



Our Ref: PH/JG

Your Ref:

Mr Tony Brown LLM
HM Senior Coroner
North Northumberland
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Chief Fire Officer
Paul Hedley

9th February 2017

Dear Mr Brown

**Regulation 28 Report dated 2nd December 2016
Joshua Harry Smith Inquest 4th November 2016**

As part of the operational debrief of the tragic events of 4th April 2015, and as a result of the HM Coroner's investigation culminating in the inquest of Joshua Harry Smith on 4th November 2016, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) would like to provide the following narrative in response to Section 7 of the Regulation 28: Report To Prevent Future Deaths dated 2nd December 2016.

We would like to state at the outset that NFRS have been very supportive of the national development of the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) which has produced much needed practical guidance to help improve multi-agency response. The Joint Doctrine: Interoperability Framework sets out a standard approach to multi-agency working, along with training and awareness products for organisations to train their staff. Together with our North East blue light partners in Northumbria Police and North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) we have committed to implementing and embedding the joint working principles and models.

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Although the call handling and initial mobilising for the incident were not undertaken by NFRS Fire Control personnel, steps have been taken to confirm, and reaffirm, the procedures which would be applied within our Fire Control in the event of NFRS receiving a similar 999 call. Our policy is for any emergency call to be 'dual monitored' as it is being taken by a duty supervisory manager to reduce the risk of a mobilisation error, incorrect information being relayed to responding crews or an incorrect address being recorded. As an additional confidence and assurance measure, NFRS have adopted a policy of instigating an immediate review of the call by someone other than the call handler whenever a call has been placed by a confirmed or suspected, missing person. NFRS have also reviewed the control procedure when using Enhanced Information Service Emergency Calls (EISEC) which allows Fire Control to pinpoint mobile phone signals within a specific area. We have confirmed that Fire Control would follow normal procedure and mobilise to this area even if the target zone covered part of the sea or water area.

Since the events of 4th April, NFRS has instigated a full review of our water rescue standard operating procedure (SOP) to ensure that the content remains appropriate and relevant. We have ensured that salient operational protocols applicable to the incident have also been re-emphasised and we have ensured that all recommendations emanating from the operational debrief have been actioned across the service and all operational personnel. NFRS missing persons protocols and procedures stipulate that under normal circumstances Police colleagues hold primacy for the co-ordination and management of a missing persons search with fire and ambulance services assuming the primacy role dependent upon whether there was a subsequent requirement for a rescues / recovery or medical treatment. It may be of interest that these arrangements will be reviewed and confirmed due to the current development of the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) Missing Persons and Search Coordination of which NFRS, Northumbria Police and North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) are statutory partners.

In order to provide assurance with regard to the issues you have identified within Section 5 'Coroner's Concerns' of your report it is incumbent upon us to review our existing JESIP arrangements, consider their current effectiveness and engage with our blue light partners to collaboratively identify revisions and enhancements that can be applied. NFRS is committed to continual improvement with regard to operational response and incident command and it is our intention to continue to develop and embed our JESIP training with a clear commitment that it will be more focused at operational firefighter and initial supervisory manager level. NFRS have released a range of learning and development materials across the service to support personnel already trained and have imbedded maintenance programmes established via the competence framework. Front line operational personnel are scheduled to be trained from February 2017. Personnel already trained to the JESIP principles include:

- Civil Contingencies Team;
- All NFRS flexi duty officers at middle and senior levels;
- All Fire Control staff;
- NFRS supervisory managers via Continuous Professional Development Days;

JESIP principles are embedded across all NFRS incident command courses and incident command maintenance programmes.

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As part of our ongoing internal JESIP training we will liaise with Northumbria Police and NEAS colleagues to ensure they are clear about the content and context of the front line training we will deliver, and to ensure that it is consistent and complementary to the training being provided at the same operational levels within our emergency partner services. Our intention is to agree with partners on the implementation of a joint task and finish working group to develop a joint inter-service action plan to address the concerns raised during your inquest. It is our intention, in collaboration and discussion with our 'blue light' partners, to seek to establish this group by 1st April 2017. To assist with the facilitation of the group NFRS would like to nominate Station Manager [REDACTED] Station Manager [REDACTED] has extensive experience delivering incident command at all levels during a secondment to the Fire Service College. Station Manager [REDACTED] is also our JESIP single point of contact and has been integral in developing NFRS JESIP structures.

In order to ensure that operational response and effectiveness to any future missing person incident is optimised, we would look to include colleagues from HM Coastguard and Northumberland search and rescue teams and in the confirmation of JESIP principles across agencies and the delivery and execution of local joint exercising and training. The inclusion of HM Coastguard as an attendee at the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum and Emergency Services Liaison sub-group should assist in the delivery of these proposals.

We would anticipate that some of the deliverable outcomes of that process will be;

- Confirmation of JESIP principles across all agencies
- Affirmation of the application of JESIP principles at Operational, Tactical and Strategic levels
- Confirmation of agency primacy in missing persons cases
- Development of a 'front-line' joint exercising plan to compliment joint exercising arrangements at tactical and strategic levels
- Reaffirm commitment to JESIP at regional forums such as Northumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and Emergency Services Liaison Group (ESLG)
- Each service to review, and if necessary revise, their existing JESIP delivery plans.

To provide the required assurance and confidence that NFRS and partners have taken the necessary steps to mitigate the potential risk of a reoccurrence of the issues highlighted within your Regulation 28 report you may wish to be provided with a copy of any jointly produced action plan for your review. I would be happy to facilitate this with the agreement of our partners in due course.

Should you wish discuss the content of this letter to provide further detail and context, please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience

Yours sincerely



Paul Hedley
Chief Fire Officer