. Did you see any of Mr Argyle's
 12 evidence this morning?
 13 A. Yes, sir.
 14 Q. Did you see the mistake that he made about this action
 15 card which he corrected?
 16 A. Yes, sir.
 17 Q. We can go back up to the first page {INQ004360/1},
 18 please.
 19 Sitting there now, can you see the potential for
 20 there to be confusion about when this action card should
 21 be used given the title is simply "Bomb -- general"?
 22 A. I have had significant input in this development of this
 23 action card. The fact that the -- all the actions are
 24 to send to a rendezvous point and obtain wind speed and
 25 direction, to me it's obvious that this is not for

132

1 a device that has already exploded. An explosion card,
 2 for me, is very self-explanatory.
 3 Obviously, when these — when these cards were being
 4 developed, I'm not sure, if I'm honest, where the term
 5 "Bomb — general" comes from. It's probably not the
 6 wording that I would have chosen. If you go down the
 7 next — the page again to {INQ004360/2}, the initials on
 8 there were the North West Fire Control single point of
 9 contact at the time, who I work with. So the 2015
 10 version is Jim Hutton and the second one is Ben Levy,
 11 who were both the single point of contact for North West
 12 Fire Control.
 13 I'm only being honest here. I cannot see how them
 14 two can get mixed up, but obviously I have had
 15 experience in writing the cards.
 16 Q. One way might be that a member of the public phones up
 17 and says a bomb has gone off, at which point a search is
 18 done for an action card using the key term "bomb".
 19 A. Yes, and I would expect that the explosion card would
 20 come up as well because the word "bomb" is included in
 21 that action card.
 22 Q. Did you have any concern when delivering any training to
 23 North West Fire Control that the circumstances in which
 24 this action card would be used was understood by them?
 25 A. No, sir, none. There was never any feedback to say this

133

1 is confusing. We mentioned Janine earlier. You know,
 2 I had a very good working relationship with Janine. And
 3 again, it was never sort of highlighted that that would
 4 have caused that kind of confusion. So...
 5 Q. I'm going to leave action cards for the time being and
 6 we're going to just have a look at what the GMFRS MTFA
 7 mobilisation policy was. It will be a document that I'm
 8 sure you will be familiar with.
 9 If we go to {INQ004213/1}, is that a document you
 10 recognise?
 11 A. Yes, sir.
 12 Q. If we go to {INQ004213/3}, we can see that the version
 13 is dated 27 February 2017, the author is identified as
 14 John Fletcher, and I think that you are identified
 15 within the consultation and engagement box; do you see
 16 yourself there?
 17 A. Correct.
 18 Q. So was this a document that you had some input into when
 19 it came to the creation of it?
 20 A. I had a little involvement in that, sir. That was
 21 document that was drafted whilst I was doing other work.
 22 I was aware of it, obviously, and I had a contribution
 23 to it, yes. But I wasn't sort of the lead developer by
 24 any means.
 25 Q. Did you understand it to reflect GMFRS's mobilisation

134

1 policy when it came to MTFAs?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. So we can go to {INQ004213/5}. We can see:
 4 "Initial notification. An MTFA-type incident will
 5 in all probability occur with little or no notice,
 6 therefore the incident may be reported in a number of
 7 ways.
 8 "(a) Direct calls from members of the public to
 9 NWFC;
 10 "(b) From the FDO to NWFC or possible duty NILO;
 11 "(c) North West Ambulance Service Control to NWFC;
 12 "(d) Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service
 13 resources that are in the vicinity of the incident at
 14 the time."
 15 It goes on at paragraph 3 to indicate that three
 16 phased plans. Given the emphasise that I have placed on
 17 this already, Mr Gaskell, I'm sure you can anticipate my
 18 next answer (sic).
 19 When one looks at those —
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Not question?
 21 MR DE LA POER: Pardon me, question, sir.
 22 When one looks at that notification phase action
 23 plan, there are three sources of information which are
 24 identified as giving rise to that plan being activated.
 25 When one looks at the guidance contained within the

135

1 mobilisation policy, there is a fourth potential source
 2 of information, namely members of the public.
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. Can you help us to understand what may be thought to be
 5 something of a tension between the two?
 6 A. I think the comment I made earlier is that we will
 7 obviously get information into North West Fire Control
 8 from members of the public. The fact that that
 9 information — it potentially is going to be — it could
 10 potentially be incorrect, it could be inaccurate. So we
 11 wouldn't just base it on that particular source of
 12 information.
 13 So the point here reflects reality, but to make that
 14 informed decision on how we're going to react, I think
 15 we're looking at the other bullet points, sir.
 16 Q. So although it's identified within the GMFRS policy as
 17 a source of information, in fact that wouldn't be
 18 regarded as one of the legitimate sources of information
 19 for the purpose of using the MTFA action cards?
 20 A. In the first instance, sir, I don't think it can be, no.
 21 Q. Now, what it says at paragraph 4:
 22 "On notification NWFC will obtain as much
 23 information as possible and inform the duty NILO as
 24 a priority and obtain operational specific instructions
 25 from the duty NILO. The duty NILO will, if possible,

136

1 liaison direct with the FDO to obtain further information
2 and intelligence."

3 So is that capturing what the action cards are
4 expecting?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. We can see that there are others and I — and it may not
7 map precisely on to it, but again we see there's no
8 mobilisation. The key point is the first substantial
9 action is to contact the NILO and take advice from the
10 NILO about what needs to happen next.

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. Was that the absolute thrust of the training that you
13 were giving North West Fire Control when it came to
14 MTFAs?

15 A. That's correct.

16 Q. Why for an exploded bomb would you send immediately and,
17 without more, responders but in an MTFAs you wouldn't?
18 Just explain to us why that distinction is drawn.

19 A. Because I — in my opinion, the information that would
20 come through would be that you've had an explosion. The
21 information at that very early point, I think, would be
22 unusual to say that it is a bomb and that is an
23 explosion and that we would deploy to scene.

24 Q. Why wouldn't you deploy to the scene if it was or there
25 was good reason to think that it was an MTFAs?

137

1 A. Because of the marauding terrorist-type attack incident
2 scenario.

3 Q. I'm sure my question is so obvious that you've slightly
4 missed the point. Can I put it a different way: is it
5 because of the concern that Fire and Rescue Service
6 personnel will get caught up in the attack?

7 A. Yes, and I don't want that to get confused with the risk
8 assessment methodology that would be used for the
9 potential of a secondary device.

10 Q. Yes. And there are you referring back to the explosion
11 action card which accepts that risk when it deploys
12 people?

13 A. Yes. And I would say that it's unlikely in the early
14 stages, if we get an incident that's described as an
15 explosion, or even a bomb, that GMP may not initially
16 declare Operation Plato.

17 Q. That was your expectation, was it?

18 A. That's my — that is my understanding, having spoken to
19 many, many police officers, that Operation Plato may not
20 be declared initially even if a bomb had been detonated.

21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Again, that's slightly contradictory to
22 the evidence that we've heard in general terms. So
23 I think an attitude which we've heard is: there is an
24 explosion. If there's information or an inference that
25 that comes from a bomb, then ever since Mumbai there has

138

1 been at least the possibility that there will be
2 a secondary gunman or a secondary attack of some sort
3 which will take place, and that is already in their
4 minds.

5 So in those circumstances they are likely to declare
6 a Plato because there's a possibility of a gunman.
7 That's not how you understood it?

8 A. Not in such black and white terms, sir, no. I think
9 that if a device had detonated, then I would expect that
10 the explosion action card would be followed and
11 resources would be mobilised. The fact that as and when
12 Plato is declared, the available resources from —
13 certainly from fire and ambulance is reduced
14 significantly, and the actual time in response is
15 increased significantly.

16 MR DE LA POER: In the MTFAs scenario, accepting for a moment
17 that we can't deploy a large number of even specialist
18 responders straight away, why was there not a deployment
19 of one or more information-gatherers to try and gain
20 situational awareness automatically?

21 A. Are you relating that direct to 22 May?

22 Q. No, I'm asking in relation to the MTFAs action card that
23 you were the author of and teaching, that involved no
24 deployment initially, the first step was to speak to the
25 NILO. Everything then depended on what the NILO said.

139

1 Do you agree?

2 A. Correct.

3 Q. What I'm trying to understand is why not concurrent with
4 trying to contact the NILO, waiting for the NILO to get
5 the information, waiting for the NILO to come back and
6 give instructions, was there also not an instruction to
7 send individual fire officers towards the scene in order
8 to try and gain situational awareness?

9 A. Because I don't think you can have a policy that's
10 written to cover the variants of attack methodologies
11 that we're trying to describe here, and MTA JOPs 1 and 2
12 has talked about —

13 Q. Can I just stop you there?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. You're talking about the current version of JOPs?

16 A. I'm talking about hindsight as well.

17 Q. No, but I do appreciate that, and I'm not looking to
18 circumscribe your answer, and it may be that you'll have
19 to give your answer in a restricted session, but it's
20 very important that we don't talk about current JOPs.

21 A. Okay.

22 Q. I'm sorry, can I give you a moment to think about
23 whether you can frame your answer in a way that isn't by
24 reference to how it is now, typically doing your best to
25 answer my question as to why in 2017 was there not

140

1 a small—scale deployment automatically to run in
 2 parallel with the NILO's decision—making and supplement
 3 that?
 4 A. Because in the — so I'll go back to my previous — the
 5 attack methodology will dictate the potential response.
 6 Q. Yes.
 7 A. If the NILO is able to contact the force duty officer
 8 and the attack methodology is a number of people with
 9 guns, maybe on mopeds, then we're not going to send
 10 personnel to scene. That would be irresponsible, in my
 11 opinion.
 12 So a NILO would be hopefully able to get that very
 13 quick situational awareness that would then feed into
 14 the conversations with North West Fire Control.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So you would not expect a declaration of
 16 Plato until there was some positive evidence of a gun
 17 being in existence, whether it be being seen that
 18 someone was there with a gun or that someone had
 19 actually shot somebody?
 20 A. Not necessarily a gun, sir, but some kind of marauding
 21 attack.
 22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. That's now. We're actually talk
 23 going a marauding terrorist firearm attack at that time,
 24 so let's restrict it now if we may.
 25 A. Okay.

141

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: If the idea is that the terrorist sets
 2 off a bomb and then is going to ambush anyone who comes
 3 along, if you send people to the scene, actually you are
 4 maybe sending them into the arms of a gunman because you
 5 may not know until they get there and the gunman shows
 6 himself and shoots at them.
 7 A. Given that scenario, sir, I would agree with your
 8 theory. But I'm not sure how relative or in reality
 9 that would happen.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Hasn't it happened in attacks abroad?
 11 A. In 2017 obviously we're — we hadn't experienced that
 12 kind of attack. We'd had the attack at Haymarket, which
 13 wasn't declared Plato, which was obviously a potential
 14 explosive device attack.
 15 MR DE LA POER: I think I've probably taken it as far as
 16 I can with you, Mr Gaskell. But I'm sure you understand
 17 my point about whether or not there could have been
 18 a small deployment potentially, and you have given your
 19 answer. So I'm going to move on and just come back to
 20 part of your answer in a moment.
 21 My third substantive topic is Exercise Winchester
 22 Accord which took place at the Trafford Centre in May of
 23 2016.
 24 A. Correct.
 25 Q. Mr Gaskell, before you came in today you indicated to me

142

1 that there was an answer that you may have to give that
 2 was potentially operationally sensitive. Did that
 3 relate to Operation Winchester Accord? I just want to
 4 be absolutely clear about it?
 5 A. No, it didn't.
 6 Q. That is how I understood it. I'm not going to ask you
 7 about that other exercise. Let's focus on the Trafford
 8 Centre.
 9 Were North West Fire Control involved in Exercise
 10 Winchester Accord?
 11 A. North West Fire Control were made aware of the exercise,
 12 but from a mobilisation aspect, no, they were not.
 13 Q. And so far as you know, why were they not involved in
 14 exercising the mobilisation?
 15 A. Live—play exercises tend to take place in the early
 16 hours from midnight until 4, something like that — we
 17 spoke about this earlier and I don't think this is
 18 operationally sensitive — but the night shift at North
 19 West Fire Control was staffed by skeletal staff and they
 20 didn't, from my understanding, have the resources to be
 21 able to apply a control operator or two control
 22 operators for 4 or 5 hours, however long that may be,
 23 alongside business as usual.
 24 Q. We will make clear that you are referring to the
 25 position in May of 2016 so far as North West Fire

143

1 Control is concerned. But what was to stop there being
 2 more staff brought in so that North West Fire Control
 3 could practise receiving calls from the public and
 4 communicating with whoever they needed to communicate
 5 using the action cards that were triggered?
 6 A. My responsibility was to organise the training. I then
 7 sent out that information to department leads. You will
 8 probably see on the emails that there was a NILO group
 9 email and both the names I mentioned earlier are on
 10 that. They're both NILOs.
 11 So there was no reason for me to individually
 12 message the control room managers, but the single point
 13 of contact for — North West Fire Control were aware of
 14 the exercise. What I'm trying to say is it's not in my
 15 remit to dictate who attends these exercises. I plan
 16 the exercise. I plan the resources to attend from
 17 a GMFRS perspective, operationally, but it's not for me
 18 to dictate whether an individual from North West Fire
 19 Control or any other department attends. I would pass
 20 that top their managed to have that discussion.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Would you decide where it started, ie
 22 this exercise started after deployment?
 23 A. So with that, sir, the nature of MTFA exercises is that
 24 the appliances, the personnel from the three services
 25 need to be corralled at an early stage to have a full

144

1 safety brief. Obviously, we've got firearms on scene,
 2 although they're not live. So we have an operational
 3 debrief and an operational brief — not debrief, an
 4 operational brief — safety brief and operational brief.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So you are saying you start at
 6 a situation where deployment has got to already
 7 happened?
 8 A. It has, sir, yes.
 9 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You never practised deployment?
 10 A. In a separate exercise, sir. That was carried out after
 11 I left on my secondment, but there was a specific
 12 exercise called Powerhouse where the mobilisation was
 13 tested, and I believe, sir, that was a gap that we
 14 identified.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: This is post May 2017?
 16 A. Correct.
 17 MR DE LA POER: So bearing in mind your role as MTFA lead
 18 for GMFRS and the provider of training to North West
 19 Fire Control, is it your understanding that North West
 20 Fire Control were not involved in any live mobilisation
 21 exercise surrounding an MTFA scenario up to May 2017?
 22 A. Not in a live exercise as the circumstances of any
 23 deployment didn't lend themselves to have an operational
 24 mobilisation. But they were involved in other training
 25 events.

145

1 Q. I would like to just move forward with Exercise
 2 Winchester Accord and invite your attention to
 3 paragraph 69 of your witness statement, Mr Gaskell.
 4 I will try to summarise what you say about what your
 5 perception of what went wrong at Exercise Winchester
 6 Accord and you can tell me if I've got it right and
 7 whether I have missed anything out.
 8 At paragraph 69, do you indicate that you felt that
 9 the focus was on ensuring that police commanders were
 10 educated in the role of specialist responders from for
 11 other agencies following the declaration of Operation
 12 Plato?
 13 A. Yes, that's correct.
 14 Q. And what do you mean by that?
 15 A. That the Fire Service, the Fire and Rescue Service, the
 16 specialist response capability was not just about taking
 17 casualties, a casualty extraction capability from
 18 point A to point B., we also had the training in the
 19 enhanced trauma training, dressings, tourniquets, which
 20 we spoke about earlier, it was much more than just
 21 a case of moving casualties.
 22 Under the clinical governance of North West
 23 Ambulance Service, we were able to assist the ambulance
 24 to apply these critical dressings.
 25 Q. So that's what you were trying to communicate through

146

1 your involvement in the exercise; is that right?
 2 A. Sorry, sir —
 3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, I think it is after the exercise.
 4 MR DE LA POER: After the exercise?
 5 A. This would be the commander training.
 6 Q. I understand.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That we understand was arranged after
 8 Winchester Accord because the police didn't seem to
 9 appreciate what contribution the Fire Service could make
 10 to an MTFA?
 11 A. Correct, sir, and that incorporates additional intel of
 12 the specialist vehicle with the specialist dressings and
 13 the Sked stretchers, thees communication — so it was
 14 a — like a holistic view of what the Fire and Rescue
 15 Service had to offer.
 16 MR DE LA POER: So what went wrong is they failed to
 17 appreciate that in your view. What you sought to do
 18 following is try and demonstrate that capability to the
 19 commanders?
 20 A. Are we talking about Winchester Accord here?
 21 Q. Yes, Winchester Accord.
 22 A. The problems associated with Winchester Accord was in
 23 the communication cascade. We was unable to get in
 24 touch with the force duty officer, which we spoke about
 25 earlier, about this parallel exercise, which I wasn't

147

1 aware of, as part of the planning team.
 2 Sorry, I'm going to — and also we wasn't able to
 3 get hold of the TFC.
 4 What I'm trying to — the point I'm trying to make
 5 is once the actual commanders got together at the FCP,
 6 then the exercise actually went very well.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It was just 2 hours late.
 8 A. Correct. Once we got there — and obviously the police
 9 can then observe the FRS and ambulance joint capability.
 10 The problem with Winchester Accord and the amount of
 11 planning and preparation that went into that, but
 12 I don't think we envisaged those two key points, those
 13 two failures of communication.
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: The suggestion I have heard is that some
 15 people, not within GMP, got the impression that the
 16 police officers who were the armed police officers who
 17 were there on that were interested in their part but
 18 really their interest in the whole thing stopped after
 19 they'd done their bit.
 20 A. Yes, the — the figures — if I remember correctly, the
 21 exercise started at midnight on 9 May. And was going
 22 through to 4 o'clock on the 10th.
 23 The initial 30 minutes was purely for police
 24 response to learn their tactics in that early stages,
 25 and then at 00.30 there should have been that

148

1 declaration of Plato that came into fire and ambulance
2 who then should have progressed to an RVP to an FCP, and
3 then carried out that — the function that we trained or
4 excessively.

5 The fact that we didn't get there, sir, quite
6 rightly, for 2 hours meant that some of the police
7 functions on that exercise had been completed. So as
8 Fire and Rescue Service and ambulance were actually
9 being deployed in, you had police officers who had
10 actually been in there for the best part of an hour and
11 a half, whatever, and they'd had their — what is termed
12 as an NDEX(?), they were walking back, where really you
13 could argue that there was an opportunity lost there to
14 actually just hang fire and observe the fire and
15 ambulance capability under the governance of the police.

16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. So the way it's meant to
17 operate — so Operation Plato goes in. There's at least
18 a worry about there being an armed gunman around, or
19 maybe you would say some evidence of them being there.
20 Armed policemen go in. They clear the area to make it
21 safe for the specialist Ambulance Service, specialist
22 Fire Service to go in and do their work; yes?

23 A. Yes.

24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It should take hopefully a relatively
25 short period of time and, certainly in relation to the

149

1 plan you had, it was going to be completed within half
2 an hour?

3 A. That was the — so yes.

4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: And then the armed officers don't just
5 go away. They stay there because they have to be there
6 protecting and making sure that a gunman doesn't return
7 so that the other services can carry out their jobs?

8 A. Yes. So in effect we used to class it as a bubble. So
9 the armed police may go in. It might not even be a safe
10 zone there. So if it was a warm zone, it's a zone where
11 there's been a threat and potentially the threat is
12 going to come back.

13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It's likely to be a warm zone, isn't it?

14 A. Very much so. But what we would need as fire and
15 ambulance commanders would be that discussion at the
16 FCP. We would need some zoning considerations and then
17 to say: right, where is the warm zone up to? That's
18 sometimes classed as a limit of exploitation. And then,
19 as you say, the police officers would remain in situ,
20 guarding the entrances and exits, stairway levels, and
21 in effect, given the fire and ambulance is in a
22 protected bubble where you have people with injuries who
23 require medical treatment who require extrication to
24 a place of safety for further medical intervention, then
25 to go in and do that.

150

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: What actually happened, and what is
2 recorded, the armed police went in, did their job, made
3 sure there was no armed gunmen, and then said: right, we
4 have done our bit and now we are off home.

5 A. I know that that is the case with some of it. Because
6 it was over two levels, sir, I wouldn't be able to
7 say —

8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It might be a slightly flippant way of
9 putting it, for which I apologise, but is that what it
10 comes to in effect?

11 A. I think there was an element of that, yes, sir.

12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.

13 MR DE LA POER: There were two matters that you raised with
14 me before we started. You've already mentioned one of
15 them.

16 There has been a discussion within the evidence that
17 one of the purposes that Winchester Accord was being put
18 to was to investigate the location of the force duty
19 officer. I think you have seen evidence of June Roby
20 and others in relation to that or at least you're aware
21 of it?

22 A. Yes, sir, but to be clear, I wasn't aware of it during
23 the planning process. I'm only aware of it having
24 watched the inquiry.

25 Q. And having watched the inquiry, and having been part of

151

1 the planning process, is that something that you think
2 you ought to have been aware of?

3 A. Absolutely, sir, yes.

4 Q. Why do you say that?

5 A. Without going into detail, you know that Winchester
6 Accord was part of a three-day large exercise. In
7 effect this is the primary exercise, and if there was
8 a parallel exercise that wanted to be tested by the LRF,
9 then to me that's a secondary exercise and I think — as
10 exercise planners, and again, I'll reiterate, the amount
11 of planning and preparation that went into Winchester
12 Accord was outstanding. I had never experienced that
13 level before. It was an eyeopener for me, that
14 everything was planned to perfection.

15 But then to have this secondary exercise that was
16 going to have such a significant impact on the primary
17 exercise, truly the planners should have had an
18 understanding of what the impact of that may be.
19 I certainly didn't, anyway.

20 Q. It may be that GMP will want to explore your
21 understanding of it and your answer. But you certainly
22 have settled in a position where, having heard the
23 evidence of the inquiry, (a) there was something that
24 you didn't know about that exercise and (b) you feel you
25 ought to have known about it?

152

1 A. Correct.

2 Q. So I'm going to move on from Exercise Winchester Accord
3 and just deal with four short matters.

4 The first is Exercise Hawk River which was
5 March 2017. What was your understanding about why
6 Exercise Hawk River was arranged?

7 A. So Exercise Hawk River was an exercise funded by Central
8 Government. It had no relationship with Winchester
9 Accord. It was always going to happen. It was
10 a regional exercise that OSCT had funded, so attended by
11 the North-west region, and the purpose of the exercise
12 was to again provide assurances to government that as
13 a region we were able to effectively deal with
14 a multi-seated terrorist attack which Hawk River focused
15 upon.

16 Q. I think it was a tabletop rather than live --
17 A. It was a tabletop, yes.

18 Q. And was one of the objectives to embed the JESIP
19 principles?

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. Did it appear that the -- to you, Mr Gaskell, that as
22 a result of that exercise, the JESIP principles were
23 embedded?

24 A. Having attended Hawk River and the responses that we'd
25 had from the various agencies, I was very comfortable

153

1 that JESIP had been embedded, yes.

2 Q. You didn't play a part in the activity of the night of
3 22 May, we will come to that in a moment, but are you
4 aware that on the face of it at least there appeared to
5 have been JESIP failings on the night of 22 May?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. But bearing in mind in March of 2017 your perception is
8 JESIP is embedded, the terrorist scenario, tabletop,
9 yes, with its limitation, it's an MTFA rather than
10 a bomb, but you leave that exercise thinking, "We've got
11 this", can you help us to understand why you think that
12 that in fact wasn't the case?

13 A. I have had 4 years to reflect this and I'm sorry, sir,
14 I can't give you an answer.

15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We've had people saying to us, actually,
16 it's all very well, JESIP, but actually in the first
17 half hour, the critical half hour or even an hour, it's
18 really impossible to do it.

19 A. I don't understand that, sir. I have watched several
20 pieces of evidence. JESIP should be the -- should be
21 instigated at any incident where there's more than one
22 agency, regardless of the size and complexity.

23 So for example, at Manchester on the 22nd, the JESIP
24 principles -- the first principle is that you co-locate.
25 But to be able to do that, you need to be told -- you

154

1 need to be able to contact the various agencies to get
2 that information. It's absolutely critical.

3 We hadn't envisaged to have such problems, and when
4 I say we, I mean Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue
5 Service. We hadn't envisaged having the problems that
6 we would contacting the force duty officer because
7 ultimately that is our go-to area where we go to get the
8 information and intelligence to enable us to make the
9 informed decisions.

10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So in that first time before, say,
11 Silver is set up or anything like that, you've really
12 got to go through the force duty officer, and if that is
13 still a point of failure, the whole thing fails?

14 A. It's -- it sounds so obvious, sir, but yes.

15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It starts with having an RVP?
16 A. Correct.

17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No one ever agreed or no one actually
18 went to the same RVP. You can't really do a forward
19 control point until you've got an RVP because that's
20 where you agree where it is. So just from the outset,
21 it was bound to fail.

22 A. I would agree with that statement, yes.

23 MR DE LA POER: So that's Exercise Hawk River. One more
24 matter to deal with briefly before we get to the night
25 of 22 May.

155

1 Tri-service radio. Is that something that you had
2 some involvement in?

3 A. I had some involvement in, yes, sir.

4 Q. You've put an emphasis on the word "some" there. Do we
5 take it from that that you weren't the lead, for
6 example, for GMFRS?

7 A. No. The training that we arranged in January and
8 February highlighted the need for that to occur. So
9 I then passed it into my management chain, if you like.

10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Is this the commander training we're
11 talking about now --

12 A. It is, sir, yes.

13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: -- in January and February 2017?

14 A. Correct. And it sort of highlighted the need for this
15 interoperability channel. But that was then given to my
16 line manager because it was seen as a wider project,
17 that the LRF was going to get involved with as well.

18 So you can say that it's true that I organised
19 January and February training. I highlighted the issue,
20 but then the actual driver for it was the LRF and the
21 managers from -- from police, fire and ambulance.

22 MR DE LA POER: Was it a national issue, this
23 interoperability channel, or was it particular to
24 Manchester as far as you were perceiving?

25 A. I genuinely do not know. I don't think at the time

156

1 there was a national interoperability channel.
 2 Q. That certainly was the evidence of the NWS lead for it,
 3 Mr Butler, that it related to the Airwave capacity, if
 4 I have understood his evidence correctly, and he told
 5 the inquiry that in fact nobody had an interoperability
 6 channel until the position was resolved nationally and
 7 a particular channel that was otherwise attributed to
 8 a particular emergency service was given up for that
 9 purpose.
 10 Does that fit with what you understood at the time
 11 or is that all new to you?
 12 A. No, no, I think that's a right, and I think what you've
 13 just described there is replicated in version 3 of the
 14 joint operating principles. It was quite vague to say
 15 that police should instigate a three-way communication
 16 channel, but it didn't tell you how it was done, by
 17 radio, by mobile phone. So it was down to individual
 18 regions to actually sort that out themselves.
 19 Q. We are going to turn to the night of 22 May.
 20 You didn't deploy that night. You weren't on duty
 21 or on call; is that right?
 22 A. That's correct.
 23 Q. You received a call and you decided that because you had
 24 taken some alcohol that evening, as you were perfectly
 25 entitled to do, it wouldn't be appropriate for you to go

157

1 on duty; is that correct?
 2 A. That's correct.
 3 Q. You have offered an opinion in your witness statement
 4 about what went wrong and we've already covered that
 5 before we got here.
 6 I would just invite you to consider a perspective.
 7 North West Fire Control were presented with, given the
 8 facts as they were emerging, one of two possible courses
 9 of action: either they could contact the on-duty NILO or
 10 they could start a predetermined deployment; do you
 11 agree?
 12 A. Yes.
 13 Q. If they start the predetermined deployment there will be
 14 firefighters going to the scene unless they're turned
 15 round; is that right?
 16 A. That's correct.
 17 Q. But if they choose to go to the NILO, then one of
 18 a number of things, do you agree, then have to happen
 19 for there to be action? Let me explain what I mean by
 20 that.
 21 The NILO has to assess how much information they
 22 have available to them; do you agree?
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. The NILO has to decide whether or not they need more
 25 information than they've got at that moment before

158

1 making a decision; do you agree?
 2 A. I don't know where they're going to get that additional
 3 information from, sir.
 4 Q. It may very well be that in almost every, if not every,
 5 scenario they are going to conclude, "I need more
 6 information than I'm being given by North West Fire
 7 Control", but assuming they find themselves in that
 8 position, the place, as you have just identified, that
 9 they're going to get that information is the FDO; is
 10 that right?
 11 A. That was our --
 12 Q. That was your expectation?
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. And the whole structure, the training that you were
 15 delivering to North West Fire Control will come down to:
 16 if you go down that path -- we will examine with North
 17 West Fire Control whether that was the right path to go
 18 down. If you go down that path, you will find
 19 yourselves with the NILO and the NILO will find
 20 themselves having to contact the FDO.
 21 Do you agree, Mr Gaskell, there lies a problem which
 22 manifested on 22 May, that if the NILO can't speak to
 23 the FDO, then the envisaged procedure stops?
 24 A. So as of 22 May 2017 from an operational perspective --
 25 I know we've spoken about Winchester Accord, which was

159

1 obviously an exercise, but from an operational
 2 perspective, my understanding is that we had never had
 3 any difficulty contacting the force duty officer for
 4 information.
 5 Q. Did Exercise Winchester Accord give you pause for
 6 thought about communication surrounding the force duty
 7 officer? I appreciate it wasn't in the direction of
 8 travel that manifested on the night, but there was
 9 a force duty officer communication issue, wasn't there?
 10 A. There was, and we've just said that that was an exercise
 11 and I suppose the thought was that maybe it couldn't be
 12 resolved appropriately. It was an exercise. Our
 13 perception as of May 2017 was that we would not have any
 14 difficulties contacting the force duty officer to get
 15 real-time information because that had never happened
 16 previously operationally.
 17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Let's just forget for a moment about
 18 hindsight.
 19 A. Yes.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Getting that, as has just been pointed
 21 out to you, and I'm just taking over for a moment,
 22 getting that information from the FDO is absolutely
 23 vital to where we go from thereon. It is a possible
 24 single point of failure. Whether it's happened before
 25 or not, that is potential single point of failure.

160

1 Should the planning not have allowed for that
2 possibility and have a fallback position, a plan B as
3 they are called?
4 A. Is that with the Fire Service, sir, or with the police
5 force?
6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: It has to be with the Fire Service
7 because they can't move at the moment until they contact
8 the FDO and if they can't get through, I don't mind who
9 you arrange it with, but do you not need plan B?
10 A. I see exactly the question that you're asking, sir, but
11 we never envisaged that we would have that problem if --
12 I suppose if it was on -- on the radar, then I would
13 expect the police to identify that as a potential
14 problem.
15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay.
16 MR DE LA POER: That really is my next question, which
17 was: at any point had GMP said in the 12 months before
18 22 May 2017, "We know or we think there may be
19 a situation in which our FDO becomes overwhelmed"?
20 A. Not to my knowledge, sir, no.
21 Q. If you had been told it in those stark terms, that this
22 is an issue that we are confronting, maybe even "and we
23 think we have a solution to it", would you have or do
24 you think you might have given consideration to what the
25 chairman has termed a plan B?

161

1 A. I think you would have to do. Could I just add that we
2 had a slight indication of this during Hawk River
3 whereby an experienced force duty officer during one of
4 the scenarios said that in reality during the early
5 stages of an MTFAs we were just going to get a very quick
6 attack methodology and an RVP, and that would be it.
7 So that is different than a plan B, I suppose, but
8 in reality he was sort of saying, "In reality, I'm going
9 to be that busy, I'm only going to be able to give you",
10 like I say, "an attack methodology and an RVP and that's
11 it".
12 To be honest with you, if we get that, and we're met
13 with an officer who is in contact with the TFC, then
14 that would suffice. We never, ever envisaged that we
15 would not be able to contact the FDO.
16 Q. Did that information that they were, if not overwhelmed,
17 going to be extremely busy such that the communication
18 was reduced to only a few words, did that give you pause
19 for thought about whether or not you might need
20 a plan B?
21 A. If I'm being honest, sir, no, it didn't.
22 Q. Do you think it should have?
23 A. That example I have just given you there with an attack
24 methodology and an RVP, if that was all that they were
25 going to be able to give us, that would suffice.

162

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So as I understand it, you are saying
2 that actually gave you reassurance in a funny sort of
3 way, because they were saying, "We will be overwhelmed,
4 but we would be able to get this bit out to you", and
5 that would be enough?
6 A. If they'd have said -- sorry. If they'd had said, "It's
7 highly likely that we will not be able to speak to you",
8 then that would have absolutely raised alarm bells and
9 it wouldn't have been a plan B, I think it would be
10 something that we would have had to escalate as a real
11 issue.
12 MR DE LA POER: My final topic which I can deal with in one
13 or maybe two questions, I'll make it a long one, but
14 I think I'm right and you will be able to agree.
15 We mentioned at the start of your evidence that you
16 were seconded to the Home Office during the last
17 20 months of your career with GMFRS.
18 A. Correct.
19 Q. Whilst you were seconded to the Home Office, were you
20 involved in the writing of MTA JOPs edition 1?
21 A. That's correct.
22 MR DE LA POER: Thank you very much.
23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I just -- just -- the FDO, we can't get
24 contact with, we're really stymied. It seems to go from
25 bad to worse then.

163

1 A. Sorry, I didn't get the first bit of the question.
2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: The problem with the communication with
3 the FDO -- sorry, so you haven't got the information you
4 need and the NILO hasn't got that, but it doesn't just
5 stop there. It seemed to go from bad to worse. So
6 you've got a NILO who is at home some distance way. It
7 takes him a long time to get in. We will obviously look
8 at that when it comes to his evidence, and in the
9 meantime a few people get mustered, but then really
10 nothing happens until he arrives and even then it
11 doesn't happen.
12 Did you have planning for anything like that? What
13 would you anticipate would have happened?
14 A. Without contact with the force duty officer, sir,
15 without any credible intelligence, I would still say
16 that the Fire and Rescue Service or the NILO would be
17 reticent to send appliances down to the scene. They
18 would be trying to get in touch with counterparts from
19 ambulance, obviously from ambulance, from the control
20 rooms, because obviously we can't get in touch with the
21 police force duty officer.
22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: They did get information from the
23 ambulances, as it happens, that were down there dealing
24 with people.
25 A. Again, it's difficult for me to comment. My

164

1 understanding is that there were several METHANE
 2 messages which were sent from scene quite quickly that
 3 were not shared amongst control rooms. I'm not really
 4 in a position, sir, to comment. I'm sorry.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I just wonder whether the planning had
 6 gone to that sort of situation.
 7 A. No, it hadn't, sir, if I'm honest.
 8 MR DE LA POER: So far as Mr Berry was concerned, and within
 9 your knowledge, he knew, by reason of the pre-existing
 10 procedure, to contact the FDO. If that didn't work, he
 11 was on his own in terms of working out what the next
 12 best steps were concerned; is that what it comes to?
 13 A. As of May 2017, yes.
 14 Q. Yes. It was then down to his operational discretion,
 15 was it?
 16 A. To his what, sorry?
 17 Q. His operational discretion, making the best judgement he
 18 could.
 19 A. Yes, but again, on the lack of information/intelligence,
 20 the training at the time was to hang fire until you can
 21 find the information to be able to feed into a dynamic
 22 risk assessment.
 23 Q. Was that even in circumstances where there had been no
 24 declaration of Operation Plato communicated and there
 25 had been an RVP given by the police?

165

1 A. Am I right in saying there was other mitigating
 2 circumstances in messages that would influence that
 3 decision?
 4 Q. So there were suggestions of gunshot injuries. There
 5 was a suggestion of an explosion, which you could infer
 6 was caused by a terrorist. But there were two — there
 7 was one absence of a piece of information, namely
 8 a formal confirmation from the police: this is an MTFA.
 9 That never came. What did come from the police is that
 10 there was a rendezvous point.
 11 A. With my knowledge of Manchester, and I've got to answer
 12 it from my perspective, I have obviously read reports
 13 and Cathedral Gardens doesn't mean anything to me in
 14 relation to the MEN Arena. So I would have possibly
 15 said go to the Cathedral Gardens. But that's my limited
 16 knowledge of the city centre of Manchester.
 17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay.
 18 MR DE LA POER: Sir, that concludes my questions. I have
 19 been asking questions this afternoon for an hour and
 20 15 minutes, and I should acknowledge publicly that
 21 having encouraged everyone to do their best today, I can
 22 see that the time that I have felt it was necessary to
 23 ask Mr Gaskell questions has meant that we will not be
 24 able to conclude him today.
 25 Can I propose this: that we take a short break now

166

1 and in that time I will seek to speak to those who
 2 represent North West Fire Control to see whether or not
 3 they believe they can start and finish their
 4 questioning. I would hope that they can within
 5 a reasonable time. But I'll speak to them and confirm
 6 that.
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Right. Well, I propose we use the time
 8 today, certainly up until 4.30, even if it means
 9 breaking things off in the middle of questions being
 10 asked. If things can be finished very rapidly after
 11 that, fair enough. But I'm afraid you are going to have
 12 to come back on Monday, for which I apologise, but I do
 13 gather you're available.
 14 A. That's fine.
 15 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We will just have to break it up in that
 16 way.
 17 MR DE LA POER: Thank you, sir.
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you. Ten minutes.
 19 (3.26 pm)
 20 (A short break)
 21 (3.38 pm)
 22 MR DE LA POER: I'm grateful for the messages that I have
 23 received. Can I invite questions from Mr Smith QC on
 24 behalf of North West Fire Control.
 25 Questions from MR SMITH

167

1 MR SMITH: Could I deal first of all with the reference you
 2 made to staffing at North West Fire Control in the
 3 context of their absence from Exercise Winchester
 4 Accord.
 5 You said in evidence that you believe they didn't
 6 have the resources to staff such an exercise at that
 7 time of night; is that correct?
 8 A. That's my understanding, sir, yes.
 9 Q. Where did you get that understanding from?
 10 A. From discussions with North West Fire Control personnel.
 11 Q. Which personnel?
 12 A. That's the follow-up question. I don't know, sir.
 13 I remember having conversations that during the evening
 14 time, in the early hours of mornings, that there was not
 15 enough personnel available to resource a large-scale
 16 exercise as well as business as usual.
 17 Q. Well, I would just like to you consider whether your
 18 recollection of whatever discussion you may have had may
 19 be inaccurate.
 20 A. As in — my memory of the conversation, sir, yes.
 21 I don't know who I had it with, sir, but I remember
 22 having a discussion that that could be one of the
 23 factors as to why North West Fire Control cannot be
 24 involved in large-scale exercises.
 25 Q. When the mobilising information was prepared, which

168

1 I haven't given notice in relation to, but for the
 2 chairman's reference, is {INQ001250/1}, that was
 3 a document prepared by Greater Manchester Fire and
 4 Rescue Service. You don't have that, Mr Gaskell.
 5 The mobilising information simply stated that North
 6 West Fire Control will not be required to mobilise any
 7 GMFRS resources to the exercise. Do you remember that?
 8 A. Apologies, sir. I missed the order -- which exercise
 9 are we referring to here, sir?
 10 Q. Winchester Accord?
 11 A. That's correct. The nature of the exercise and the
 12 locations of briefings meant that we had to have
 13 resources in position at a set location for a safety
 14 brief and an operational brief. That was prior to the
 15 start of the exercise. So it didn't lend itself to
 16 a dynamic mobilisation exercise.
 17 Q. The simple issue is this, isn't it: as far as Winchester
 18 Accord was concerned, the rendezvous point was already
 19 identified in advance?
 20 A. Correct.
 21 Q. And the crews were at a particular fire station?
 22 A. Correct.
 23 Q. And it was considered, wasn't it, that there was no
 24 requirement to involve North West Fire Control because
 25 the starting point of the exercise would be from the

169

1 rendezvous point?
 2 A. Yes, sir, and that would have been a discussion I would
 3 have had with the North West Fire Control SPOC as well,
 4 because obviously if there's no benefit to North West
 5 Fire Control being involved in the exercise, then there
 6 wouldn't be any reason for them to take part.
 7 Q. And that's the reason, isn't it? Nothing to do with
 8 staffing.
 9 A. That is one exercise that -- that particular exercise
 10 didn't lend itself to a dynamic mobilising procedure.
 11 I'm trying to -- there are exercises which again didn't
 12 lend themselves to North West Fire Control getting
 13 involved. All I'm relating to is that I can recall
 14 having a conversation about -- on a visit to North West
 15 Fire Control, having a conversation about staffing
 16 levels at night and them not having the resources to
 17 carry out a command and control function for an exercise
 18 alongside BAU. If I'm honest with you, I'm struggling
 19 to recall the context of the conversation.
 20 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Smith, (overspeaking) I don't think
 21 the witness is attributing to in any way to that
 22 particular exercise. I think he was talking about in
 23 general terms for exercising.
 24 A. I am absolutely not attributing it to Winchester Accord,
 25 sir.

170

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No. And you accept that for Winchester
 2 Accord it was never on the cards that they would be
 3 playing a part in it?
 4 A. That's correct, sir.
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you.
 6 MR SMITH: Finally this, before we leave this subject.
 7 What did you mean by skeletal staff?
 8 A. That they -- they had enough staff. I'm not saying that
 9 they didn't have enough staff for business as usual
 10 operations. What I meant by that is the conversation
 11 that I had was that they hadn't got enough staff on to
 12 enable two or three personnel to be involved in
 13 a large-scale exercise.
 14 Q. Now, moving on from there, could I take you, please,
 15 Mr Gaskell, to the training and presentations to North
 16 West Fire Control for which you were responsible.
 17 There are two with which the inquiry has been
 18 concerned. One was in October 2014 and the one to which
 19 specific reference has been made in evidence was
 20 December 2015. And it is that second one that again
 21 I would like to concentrate on as well, but before we do
 22 so, do you recall that the October 2014 presentation
 23 involved an example of the terrorist attack in Nairobi?
 24 A. That's correct.
 25 Q. And that involved an MTFA from the outset, didn't it?

171

1 A. I'm just trying to recall the circumstances of the
 2 incident. Yes, I believe it did.
 3 Q. So it wasn't preceded by an explosion. What happened
 4 was that a number of armed people entered the shopping
 5 arcade and committed the atrocity there?
 6 A. That's my understanding, sir, yes.
 7 Q. And then is the position that, by December of 2015, you
 8 had available to you the experience of the attack on
 9 13 November 2015 at the Stade de France at Saint-Denis?
 10 A. When you say experience, sir, I'd only got the --
 11 anything that I could get off the media as such. I had
 12 no learning outcomes or anything as such.
 13 I remember inputting slides in that document in that
 14 PowerPoint because it was a multi-seated MTFA. So
 15 I used the information that was available, but
 16 I certainly had no information on the types of attack,
 17 sir.
 18 Q. If I can ask Mr Lopez to put up on the screen the
 19 presentation we've already looked at once which is
 20 {INQ033925/11}.
 21 This is the information, isn't it, Mr Gaskell, that
 22 you were able to run through with North West Fire
 23 Control staff at the time when you delivered this
 24 presentation?
 25 A. Yes, sir, this was open source material that I was able

172

1 to incorporate into a presentation.
 2 Q. And as we've seen, you illustrated the presentation with
 3 a number of photographs. Presumably they were lifted
 4 from public media?
 5 A. That's correct, sir. And can I just add there was
 6 a proviso -- I had a redacted presentation as well.
 7 I informed North West Fire Control that this
 8 presentation contained images of a certain nature,
 9 and I gave them an opportunity, if they didn't want to
 10 have that included, I have a redacted presentation as
 11 well.
 12 Q. I want to ask you to consider whether you agree that
 13 certain clear messages were delivered by you in this
 14 presentation to North West Fire Control staff.
 15 The first is that at the Stade de France and other
 16 locations these were related terrorist incidents at
 17 different locations, but that the shooting was preceded
 18 by explosions.
 19 A. I don't have the information or the knowledge of the
 20 four further locations, if for every location actually
 21 that was the attack methodology, sir.
 22 Q. If we go back to {INQ033925/8}, Mr Lopez, please:
 23 "Three suicide bombers outside Stade de France."
 24 Then:
 25 "Suicide bombs and then the shootings at four

173

1 further locations [including the Bataclan Theatre]."
 2 Could that come down now, please?
 3 The point I'm asking you to consider is that the
 4 example giving to North West Fire Control staff was that
 5 this incident in Paris began with suicide bombers
 6 outside the Stade de France and was followed by further
 7 suicide bombers and then mass shootings.
 8 A. Could I ask for that slide to be put back up, please?
 9 Q. Of course. I'm sure Mr Lopez can do that very quickly
 10 {INQ033925/8}.
 11 A. That's good.
 12 The point I'm trying to make here, sir, is that I'm
 13 not saying that -- the way that that's written, I can
 14 understand how it's been read. The point I'm making is
 15 that at four locations there were suicide bombs and at
 16 some locations there was shooting. For example, the
 17 Bataclan did not include a bomb. It was -- it was
 18 a mass shooting.
 19 I'm not sure -- I don't have the knowledge. I think
 20 I might have wrote that to say that of the four
 21 locations, there could have been bombs at some, there
 22 could have been shootings at the other. I'm not trying
 23 to indicate that the bombs and mass shootings were at
 24 both locations. I don't have that knowledge, sir.
 25 Q. Thank you. Can that come down, please.

174

1 Do you agree that one of the clear messages that
 2 either you put across to North West Fire Control or you
 3 may be prepared to accept they would read into the
 4 presentation was that an exploded bomb in a public place
 5 resulting in numerous casualties may be the beginning of
 6 an MTFA?
 7 A. I would agree that an exploded bomb could be a precursor
 8 for a larger attack, yes.
 9 Q. And that would be something that somebody listening to
 10 your presentation could reasonably take away from it; do
 11 you agree?
 12 A. I still remember actually stating that as fact. It
 13 could be interpreted that way, sir. I fully agree with
 14 what you're saying. But to have the two together,
 15 it's -- it wasn't something that I actually delivered at
 16 the -- as part of the presentation. However, I can see
 17 how that could be inferred.
 18 Q. Now, I want to come next, please, if I may, to --
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Mr Smith, I'm sorry to interrupt you
 20 again, please forgive me. I just want to go back to
 21 {INQ033925/11} because there was another message that
 22 may -- could we have page 11 back?
 23 I just wonder, it ends with:
 24 "French involvement in Syrian and Iraq Civil War.
 25 David Cameron requested MP's support for military

175

1 action. UK supporting mission in Syria."
 2 The message there is:
 3 "The same thing might happen here."
 4 That's presumably why you're saying it?
 5 A. Yes, it was an awareness session. You know, the --
 6 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm not criticising it.
 7 A. I'm not trying to say that my knowledge on terrorism
 8 is -- you know, I was doing what I perceived, but yes,
 9 I think you're absolutely right, sir, that I was
 10 inferring that, yes, that could happen here.
 11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you. We can take that down now.
 12 Thank you, Mr Smith.
 13 MR SMITH: So with great respect to the chairman, he's
 14 absolutely right, isn't he, that the whole purpose of
 15 this presentation was to alert the Fire Control room to
 16 what the possibilities were in this country?
 17 A. That was one of the -- it wasn't -- the purpose of the
 18 presentation was to have a holistic view at -- yes, that
 19 was the early part, I think, the awareness. But then to
 20 go into -- certainly the presentation we're referring to
 21 now was looking at the improvements we'd made to the SRT
 22 vehicles, the improvements we'd made to our PPE. So it
 23 was more than just looking at the incident types. It
 24 was about the response that we had in place and how we
 25 had improved it since the previous presentation.

176

1 Q. Could I take you, please, to document {INQ004213/1},
 2 please, which is the GMFRS MTFa mobilisation emergency
 3 response guidance. If we move on down to {INQ004213/3}
 4 we see that it's version 1, 27 February 2017, authored
 5 by Group Manager John Fletcher and involving yourself;
 6 is that correct?
 7 A. That's correct, sir.
 8 Q. Was this document a draft at that stage or was it issued
 9 guidance?
 10 A. I'm not 100% on my answer, but I would -- I would
 11 envisage that if it's saying version 1 and a date,
 12 I would say that that's a published document.
 13 Q. Yes.
 14 A. But I'm not 100%, sir.
 15 Q. In your statement you indicated that:
 16 "This provided [and these are your words] cast-iron
 17 mobilisation instructions for North West Fire Control to
 18 follow."
 19 Do you remember saying that in paragraph 51 of your
 20 statement? Your words were:
 21 "Like all versions it contained cast-iron
 22 mobilisation instructions for NWFC to follow."
 23 A. That's probably -- that's a reference to the sequence of
 24 events on the action card.
 25 Q. Would it also include the content of this guidance, in

177

1 other words that this guidance could also represent
 2 cast-iron instructions for North West Fire Control to
 3 follow? It would help you perhaps if we turned to
 4 {INQ004213/5} just to refresh your memory.
 5 A. Are you able to tell me the actual reference that you're
 6 questioning, please?
 7 Q. Yes. It starts with the initial notification and
 8 guidance, and then in moving down the page to
 9 paragraph 4, "Actions on notification":
 10 "On notification North West Fire Control will ..."
 11 Do you have that?
 12 A. Yes, sir.
 13 Q. And were these cast-iron mobilisation instructions for
 14 North West Fire Control to follow as well as the action
 15 card?
 16 A. I would say that the two should be absolutely -- the
 17 content should be absolutely the same. As regarding to
 18 cast-iron mobilisation instructions, I would say that
 19 that phrase probably relates better to an action card
 20 rather than a mobilisation document.
 21 Q. I understand, thank you.
 22 Looking at these provisions at paragraph 4, I'll
 23 just read them, if I may, but Mr Lopez has kindly put
 24 them back up on to the screen. It's the lower half of
 25 the page, please, Mr Lopez, rather from the middle on:

178

1 "Actions on notification. On notification NWFC will
 2 (a) obtain as much information as possible; (b) inform
 3 the duty NILO as a priority and obtain operational
 4 specific instructions from the duty NILO -- the duty
 5 NILO will, if possible, liaise direct with the FDO to
 6 obtain further information and intelligence."
 7 And then (c):
 8 "Inform the [duty group manager]."
 9 Just dealing with those three actions for the time
 10 being, do you agree that as far as (a) is concerned,
 11 obtain as much information as possible, keeping open
 12 a line with Greater Manchester Police and the North West
 13 Ambulance Service, both organisations being in contact
 14 with the Fire Service control room at the time of the
 15 announcement of the incident, and conversing with them
 16 and sharing information with them complies with that
 17 requirement to obtain as much information as the control
 18 room could. That's the purpose of it, isn't it?
 19 A. So is that an accurate representation of what happened
 20 on 22nd? I'm not sure about that, sir.
 21 Q. Well, I think I can take it from that answer and what
 22 you said earlier that you haven't familiarised yourself
 23 with some of the detail or a lot of detail of the
 24 evidence; is that correct, Mr Gaskell?
 25 A. I haven't had access to it, sir.

179

1 Q. Very well. Look, I'm not going to go through these
 2 points in relation to the facts of the incident save for
 3 one matter which I'm come to in a moment for that
 4 reason.
 5 Can I take you, please, next to the explosion
 6 action --
 7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I'm sorry, Mr Smith, could we just stick
 8 with what's on there just for a minute.
 9 MR SMITH: Of course.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: On (b), the second half of that sentence
 11 in (b):
 12 "The duty NILO will if possible [in bold and
 13 underlined] liaise direct with the FDO to obtain further
 14 information and intelligence."
 15 Doesn't that presuppose the possibility that he
 16 won't be able to?
 17 A. There's a presumption there, yes, I fully agree. I have
 18 studied this document before, I'm not the author, and if
 19 I'm honest, I'm not sure as to why that's been put
 20 there.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you. Thank you, Mr Smith.
 22 MR SMITH: Sir, I was going to return to that in due course.
 23 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Forgive me.
 24 MR SMITH: Not at all, sir, forgive me. I just wanted to
 25 make it clear that I have not abandoned reference to

180

1 paragraph 4 at the moment.
 2 What I would like to do, however, next is to take
 3 you next if I may to the explosion action plan, and that
 4 involves going, please, to {INQ004404/1}.
 5 Now, your position, Mr Gaskell, as I understand it,
 6 is that this was the appropriate action plan in relation
 7 to information provided to North West Fire Control from
 8 Greater Manchester Police into the control room to the
 9 effect that a bomb had exploded; is that correct?
 10 A. That -- that's not -- what I would say is that's the
 11 correct action card for an explosion and my -- the early
 12 stages of notification, I think, would be very unclear
 13 as to the nature of the explosion.
 14 Q. So do you agree that it would be reasonable and
 15 appropriate for the control room, before applying the
 16 requirements of the (inaudible: distorted) plan, for
 17 themselves to be clear about the nature of the incident
 18 they were responding to?
 19 A. If I could put some context on that, if we have a gas
 20 explosion at a house, we are unsure at the time of
 21 reporting that it is a gas explosion: it's an explosion
 22 and we would send resources to that location.
 23 Q. Well, this isn't quite as clear as that, is it?
 24 A. Again, I haven't had the information on the evening --
 25 I'm really -- I don't have any information about the

181

1 information on the evening, sir.
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. Let's forget about the
 3 information on the evening. Let's just look at this
 4 document. So headline:
 5 "Incident type action plan explosion."
 6 There's the action. And then the triggers, it's
 7 difficult to understand why it's under "Trigger":
 8 "Cause of explosion could trigger different
 9 [incident type action plans] -- gas, bombs, cylinders,
 10 impact."
 11 If I'm reading that, do I understand that to start
 12 with I follow the explosion plan, then if I know it's
 13 a bomb that's exploded, I follow a different plan? How
 14 do I do this -- how do I respond to this action plan in
 15 practice?
 16 A. So the different triggers -- so if we look at
 17 chemical/impact that would obviously initiate
 18 a different response altogether because we could have
 19 toxic chemicals.
 20 But if we look at the triggers there and look at the
 21 second one, which is bomb, there is then a conversation
 22 to have around the information/intelligence of the
 23 attack methodology, what is the likelihood of there
 24 being a secondary device, and the risk that -- as
 25 I said, the Fire Service are not risk averse -- we need

182

1 to go and actually help people.
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So once I know it is an explosion,
 3 I need to wait to have some idea as to what has caused
 4 the explosion before I identify the incident type action
 5 plan?
 6 A. Absolutely not, sir. I think the resources -- as that
 7 action plan says, if we get reports of an explosion,
 8 that action plan is implemented and we send TRU, pumps,
 9 station manager.
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So suppose I'm there at North West Fire
 11 Control and I am told simply there has been an
 12 explosion. I then send them off there. Within
 13 2 minutes I hear it's a bomb that's exploded and then I,
 14 what, call them all back?
 15 A. The first reactions would be done relatively quickly,
 16 sir, the fourth action is the duty NILO, and he would
 17 have that conversation with the force duty officer to
 18 find out the information/intelligence.
 19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Sorry, I'm sorry to take this over,
 20 Mr Smith, but I need to understand it.
 21 So they are told explosion has happened. A member
 22 of the public rings up, "There's been an explosion".
 23 Then within -- so they follow all that. Then within
 24 a minute another member of the public rings up says,
 25 "It's a bomb that's gone off", do I now have a different

183

1 incident type action plan --
 2 A. But it's still the same effect that the Fire and Rescue
 3 Service are attending, sir: it's still an explosion.
 4 It's not an MTFA. There's nothing there to say it's
 5 a marauding terrorist. Regardless of the cause of the
 6 explosion, the Fire and Rescue Service is still
 7 attending that type of incident.
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Thank you, Mr Smith.
 9 MR SMITH: I just want to spend a minute or two looking at
 10 these actions, please.
 11 First of all, there's no action there to inform the
 12 duty NILO, is there? It's to send the duty NILO.
 13 A. Yes, but the duty NILO on the pager would get a message
 14 to say there's been an explosion. And then --
 15 Q. Of course.
 16 A. -- based on -- based on the information that -- if
 17 it's -- if it's a -- sorry -- unknown reason for the
 18 explosion, then I would expect the NILO to ring the
 19 force duty officer for confirmation if there is anything
 20 sinister. If not, then it doesn't alter the
 21 mobilisation at all.
 22 Q. You see, if we look at this from the point of view of
 23 the control room, looking at the action plan as it comes
 24 up on the screen, running through them from the
 25 beginning, the first is to send the TRU, isn't it?

184

1 A. Correct.
 2 Q. But not the SRT?
 3 A. Because there is no inference that it is
 4 a terrorist –related incident.
 5 Q. Thank you. And would you agree that the control room in
 6 any event had no authority to send the SRT? That could
 7 only be done on the authority of the duty NILO.
 8 A. If you had a message that it was an Operation Plato,
 9 then I would expect Control to start the implementation
 10 phase of the action card, which is to mobilise the SRT
 11 to an RVP.
 12 Q. But we are looking at the explosion plan at the moment.
 13 A. There's no — there's no necessity, no requirement to
 14 have the SRT attend an incident of that nature.
 15 Q. But what nature?
 16 A. An explosion.
 17 Q. But, Mr Gaskell, this is in fact a bomb that has
 18 exploded in a public place causing, by this stage alone,
 19 numerous casualties, all of which was communicated to
 20 the control room by Greater Manchester Police.
 21 Are you saying in those circumstances that it was
 22 sufficient simply to send the TRU and, if we look at the
 23 next one down, standard appliances?
 24 A. It's absolutely what I'm saying, yes, sir.
 25 Q. And you drew this plan up, did you?

185

1 A. I was involved in the plan, yes — in the action card
 2 or —
 3 Q. In the action card.
 4 A. I was involved in the action card with the North West
 5 Fire Control SPOC, yes, sir.
 6 Q. It doesn't say, does it, "Inform the duty NILO", and it
 7 doesn't say, "Inform the duty group manager", does it?
 8 A. You would not inform the duty group manager at that
 9 stage because the duty group manager would be informed
 10 if the command support room was being set up for
 11 a larger –scale incident. At the minute we don't know if
 12 this is going to do that, to actually escalate to that.
 13 So that's the reason that the duty GM is not on that
 14 list.
 15 When it says, "Send the duty NILO", the explosion
 16 action card is for an incident where the explosion has
 17 occurred and the NILO will be going to scene to help
 18 with interoperability issues, not to manage as a MTFA.
 19 As an on –scene commander. Completely different. And
 20 not as an incident commander either.
 21 Q. (Overspeaking).
 22 A. Sorry, sir?
 23 Q. From 23 miles away, Mr Gaskell?
 24 A. That has nothing to do with this card, sir. This card
 25 is written for a generic explosion.

186

1 Q. Well, would you look next, please, at the guidance that
 2 we've just been looking at which is {INQ004213/1}, and
 3 would you go, please, to {INQ004213/7}, or just start,
 4 Mr Lopez, at the bottom of {INQ004213/6}, if we may.
 5 Now, there's a section there headed "Mobilisation of
 6 Special Response Team resources", and over the page at
 7 {INQ004213/7}, at paragraph 9, under:
 8 "In no circumstances should non –MTFA trained
 9 personnel be mobilised to the incident".
 10 What I would like to do is just pull the threads of
 11 this together, please.
 12 Plainly — thank you, Mr Lopez.
 13 Plainly, the guidance is related to an MTFA and we
 14 have been looking at an action plan or card relating to
 15 an explosion.
 16 A. That's correct.
 17 Q. We are on common ground there, aren't we, Mr Gaskell?
 18 I've got that right?
 19 A. I would say that statement is correct, yes.
 20 Q. I want to put to you for your consideration these
 21 circumstances, please. Putting this information
 22 together, together with the training presentation that
 23 you provided to North West Fire Control in relation to
 24 an MTFA, where a control room team leader concludes that
 25 this may be a terrorist attack and that firearms may

187

1 follow to produce an MTFA or Plato situation, in other
 2 words follow the explosion, what would you expect the
 3 Fire Control team leaders to do in terms of assessing
 4 the situation confronting them before deciding what
 5 action to take on the basis of the information they were
 6 receiving in the control room? Are you clear about that
 7 or do you want me to go over it again?
 8 A. I am — I am struggling with the relevance of the fact
 9 that non –MTFA trained personnel do not go to a scene and
 10 the other point that you made about the MTFA card
 11 about — sorry, about the explosion card. I don't see
 12 the relevance of explosion and MTFA. They're two
 13 completely separate incident types. I'm missing the
 14 connection there, sir.
 15 Q. You see, that's the point I'm trying to make,
 16 Mr Gaskell, probably not very well.
 17 We're looking here, aren't we, at two completely
 18 different situations: an Operation Plato situation,
 19 an MTFA, in which a firearms incident has become
 20 involved?
 21 A. An MTFA, yes. That's one incident type, yes.
 22 Q. We are looking at an explosion which the control room
 23 has received information about and been told that it's
 24 been caused by a bomb in a public place. And they've
 25 been looking, and we shall see that they have, at the

188

1 explosion action plan to which you've made reference and
 2 we have just been looking at.

3 A. Correct.

4 Q. Can you envisage circumstances in which control room
 5 team leaders may be very concerned about mobilising
 6 standard appliances to an incident if in fact what
 7 they're looking at and believe they are looking at is an
 8 unfolding MTFA and that the explosion is simply
 9 a precursor to an MTFA? They wouldn't know which action
 10 plan was appropriate, would they?

11 A. But if you use that logic, then the Fire and Rescue
 12 Service would not respond to any explosion at all. What
 13 I'm trying to make out, the point I'm trying to make out
 14 is whether it's a bomb, whether it's a gas explosion or
 15 a cylinder, the Fire and Rescue Service are responding
 16 to the effects of that explosion, not the incident --
 17 the attack methodology, sir. And until we know that
 18 attack methodology, then that changes, sir.

19 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I want Mr Smith to repeat to you the
 20 information that they had from the police as to what
 21 this incident contained. Could you just do that,
 22 Mr Smith?

23 MR SMITH: If I may say so, I said I would turn to this
 24 issue of possible contact with the FDO. What I was
 25 intending to do was to read aloud part of the transcript

189

1 from the telephone call to Station Manager Berry. It's
 2 only a very short section --

3 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Fine.

4 MR SMITH: -- which encompasses this, and just run through
 5 these timings.

6 What we have is at 22.35.50, sir, the GMP call to
 7 North West Fire Control is in progress and the control
 8 room operator is told for the first time that a bomb has
 9 exploded at the arena.

10 What happens next is that at 22.38 a pre-alert goes
 11 out to the fire crews at Manchester Central and what has
 12 happened is that the control room operator has created
 13 an incident and selected an incident type which is
 14 explosion, EPO1.

15 Just pausing there, Mr Gaskell, I'm sure you would
 16 say he's done the right thing?

17 A. Given those circumstances, sir, yes, I would.

18 Q. He's done exactly the right thing. He's picked up the
 19 right incident type and he's added it to the incident
 20 log.

21 Then what happens is that the explosion action plan
 22 becomes automatically added to the incident log by the
 23 system.

24 The next stage of the events is that, at 22.40, team
 25 leader Michelle Gregson provides the following

190

1 information to Station Manager Berry. I'm going to
 2 slowly read this, if I may, because you haven't had
 3 an opportunity of seeing it, and it deals with, with
 4 respect to him, the chairman's question:

5 "We are receiving reports of an explosion at the
 6 Manchester Evening News Arena. It's already detonated.
 7 The police that we've got on the line are saying it's
 8 a bomb. There's been 30 casualties reported so far.
 9 The rendezvous point at the moment is the car park
 10 outside the cathedral. I have just phoned you while
 11 we're still on to the police. Would it be all right for
 12 you to get in touch with them? Obviously we are not
 13 mobilising at the moment, so can you just speak to them
 14 and we'll hang fire?"

15 Now, I've got a number of questions arising out of
 16 that, Mr Gaskell.

17 First, going back to the matter I was asking you
 18 about, do you consider that it would be perfectly
 19 reasonable for a control room team leader to question at
 20 that stage whether it was appropriate to mobilise
 21 standard crews and appliances to an incident such as
 22 this described in those facts where that team leader
 23 believed that this could be an unfolding MTFA? Do you
 24 take the view that regardless of that belief, the team
 25 leader should nonetheless have sent non-specialised

191

1 crews to the incident without first speaking to the duty
 2 NILO?

3 A. I'm trying to be helpful here. This is the first time
 4 I have heard this information.

5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Do you need it in writing in front of
 6 you?

7 A. No, sir, I've got -- so if I'm right, at 22.38 the -- if
 8 I'm right in saying, the explosion action card was
 9 picked by -- selected by an officer at Fire Control.
 10 I just question --

11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Hang on. Could you let him finish.

12 A. I just question, because if I'm right, the next
 13 reference you make is at 22.40. I just question why
 14 have the appliances not been deployed in that 2 minutes.
 15 That's enough time for appliances to be deployed and
 16 en route to an incident, and then to say that you've
 17 further information about it's been a bomb, then
 18 again -- I keep -- in my opinion, the Fire and Rescue
 19 Service are reacting to the effects of an explosion, not
 20 the -- not to say that the bomb is a precursor for
 21 a bigger attack, because we haven't got that
 22 information, and if we reacted like that every time, we
 23 would have significant delays in how the Fire and Rescue
 24 Service react to a lot of different incidents.

25 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: I think there's more information than

192

1 perhaps you're -- this is just coming to you for the
2 first time, then you should certainly have the time --
3 the information appears to be there's been an explosion,
4 then the information is it comes from a bomb, that bomb
5 has caused significant amount of injuries, and there is
6 an RVP point which is away from the actual scene of the
7 bomb.

8 I think what's being put to you is: with all that
9 information which may give an indication that the police
10 believe there's an MTFA developing, would you really be
11 sending ordinary firefighters into the scene or would
12 you be saying, if you'd sent them: get them back, don't
13 let them go there until we have got more information?

14 A. I think the perception here is that as an RVP has been
15 nominated, that suggests it's some kind of sinister or
16 terrorist incident.

17 We get RVPs nominated for a vast range of incidents
18 because the incident may be down a narrow alleyway or it
19 might be difficult to access. So the fact that an RVP
20 has been nominated doesn't infer that you have to think
21 cautiously about this --

22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You draw no inference from the RVP
23 point?

24 A. I don't, sir, no, because an RVP from police is not an
25 uncommon instruction.

193

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: But do you draw the inference from the
2 information you got from the police that it may well be
3 a terrorist attack?

4 A. Based on what, sir?

5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That there's been a bomb gone off in
6 a place where there are obviously sufficient people to
7 suffer injuries?

8 A. I understand it is a consideration, but I would not
9 consider that to be a reason at this point to stop the
10 mobilisation.

11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. Mr Smith.

12 MR SMITH: Would you consider it to have been a reasonable
13 response for North West Fire Control to contact the duty
14 NILO?

15 A. Yes, as long as that didn't delay the initial response
16 of the PDA.

17 Q. I would like to take you now to those words I said
18 I would come back to:

19 "Would it be all right [the team leader said to
20 Station Manager Berry] for you to get in touch with
21 them?"

22 That's the police:

23 "Obviously we're not mobilising at the moment, so
24 can you just speak to them and we will hang fire?"

25 I would like you to bear in mind that the police

194

1 were still on the line in the police control room at
2 that time. So the two control rooms were in touch, and
3 I'm going to ask you to consider that plainly what the
4 team leader, Michelle Gregson, was referring to was the
5 need for Station Manager Berry to contact the force duty
6 officer.

7 A. I would say that --

8 Q. (Overspeaking) -- I'm so sorry to interrupt you,
9 Mr Gaskell, I didn't mean to.

10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, no, do give your answer.

11 A. I would say that's a very reasonable request from the
12 team leader with a proviso, as I said before, that that
13 doesn't delay, given the information you have, that
14 doesn't delay the initial PDA response given the
15 information you have.

16 I would also question -- you've used the word
17 a couple of times: "Obviously I'm not going to send
18 resources". I don't understand where "obviously" comes
19 from, sir.

20 Q. Can I take you back then to the guidance at
21 {INQ004213/5} that was current at the time. I said
22 I would return to this. Under 4(b) you see those words:

23 "The duty NILO will, if possible, liaise direct with
24 the FDO to obtain further information and intelligence."

25 And just as the chairman indicated to you earlier,

195

1 doesn't that indicate to you that when you were engaged
2 in assisting with this document and its preparation, it
3 must have been within your contemplation that the duty
4 NILO might not be able to make contact with the force
5 duty officer?

6 A. Given that sentence there, I don't see how you can come
7 up with any other explanation really from what you've
8 just said. I'm at a -- a bit of a loss as to why that
9 is in there, if I'm honest with you, sir.

10 Q. Well, why are you at a loss?

11 A. Because I'm not the author of the document. It doesn't
12 make sense because my understanding was that we would
13 contact the force duty officer. You may give reference
14 to Exercise Winchester Accord the previous year where
15 we'd had difficulties, but that was during an exercise
16 scenario. We had never in an operational context had
17 had any difficulties whatsoever to contact the duty NILO
18 (sic).

19 So I genuinely -- I'm not trying to be difficult
20 here, but I think possibly Mr Fletcher would be in
21 a better position than me to answer that question.

22 Q. We're going to ask Mr Fletcher about this. But at the
23 moment you are shown as having been involved in the
24 consultation and engagement for this document, aren't
25 you?

196

1 A. With a particular focus on the information within the
2 action card to make sure that that was transposed
3 accurately into this document, not with the full
4 project --
5 Q. (Overspeaking) -- I'm so sorry, Mr Gaskell.
6 A. I have finished.
7 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You have finished. Can I just ask,
8 Mr Lopez, can we have the whole of this page up so I can
9 see it all in context?
10 (Pause)
11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So as I understand it, the issue between
12 you and Mr Smith is to say that the information given to
13 North West Fire Control at this time was not such as
14 might indicate an MTFA, so this guidance doesn't apply;
15 is that what you're saying.
16 A. Correct, sir.
17 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. So it shouldn't have been in the
18 contemplation really at that time of NWFC?
19 A. I'm not sure it shouldn't have been in contemplation,
20 but it shouldn't have delayed the mobilisation in my
21 opinion.
22 MR SMITH: So before we leave this document, did you read it
23 once it had been published?
24 A. This document here? Yes, sir.
25 Q. You did?

197

1 A. Yes.
2 Q. And when you read it, what view did you form of the
3 section that we've drawn your attention to, "if
4 possible"?
5 A. I'll be honest with you, sir, I didn't scrutinise it in
6 that detail. I didn't go into it line by line. That's
7 the -- that's my honest opinion. I didn't go into that
8 in that detail.
9 Looking at it now, it appears to contradict itself
10 a little, that line.
11 Q. Well, Mr Gaskell, surely this was an important document
12 and, given your position with Greater Manchester Fire
13 and Rescue Service, as the MTFA lead, you would want to
14 ensure that the contents of it were accurate before it
15 became a published document; do you agree?
16 A. I would say that the contents of that document are
17 accurate. However, I am a little confused with the
18 terminology within section 4(b) -- the rest of the
19 document --
20 Q. (Overspeaking).
21 A. Sorry.
22 Q. No, it's my fault.
23 Before I leave this, did you say to Mr Fletcher,
24 "I don't understand why you have used the words 'if
25 possible'?"

198

1 A. No, I did not.
2 Q. I would like to just return to the discussion between
3 Station Manager Berry and the team leader, Michelle
4 Gregson.
5 Station Manager Berry was informed by the team
6 leader that North West Fire Control was "not mobilising
7 at the moment". I have read those words to you; do you
8 remember them?
9 A. Could you just repeat that again? Sorry, sir.
10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: She said:
11 "Of course we're not mobilising."
12 Do you remember? You quoted that yourself a minute
13 ago. Right. So that's what she told Berry.
14 A. "Obviously we are not mobilising at this point." Okay.
15 MR SMITH: Are you also saying that it was therefore not
16 a reasonable response by Station Manager Berry to then
17 discuss with the team leader a mustering point or
18 rendezvous point at Philips Park Fire Station and are
19 you saying that instead Station Manager Berry should
20 have said to the team leader, "What are you doing? Get
21 those crews down to the incident scene immediately"? Is
22 that what you're saying?
23 A. I think this conversation would have never have taken
24 place if the action card would have been followed
25 correctly, sir.

199

1 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Well, I am not sure you are saying that,
2 are you, because you are saying it's perfectly
3 reasonable for the team leader to speak to the NILO.
4 A. If it didn't invoke a delay in the response, sir.
5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: You are saying she should have gone on
6 with in accordance with the card, but at the same time
7 you did agree that it would be perfectly reasonable for
8 her to ring the NILO and have the sort of discussion
9 we're talking about?
10 A. Yes, but not to discuss the mobilisation criteria; to
11 discuss intelligence from the scene, sir.
12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. But she did. So what you're
13 being asked is: she did that, so should it not be
14 obvious to Mr Berry, just as it is to you, "What on
15 earth are you doing, get on with this mobilisation"?
16 That's the point being made to you, that he would have
17 reacted in that way if he hadn't been of the same view
18 as the team leader.
19 A. And I'm in a really difficult position here because
20 I don't know if the information and intel at that
21 point -- I'm not trying to --
22 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, you would know, because Mr Smith has
23 told you, what was said to Mr Berry by the team leader
24 in that conversation. And what Mr Smith is saying is --
25 I hope I'm getting it right, Mr Smith -- he is saying:

200

1 well, if you're right and that's really what the action
 2 card meant and what you should have done, Mr Berry would
 3 have said to you, "Get on with it, get them down there".
 4 A. I think that's a reasonable supposition, based on -- if
 5 the information that you've told me is what we had at
 6 the time and there was no inference of gunshot wounds at
 7 that point.
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So Mr Berry should have said, "Get on
 9 with the explosion action card", essentially?
 10 A. Yes, if that -- if the information that there was a --
 11 a device that had detonated, we had shrapnel wounds,
 12 then I would -- I would suggest that that was for a --
 13 to follow the explosion action card, yes, sir.
 14 MR SMITH: Sir, before we leave this, you don't dispute the
 15 fact, do you, that Station Manager Berry was a very
 16 experienced member of Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue
 17 Service?
 18 A. That's correct.
 19 Q. He had and he been through the NILO training course,
 20 hadn't he? He would have to have been.
 21 A. He had been, yes.
 22 Q. A detailed training course?
 23 A. It is.
 24 Q. And he would have knowledge of the action plans,
 25 wouldn't he in?

201

1 A. Yes, he would.
 2 Q. If you are right -- if you are right -- the first thing
 3 that you would have expected Mr Berry to do was to have
 4 said to the team leader, "Why aren't you mobilising?",
 5 surely?
 6 A. I would have asked the question, why haven't you
 7 mobilised, yes. You've come up with a statement that
 8 says, "Obviously, we haven't mobilised". I think
 9 I would want to know why is that such an obvious
 10 statement.
 11 Q. So does it come to this: that you would have adopted
 12 a different position to Station Manager Berry if
 13 informed of this information in his position as the duty
 14 NILO at that time, or would you be prepared to agree
 15 that Station Manager Berry's management of this when he
 16 received the information was a reasonable one?
 17 A. (No answer given).
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay, they are not necessarily
 19 alternatives, are they?
 20 MR SMITH: No, they are not.
 21 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So can we have them one at a time.
 22 First of all, would you have taken a different attitude
 23 to Mr Berry when told those things? I think your answer
 24 is yes.
 25 A. It is, but I would also have a caveat, sir, that it is

202

1 so much easier now to sit here.
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Of course. We're all doing that.
 3 A. It's a very different world at 10.30 on that evening.
 4 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay.
 5 A. However, to answer your question, sir, as helpfully as
 6 I can, given the information, if we had the information
 7 that a bomb had detonated, people were hurt, and we had
 8 no further information action and that we'd been given
 9 an RVP, which is quite normal, I would say it's probably
 10 realistic to say that I would have -- I would have
 11 mobilised to that RVP.
 12 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Now, the second question is: do you
 13 regard Mr Berry's reaction, although different from
 14 yours, to be a reasonable reaction in the situation he
 15 was?
 16 A. The thing is with Operation Plato, the NILO role is key,
 17 and the factor that is within that is human nature and
 18 how people react to different information, that is the
 19 variable.
 20 It maybe isn't so black and white, so I am sort of
 21 looking at different risk appetites. I'm not saying
 22 that the control room manager was wrong. I'm certainly
 23 not saying that, and I'm not trying to say that Andy is
 24 wrong. I'm saying it's up to that individual on the
 25 night.

203

1 The NILO course gives that uniformity. Hopefully
 2 the action cards help with that. But there will still
 3 be grey areas that need to be explored before an
 4 absolute --
 5 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: So the answer to the question is? Was
 6 it a reasonable response of his or not?
 7 A. Yes, I think it is.
 8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay.
 9 A. Sorry, sir, if I went round --
 10 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: They are your two alternatives, I think,
 11 Mr Smith.
 12 I assume you've some way to go have you or am I
 13 being unduly pessimistic?
 14 MR SMITH: I have a little way to go. Obviously I'm
 15 dependent upon your view as to the sitting time.
 16 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: No, you -- we don't want to go on -- if
 17 we can -- the witness is going to have to come back next
 18 week in any event, so I don't want to go on too long
 19 because people, not surprisingly, have had long days.
 20 But if you're going to finish in the next 5 or
 21 10 minutes or want to do something in the next 5 or
 22 10 minutes, then do it.
 23 MR SMITH: Could I just finish this topic?
 24 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Absolutely, of course.
 25 MR SMITH: And then I might have perhaps 15 or 20 minutes

204

1 possibly on Monday morning.
 2 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: That's fine.
 3 MR SMITH: I would just like to explore the answers you've
 4 just given, Mr Gaskell. You're not saying that the
 5 control room leader was wrong?
 6 A. That's what I just said, yes.
 7 Q. And does that mean also in answer to another question
 8 that I asked you that, as far as you're concerned, as
 9 well as Mr Berry, the way in which the team leader
 10 managed this situation, ie deciding to contact Station
 11 Manager Berry, the duty NILO, and seek his advice, was
 12 a reasonable step for her to take? It may not have been
 13 the one that you would have recommended, but do you
 14 agree that that was a reasonable step for her to take in
 15 the circumstances which I have presented you with?
 16 A. I'm just struggling, sir, with the thought process when
 17 the information that was initially given and that the
 18 explosion action card was selected, why the PDA was not
 19 mobilised.
 20 Maybe I have not got all the information that I need
 21 to be able to answer that, but I would expect that at
 22 10.38 the information you had there, a bomb has
 23 exploded, we have got casualties, then I would expect
 24 the PDA to be mobilised immediately.
 25 Q. Why do you therefore say that you are not saying that

205

1 the control room team leader was wrong?
 2 A. Because — again, it's the — it's the human nature
 3 element. I don't — there has been an inference here
 4 that this could be a terrorist attack because an RVP has
 5 been nominated, but I am struggling with that decision.
 6 So if you want me to be perfectly honest then, then
 7 I do think the initial actions were wrong. I think the
 8 explosion action card should have been selected and
 9 actioned appropriately.
 10 Q. I must press you about this: then why did you say that
 11 the control room team leader was not wrong?
 12 A. I tried to say that the control room leader is not wrong
 13 and Andy Berry is not wrong, trying to come from
 14 a balanced opinion. But if I'm being pressed which
 15 I think is the most appropriate decision, then I think
 16 the decision to mobilise according to the explosion
 17 action card should have been the correct path to take,
 18 given the information.
 19 Q. That is plainly your view, Mr Gaskell, which I respect,
 20 if I may say so. But in these situations, do you agree
 21 that there is scope for concluding that the actions of
 22 Station Manager Berry and the actions of the team
 23 leaders at North West Fire Control, both of them, not
 24 just Mr Berry, could be considered to be reasonable in
 25 the circumstances that confronted them?

206

1 A. I feel like this is a question we have had already. My
 2 opinion is that the action card for explosion should
 3 have been followed. The fact that it wasn't then led to
 4 this further discussion between Andy Berry and the team
 5 leader.
 6 Q. And?
 7 A. And that if the action card had been followed, they
 8 would have had resources on scene very quickly.
 9 Q. Yes. But before I leave this, may I just ask you: is
 10 that meant to be an answer to my question?
 11 A. I'm certainly not trying to evade the question. As I
 12 say, if I haven't answered it, please ask it again,
 13 because I'm not trying to evade the question.
 14 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Shall we all look at the (overspeaking)
 15 then we will try again on Monday morning if necessary,
 16 okay. I think we will call it a day if that's all right
 17 by you, Mr Smith.
 18 Can I just ask one thing.
 19 No one, as you haven't, has doubted that everyone is
 20 acting with the very best intentions and that's why you
 21 are saying and I understand your reluctance to criticise
 22 other who are in a different position at 10.30 on the
 23 night.
 24 Maybe a fundamental problem is you actually can't
 25 have action cards cast in stone that you must follow in

207

1 every situation because you just can't actually do that,
 2 can you?
 3 So one of the problems here is that — I understand
 4 why you do it because you want to make sure NWFC
 5 actually do the proper thing at the right time, but
 6 unless you are able when devising the action cards to
 7 think of every conceivable possibility, you are actually
 8 never going to cover everything. So you're going to get
 9 disagreements in interpretation when something hopefully
 10 out of the ordinary happens.
 11 Do you think that's a possibility?
 12 A. It is a possibility, sir. I am struggling to understand
 13 how an explosion can't be interpreted as an explosion
 14 because that's what we had on the 22nd. But maybe
 15 I don't — I'm at a disadvantage because I don't know
 16 enough about the actual circumstances and the
 17 communications.
 18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Whether you're right or wrong, there was
 19 clearly a different interpretation taken at the time by
 20 maybe not just one, but maybe two people, who are no
 21 doubt perfectly experienced and doing their best to
 22 abide by the action cards.
 23 That may be they are just not interpreting it right,
 24 or it may be there's some ambiguity, or you can't
 25 provide for every eventuality on an action card.

208

1 A. And I suppose what you just referred to there as you
2 can't have an action card for every type of action,
3 that's where the NILO role is so valuable because they
4 will hopefully bridge that intelligence gap. But I'm
5 sort of relating this back to the early stages, 10.38,
6 that we had an explosion, people injured, and that for
7 me should have been the explosion action card selected.
8 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Okay. Thank you very much. And I'm
9 sorry you've got to come back to Monday this morning.
10 A. Not a problem, sir.
11 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: What time are we due to start on Monday?
12 MR DE LA POER: Before that we will --
13 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: We will be here tomorrow.
14 MR DE LA POER: So on Monday, I'm afraid, we will need to
15 persist with the 9.30 start. We've got a very heavy
16 week next week, and we must do our best to progress
17 through it.
18 SIR JOHN SAUNDERS: Right, okay. 9.30 on Monday, 2 o'clock
19 in here tomorrow, except for those who are having
20 advance notice of what is in the report.
21 Right, thank you all very much.
22 (4.45 pm)
23 (The hearing adjourned until
24 Thursday, 17 June 2021 at 2.00 pm)
25

209

I N D E X

1
2
3 MR PAUL ARGYLE (continued)1
4 Questions from MR DE LA POER (continued)1
5 Questions from MR SMITH19
6 Questions from MR HORWELL45
7 Questions from MS AILES53
8
9 Witness statement of TIMOTHY JOHN83
10 SUTER (read)
11
12 MR NEIL GASKELL (sworn)95
13 Questions from MR DE LA POER95
14 Questions from MR SMITH167
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

210

211