

Harnessing the power of kindness for communities in crisis:

Towards a more effective response
to emergencies in the UK



Learnings from 2017

ZA/6

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Foreword

At the British Red Cross our aim is to be the movement that connects human kindness with human crisis; to help harness and channel that outpouring of compassion towards those affected in their greatest time of need.

Our deep and enduring, human-centred values – including humanity, impartiality and independence – are central to the actions of every British Red Cross volunteer and staff member, from giving a smile and offering a helping hand, to providing essential support to those most in need. We see those we help as people with crisis needs, not problems to be solved. We continually challenge ourselves to ensure that our actions and impact uphold these fundamental principles.

In the space of a few weeks last year, the UK saw a series of emergencies unparalleled in peacetime in this country. The terror attacks in Manchester and London as well as the Grenfell Tower fire caused enormous loss of life and injury, and devastated communities.

The reverberations of these tragedies extend far further than those who sadly died. Many who survived suffered life changing injuries, and must adapt to dramatically different lives and the long lasting emotional impact of

trauma. All those who were witness to the pain and distress of those directly impacted – the emergency services, British Red Cross personnel, community volunteers, and members of the public – also pay a personal price as they too try to make sense of the suffering they have seen first-hand.

However, this time in our national history should also be remembered as a period when communities pulled together, for the heroic response of the emergency services and for the incredible kindness shown by many thousands of ordinary people and businesses. People were moved to ask: “how can I help?” and gave their care, shared their time and donated what they could.

Our special role as a humanitarian auxiliary to government means that in summer 2017, the British Red Cross was called upon by the authorities in both London and Manchester to deploy our volunteers and staff to support people affected by these tragic events.

We believe we were one of the only organisations to be involved in responding to all the events that took place, and this gives us a unique perspective on what lessons can be taken from this unprecedented and challenging period.

In 2017, our staff and volunteers worked tirelessly to:

Support people in crisis

- > Provide humanitarian assistance and first aid at the scene
- > Set up staffed rest centres and create safe spaces for those concerned for loved ones
- > Support the NHS, including with hospital discharge, deploying our ambulances and the provision of mobility aids
- > Accompany those bereaved to the mortuary and provide welfare assistance
- > Trace loved ones and reunite families
- > Give emotional and psychological help
- > Signpost to other organisations.

Provide a platform for kindness

- > Engage the public to donate, such as the Shop for Grenfell, We Love Manchester Concert and Saturday Night for London initiatives
- > Raise £27 million in donations
- > Co-ordinate fundraising and distribution efforts
- > Work with businesses moved to support to victims and families.

Play a strategic role

- > Work collaboratively with statutory services and governmental organisations, including as part of the strategic Gold Command at the Grenfell Tower.
- > Manage public information communications in the aftermath of the events.

There is much to be proud of in how we collectively rose to this challenge, but it is important also to reflect and learn from where things could have been done better or differently.

The British Red Cross has been upfront about where our response did not meet our high standards. The Grenfell Tower fire in particular showed that some of our established ways of working are not responsive enough to local need, and highlighted where we did not communicate effectively enough with statutory and other voluntary and local organisations.

We are more convinced than ever that effective emergency response is truly human-centred, focussing on the individuals and communities at the heart of an emergency.

This means ensuring people in crisis have timely and compassionate access to the support they need in that moment, whether this be practical, emotional or financial. We need streamlined, adaptable processes to harness the outpourings of human kindness that so often follow a crisis so that the efforts of volunteers and members of the public are most effectively channelled to meet presenting need.

We need to heal fragmentation between statutory and voluntary services and between national and local voluntary organisations. Most importantly, a human-centred response requires all of us to develop new approaches to empower and put people and communities at the heart of emergency response; whether this be through regular and clear communication or a collaborative approach to problem solving that brings together local insight with sector expertise.

We are resolved to support people to feel safe again, to recover and to prepare for the future. It is critical that all of us come together to share our learning and develop our thinking with communities, organisations and with government.

Principles and the case for change

Putting people first

Principle 1: People should expect that their crisis needs are central to the way emergency response is designed and implemented, wherever they are in the UK.

The tragic events in 2017 highlighted the need for a truly human-centred response to emergencies, putting those affected first and foremost in the design of our approach to crisis response. From our experience, we know how important it is for emergency response to be holistic, to address social as well as practical needs, and for it to be fast and effective.

We have learned from 2017 that the right structures and processes must be in place to ensure the most effective and person-centred crisis response and these would include:

- > Strengthened local structures and reviewed local plans.
- > A renewed role for the British Red Cross.
- > Closer join up between statutory and voluntary sector providers.
- > A more co-ordinated and upskilled voluntary sector.
- > A local and diverse emergency response.

Strengthened local structures and reviewed local plans

The British Red Cross's humanitarian role as an auxiliary to government and our ability to provide end-to-end all encompassing support across the UK over a sustained period means, in practice, that we are the lead voluntary sector emergency response organisation. In addition to the scale and scope of the services we offer, the British Red Cross plays a lead role in formal

emergency response structures with and for the voluntary sector. At the national level, we chair the Voluntary Sector Panel for emergency response, and we represent the voluntary sector in other forums. We are also currently leading a project to unlock the potential of the voluntary sector, in coproduction with voluntary sector partners, on behalf of the Cabinet Office.

At the local level, emergency response is coordinated through Local Resilience Forums (LRF). An LRF brings together key emergency responders and specific supporting agencies, to plan and respond to emergencies in their localities. Responders with statutory responsibilities to respond include police, fire, ambulance and health services, and utility companies. The voluntary sector participates through the LRF Voluntary Sector Panels, where organisations play a key role in representing the needs and interests of the people they support. Across the country, we chair several LRF Voluntary Sector Panels, coordinating the collective efforts of other voluntary sector partners. We play a substantive role in all others.

Although these local forums feature in the guidance to the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, recent events showed that there is no guaranteed consistency across areas in terms of the effectiveness of the structures and plans of emergency response. For example, some Voluntary Sector Panels are not elected or representative and are not properly included as part of the design and delivery of emergency response. We would like to help improve the way things work and give greater voice to the needs of local communities, including through playing a lead role on all LRF Voluntary Sector Panels.

UK-wide

For some time, we have advocated for the need for the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to apply to the Northern Ireland as it does to the rest of Great Britain. We believe this would help to strengthen local relationships between the statutory responders and the voluntary sector, leading to a more person-centred and agile response to emergencies. We are also aware that some powers under the Civil Contingencies Act will become devolved to Wales in 2018. We would support the Act covering the whole of the UK and, where there are differences or devolved powers, for there to be consistent principles to response.

A renewed role for the British Red Cross

We also want to improve the way we respond to emergencies and would like to work with government to agree processes for the British Red Cross to deploy the 'right to initiate'. We work closely with statutory authorities and usually wait to be invited to deploy our services. However, we have reflected on our responses in 2017 and to past events, and we feel that we have not always responded as rapidly or as proactively as we might have.

The 'right to initiate' would mean that the British Red Cross would be able to respond proactively to identified need in the aftermath of a crisis. For example, whilst the statutory agencies, rightly, are focussed on responding to the actual scene first to save life and tend to the most critically injured, we would establish a survivor reception centre in the immediate aftermath of a major incident. We want to be in an agreed position where we can best help people and support the statutory authorities. It would also help us to address recovery, which is often forgotten.

Recommendations

- > Meeting people's needs should be central to the design of and delivery of crisis response. Statutory authorities, in partnership with voluntary sector organisations, should review local structures and plans to ensure they are person-centred and involve the best possible inclusion and join up between statutory responders and the voluntary sector.
- > The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 should apply to the whole of the UK, with a consistent, person-centred approach across all countries, even where there are devolved powers.
- > In collaboration with the statutory authorities, we would like to explore ways for the British Red Cross to be more proactive in response to human need, including the 'right to initiate', if or when the authorities are unable or unwilling to do so. This would place meeting people's needs at the forefront of the response and ensure continuity and recovery. The British Red Cross will continue to be ready to deploy in line with Local Resilience Plans, for example by setting up rest centres.

Principle 2: People should expect a coordinated and high quality response in and after an emergency.

A better coordinated voluntary sector

Within and outside of the formal structures, the voluntary sector has an important role to play. In 2017, there was a highly visible response from different voluntary and community sector groups to all the emergencies. The voluntary and community sector, especially around the Grenfell Tower fire did an extraordinary job as first responders. However, it took time for our organisations to provide support in a collaborative, joined up way. This created confusion and limited access to the support victims needed.

We are interested in and able to undertake a convening role. As a national organisation we operate on a large scale, and our end-to-end approach means we provide a range of services helping communities to prepare, respond and recover from a range of emergencies. This expertise and our resources could be utilised to support and upskill other voluntary sector organisations, and link disparate third sector services together.

Closer join up between statutory and voluntary sector providers

The response to the Grenfell Tower fire also showed us that there can be distrust by some in the community of the 'establishment', which can include both statutory and voluntary sector responders, including the British Red Cross. Particularly after the fire, the scale of the tragedy challenged the ability of local voluntary sector bodies to act as a bridge between communities and authorities.

Efforts were also hampered by poor data sharing. It is vital that as well as working in close partnership, information is shared appropriately, in order to support people most effectively. We have learned of the importance of proper registration of people affected, or there can be delays in mobilising the right support at the right time, duplication of lists and double counting of people.

There clearly needs to be a strategic recognition of the importance of speedy and effective coordination of community relief efforts and the establishing of well-rehearsed communication channels between recognised responders and the local community and voluntary sector.

Recommendations

- > The British Red Cross would like to work in partnership with government and others to develop and strengthen our ability to convene and lead the voluntary sector.
- > Statutory authorities should work with voluntary sector responders to build more constructive working relationships and agree new, clear protocols for effective information and data sharing.

Principle 3: People should be supported in their local communities and local communities should be empowered to respond.

Local and diverse emergency response

Crisis response should be as local as possible, with local communities empowered to prepare, respond and recover from a crisis. Our experience is that local community organisations in emergencies – whether in the UK or internationally – have a critical role to play. They are always first on the scene and the British Red Cross is committed to supporting and nurturing that role, harnessing its national and global expertise.

We already provide some training and advice to others in the sector to upskill them to play a greater role themselves. For example, we are planning to provide free training for Islamic Relief volunteers. We are also in discussions with others, such as Humanists UK and small community groups, to advise on how they can provide support in and following a crisis. We are keen to explore how we can use our strategic and experienced position to work with diverse groups to improve the collective ability to respond.

While we reached out to some of the larger local organisations from the beginning of our response to help coordinate fundraising, it took us too long to reach out to the grassroots groups. This is something we will learn from. We recognise that we can do

more to engage with community groups – to recognise and promote their diversity – and to try and mirror this in our own.

As a start:

- > We have asked an independent consultant to review our approach to Community Engagement and provide recommendations – to help us listen, reflect and act differently in future.
- > We recently published an internal report on improving recruitment and development of BAME staff and are developing an inclusion and diversity strategy: implementation of the report's recommendations is being led by our Chief Executive.
- > As part of this work we are developing a more robust recruitment and selection process, incorporating mandatory diversity and unconscious bias training, name-blind applications and collecting key diversity metrics.

Recommendations

- > We will do more to engage with and support community groups in responding to emergencies: to marry their local insight and relationships with our national and global expertise for the most effective response possible.
- > Government should support initiatives to upskill the voluntary sector to respond to emergencies in local communities.

Ensuring people can access the support they need

Principle 4: During and after an emergency, people should be able to access the support they need quickly and feel safe and confident to do so, with their dignity preserved.

Single support line

We know how critical telephone support during and after an emergency can be, so that people affected by an emergency can speak to someone who is able to listen without judgment: after the Grenfell Tower fire, we received over 650 calls to our support line alone. However, in response to the 2017 emergencies there were a number of different support lines set up, which caused confusion and impacted on people's ability to access the support they needed. A key learning is that there should be a single support line, with one number. We are already working with other voluntary sector organisations including Victim Support, Cruse Bereavement Care, and the Samaritans to work through how to set this up for future emergencies.

Meeting human need first

As a humanitarian organisation, we are driven by our principles to provide support to people in crisis in an impartial way, based on their human need and nothing else. After the Grenfell Tower fire, we were concerned that some survivors with irregular immigration status might not have felt able to access support, especially from government, because they may have been afraid of being detained or deported. In order to give real clarity, we asked the government to grant a two-year compassionate leave to remain to survivors of the Grenfell fire who are foreign nationals. People should always feel safe and confident to access emergency support.

Cash assistance

We believe cash assistance should be considered as part of response to major crises in the UK crisis response. Cash assistance is already established as an effective and efficient tool in our humanitarian response internationally and plays a vital role in preserving the dignity of affected people. Distributing cash in the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire or the terror attacks was not something we were able to do.

However, we think that this should be an important new feature of UK emergency response going forward. In practice, this would mean transferring money directly to all those affected at the outset of a major emergency, to ensure they could afford to buy the essentials they need themselves, such as food and clothing. Crucially, people would need to be assured that any state benefits they were receiving would not be put at risk by receiving cash assistance.

We are working with our international colleagues at the Red Cross to explore how to implement cash assistance in the UK.

Recommendations

- > It's critical that people know how, where and when they can access support. There should be a single support line, with one number, that is accessible 24/7 for as long as people need it.
- > Government should make clear that access to support given during emergencies and for recovery is based only on meeting human need. Personal circumstances, such as immigration status, will not be a barrier to access.
- > Cash assistance to provide immediate support is an effective way to preserve people's dignity and must be our default approach.

Principle 5: During and after an emergency, people should have access to social and psychological support as well as the practical help they need.

Emotional and psychological support

During and after a crisis, whether on a large or smaller scale, as well as the other immediate practical and physical needs of those directly affected, social and psychological support is a hugely significant factor in the early stages of recovery.

The Grenfell Tower fire and the UK terror

attacks in 2017 were shocking and hugely traumatic for those directly involved, as well as for the blue light or emergency services and others who responded so bravely. Even those of us who have not been directly involved can feel impacted by what we have seen and heard.

A core part of the British Red Cross's approach to crisis response is our award-winning psychosocial support programme. Our team of volunteers and mental health professionals provide the most appropriate support, including working with people who face extreme distress and mental health difficulties. Our psychosocial professionals also provide clinical supervision and reflective practice to our own workforce. We recognise the important role others have to play in this space as well.

Having this resource of psychosocial professionals has meant that we have been able to: act as a focal point for psychosocial responses and resources for the voluntary sector (e.g. post the London Bridge and Borough attacks); contribute to clinical reference groups on mental health to promote the most effective responses to crises (alongside NHS professionals and academics) and seek out innovative methods of delivering care, such as partnering with NHS mental health professionals in outreach to the community following the Grenfell Tower fire. After the Grenfell Tower fire we also delivered a free workshop to school counsellors in the surrounding schools from the charity the Place2Be.

It is vital that people's mental as well as physical health needs are recognised and met during and after an emergency.

Recommendations

- > People's mental and physical health should have parity in emergency response.
- > Psychosocial support, such as that provided by the British Red Cross, should be seen as an integral part of emergency response and recovery.

Harnessing kindness following a major incident

Principle 6: People should know how best to give their financial support in an emergency and be supported to do so. They should be assured that their donations will go to people affected quickly, simply and equitably.

Through all our work at the British Red Cross, from health and social care services and refugee and asylum support through to first aid training, we see the kindness of people who support others through crisis. Following an emergency such as those in 2017, local communities and society naturally want to help and give support to those affected. Whether that's through donating money or other goods such as clothes or volunteering some of their time, or getting involved in the longer term, such as becoming a skilled volunteer for the Red Cross. We witnessed the significant outpouring of support from people across the UK and were pleased to have played our role in enabling people to give their support in the way they wanted to.

We raised and distributed significant funds in response to each of the emergencies we responded to in 2017, which exposed the need to improve coordination of fundraising efforts and distribution mechanisms, for a single appeal and a much simpler distribution system that is clearly communicated to those in need.

Although so much money was raised and has gone to those affected by the emergencies in 2017, we believe that the way things work could be improved in the future. Having a single, obvious fund for people to donate money to, such as the We Love Manchester fund that we set up in partnership with Manchester City Council and the Manchester Evening News worked extremely well in that context.

However, particularly after the Grenfell Tower fire, there were a number of different appeals, which made it confusing for people who

wanted to donate money and it 'split the pot' of funds for those affected, meaning that funds were distributed with varying criteria depending on the particular fund. We recognise our own role in this: we were too slow in setting up our *London Fire Relief Appeal*, partly because we were waiting for permission from authorities to begin a joint fundraising appeal.

We are exploring at what point we should progress independently and launch a fundraising appeal based on humanitarian need, and in turn how we can work collaboratively as the voluntary sector to develop a single fund from the outset of a disaster response would be more efficient and effective for those in crisis.

A trusted distribution of funds

We also recommend a streamlined distribution process for UK-based emergencies to allow for donations to be more quickly received by recipients, with clarity for victims and the public. This links to the clear need for a single and well-known point of access for support. Although raising funds and setting up emergency appeals is core to how we work, we do not actually distribute funds ourselves. Usually, we work with and through a trusted third party to ensure that all monies raised go to the people affected and we help to shape the criteria used. So, for example, after the Grenfell Tower fire, the distribution process for donations for funds raised by the British Red Cross transferred to London Emergency Trust (LET) for a multiple phased distribution, and in Manchester money has been distributed through the *We Love Manchester Emergency Fund*, a charity set up for that specific purpose.

However, for people affected who want to receive some support funds, the system and processes can seem confusing and complex. We know from recent experience that this can lead to distrust in the process and in the organisation in charge of the funds.

We want to take a leading role in shaping a streamlined distribution approach and are committed to working together with the Charity Commission, other voluntary sector organisations and the government to achieve a simpler distribution system that is clearly communicated to those in need.

Equity in response

A person-centred approach would suggest that all victims should receive equitable levels of charitable support, no matter the level of public response to the fundraising appeal.

Last year demonstrated that not all attacks and incidents will attract the same level of public support, meaning a victim of a terror attack in one part of the country might receive significantly more or less than someone in a different location, if the levels of public donations have been quite different.

We are exploring mechanisms to ensure, as far is possible, an equitable response for individuals receiving funds.

Recommendations

- > We believe one single, national, coordinated fund ensures greater clarity for the public about how to donate in a crisis, and for those affected in regards to where to access funds. Funds should have sufficient reserves to provide support immediately following a major incident, until the generosity of public donations kicks in.
- > When the humanitarian need is evident and there is a national profile, the British Red Cross will normally launch a fundraising appeal.
- > There should be a streamlined distribution approach which is transparent and shaped around the needs of people. Ideally, there should be a single organisation with a national capability and expertise in the distribution of funds to individual victims and their families. This is a distinctive, highly specialised capability.

Principle 7: People should be supported to give in ways that will help the most vulnerable

Helping people to give most effectively

After the Grenfell Tower fire, people were also incredibly generous in donating non-monetary items such as fresh food, toiletries, new clothing and bedding. However, although given with the best intentions, not all of the goods in kind were suitable for distribution and there were far more items than needed. We were asked to help make the most of the excess stock and we drew on our logistical expertise, and retail experience, to ensure the public's generosity didn't go to waste:

- > We worked with local community volunteers to sort through donations and separate new items from excess donations.
- > The best new items were made available to people affected by the fire to choose from. The remaining, excess items were labelled as 'Shop for Grenfell' and sold in British Red Cross shops across the UK.
- > Every penny raised from the sale of these items went to the victims via our London Fire Relief Fund, as did any profits from the recycling of unsaleable items.

We want to explore how people's deep desire to give at times of crisis can be harnessed more effectively. Of course, we were happy to step up our role to support the distribution of goods in kind but, given the scale of items donated that could not be passed directly onto survivors, due their condition or lack of specific need, things could be improved to ensure that people's donations and the effort it takes to process them are streamlined.

Recommendation

- > Guidance could inform people early on as to which goods are most likely to be used and give the information they need about supporting in other ways.

A new way to volunteer

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is powered by volunteers across the globe. We know the value of volunteering to people and communities and the power volunteers have to make real change and support people in or at risk of crisis.

Hundreds of British Red Cross volunteers responded to the emergencies in 2017, providing emergency, psychosocial and health and care support, as well as an arm around a shoulder, a listening ear and cups of tea. Volunteers linked to other organisations, national and local, were vital to the response too.

When a crisis hits, people often turn up at the scene to help in whatever way they can. It is understandable and laudable that many people simply wanted to give their time to help people at the sites of the terror attacks and at the Grenfell Tower fire. The public who turn up spontaneously can be of great help, but there is no way of knowing how many might turn up, they themselves might then be unsure how to contribute, and it can be challenging to coordinate spontaneous volunteers. For example, we may be unsure of their training, or background to ensure they are able to undertake certain tasks which may put themselves or others at risk.

To be more effective in an emergency situation, a little preparation is better, and we want to harness the power of these kind intentions. That's why we have worked quickly to develop a new volunteer role – **Community Reserve Volunteers** (CRV). This national network of British Red Cross volunteers can be called to help in the event of a local, large-scale crisis like widespread flooding or a fire.

They will undertake practical, behind-the-scenes tasks, specific to each emergency – like preparing kit and equipment or filling sandbags. It's quick and easy to sign up online and CRVs will be contacted by text if there is an emergency in their community they could help with. By signing up to

become a CRV in advance of a crisis, we can mobilise people to help more quickly and effectively and give tasks that are coordinated with the overall emergency response alongside the local authority, emergency services, and regular British Red Cross volunteers.

Recommendation

- > The voluntary sector and statutory services should work together to ensure the best coordination and deployment of volunteers, using innovative initiatives such as our Community Reserve Volunteers to support people to volunteer in the most effective way.

Continued support following emergencies and creating resilient communities

Principle 8: Following an emergency, communities should be supported to recover and become stronger and more resilient to crises in the future

Unlike in some other countries that are more prone to natural disasters that can lead to crisis situations (for example earthquake zones), the UK does not have a well-developed culture of 'crisis resilience'. However, recent events and the increased incidence of natural disasters due to climate change suggest that the UK ought to develop such a culture.

We work to prevent crises from happening, intervene early to prevent further unnecessary suffering, respond to emergencies, and provide support to help people and communities recover and be more prepared for the future. We would like to explore how we, working alongside others, can do more to inform local communities about levels of risk, such as via the Red Cross emergency app, raise awareness

about LRFs and action plans, and about what resources organisations such as the British Red Cross can provide, to support people and the authorities.

We see learning from responses and providing real support to communities to become more resilient to future crises as critical. We are doing lots of work already as part of our flood recovery and preparedness work.

We want to share our learning on national and international recovery and resilience with the relevant authorities and other public, private and voluntary sector organisations that are positioned to work with communities in the medium and long term.

Recommendation

- > We will use our local, national and international experience and learning to support organisations and local people to create stronger and more resilient communities – before, during and after a crisis.

Next steps in 2018

The British Red Cross will spend the next few months listening, learning and engaging.

We are preparing to participate in all relevant inquiries and initiatives in 2018, including the independent Inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire and the Kerslake Arena Attack Review in Manchester.

We will be holding a number of our own events too, to provide opportunities for us to share our learning and also learn from others, at the local, regional and national levels.

We will draw from our experience in responding to emergencies across the UK, including work on resilience in Northern Ireland and in the international context, as well as the learnings of other Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).



Photo © Simon Rawles / British Red Cross.

Appendix

The British Red Cross: what we do in emergency response

The British Red Cross is a humanitarian organisation that supports communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from crises, internationally and across the UK. Our response is as local as possible and as national as needed.

We are established by a royal charter, which states our objective is: “to provide assistance to victims of armed conflicts; and to work for the improvement of health, for the prevention of disease and for the prevention and alleviation of human suffering in the British Islands and throughout the world”.

We are guided by the seven fundamental principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality. These commit us to putting people first in everything we do. We are powered by over 20,000 volunteers in the UK who are motivated to support and be kind to others during a crisis period.

In crisis response, we respond to UK emergencies as well as emergencies abroad affecting UK nationals as a part of our collaboration with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. We have the capacity and capability to respond to all forms of humanitarian crisis.

Responding to emergencies is part of what we do and a core part of who we are. Up and down the country, our emergency response volunteers and staff support people at any time of the day or night, whether they've experienced a domestic house fire or flooding or a major emergency such as a terror attack. We provide practical and emotional support when it is needed most,

such as being with and having time for people, through to providing wheelchairs where needed to setting up a 24/7 telephone support line.

Our unique role in supporting people

Like all Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world, the British Red Cross has a special, long-standing and officially recognised function as a humanitarian auxiliary role to the UK public authorities. This means that the British Red Cross has a unique status: it is neither part of government nor a non-governmental organisation (NGO); it is a private organisation with certain recognised public functions.

We have a responsibility to co-operate with the UK government in order to support the authorities in their humanitarian tasks. In the field of emergency response and resilience, the British Red Cross has a pre-designated role in emergency response in the UK, at local, regional and national levels. We believe that having our particular principles-led approach focused on supporting people in crisis and preventing and alleviating suffering of those most in need, supports and enhances the statutory response. In doing so we remain independent and always maintain our autonomy, so that we are able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Red Cross Movement.

We have the added benefit of having an International Directorate within the British Red Cross and being part of the international Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. All Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies exist to respond in times of crisis and we have a wealth of experience to draw on from across the UK and the globe.

Our role in working with others

The rest of the voluntary sector has an important role in UK wide emergency response too. Although they don't have a statutory role (they are not part of the legal requirements for emergency response), voluntary sector organisations play an important role in the formal structures for emergency response across the UK – LRF and their equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

As well as working with the authorities and other voluntary organisations, the British Red Cross works closely with the media, which has a critical role to play in providing information, insight and communication during and after emergencies. Increasingly, the Red Cross plays a vital role in providing information directly to the public at a time of crisis.

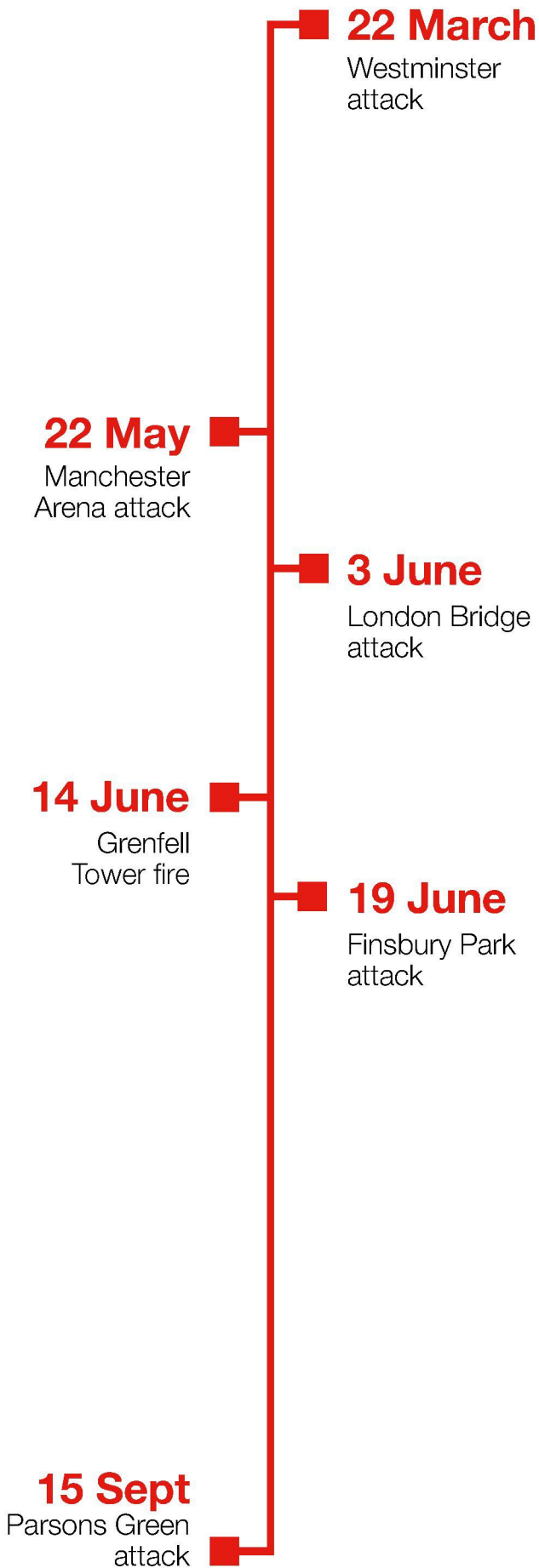
Advocacy

We take pride in our position as the lead voluntary sector emergency response organisation and are committed to continual review and development, to ensure we improve the way we work and can be in a position to lead and advise others. Through our extensive networks of volunteers, staff and services across the UK, we see the challenges faced by our communities and, where we see the need for improvement, we use our position to bear witness to people's suffering and advocate for change.



Photo © Georgina Cranston / British Red Cross

Timeline of events



Report on our activities in 2017

Westminster attack

On 22 March 2017, four British Red Cross staff, seven volunteers and three vehicles, were deployed at the request of the Metropolitan Police, to support those affected by the terror attack offering practical and emotional support.

At the request of the Mayor of London, the British Red Cross and London Emergencies Trust launched a private appeal, with donations received from leading companies and trusts based in London to provide support to the victims of the Westminster attack and their families.

Manchester attack

After the Manchester Arena attack on 22 May 2017, the British Red Cross deployed 45 emergency response volunteers and staff, 19 ambulance crews and 11 psychosocial volunteers. For the first 48 hours after the attack we were active in the rest centre which had been set up for those affected. Our psychosocial support team members provided 24/7 support primarily to bereaved families and friends at a rest centre, the Etihad stadium and two hotels where they were staying. Our teams were also at St Ann’s Square for the vigil. We launched a support line, operated by 17 staff and volunteers, to provide practical and emotional support.

The British Red Cross provided five ambulances to three hospitals in the areas and four ambulance support crews were on standby. At Oldham Royal Hospital we provided a hospital discharge service to free up bed space, psychosocial support and welfare assistance at the mortuary, with a British Red Cross emergency response vehicle used as a mini rest centre.

In conjunction with Manchester City Council and Manchester Evening News, the British Red Cross established a specific fundraising appeal – the *We Love Manchester*

Emergency Fund, which has raised £18 million. The British Red Cross was involved in the organisation of the *One Love Manchester* benefit concert and television-special. Funds were raised via bucket collections and various community activities such as fundraising football matches, cake sales and chess tournaments. Corporate partners provided a range of support such as hotel accommodation, flight to the UK for family members, fuel and food. Within two weeks of the incident everyone who had lost a family member had received £20,000 into their bank accounts and each have now received £250,000.

London Bridge attack

After the terrorist attack on Saturday 3 June at London Bridge and nearby Borough Market, the British Red Cross volunteers provided practical and emotional support at a community assistance and rest centre established by Southwark Council at London South Bank University and Southwark Cathedral. Similar support was provided in the community and at the Potters Field vigil.

The British Red Cross launched the *UK Solidarity Fund* on Sunday 4 June to help victims of terror anywhere in the UK, including the London Bridge terror attack. Fund disbursement took place via the London Emergency Trust (LET) which British Red Cross supported the set-up of. LET consists of individuals skilled in casework and to distribute funds raised. To support the fund we teamed up with the London Mayor's office, Borough Market, celebrities and a host of businesses to initiate the *Saturday Night for London* campaign. The *UK Solidarity Fund* raised £2.9 million in 2017.

Finsbury Park attack

On Monday 19 June, the British Red Cross were asked by the police to support a family and friends information centre, which accommodated approximately 50 residents who were not allowed to return to their

homes within the cordon of the crime scene. Three British Red Cross volunteers were also on hand to provide emotional and practical support to those affected. Funds raised by our *UK Solidarity Fund* were also available to people who have been affected by the attack.

Grenfell Tower fire

In the aftermath of the fire at Grenfell Tower on Wednesday 14 June, the British Red Cross deployed 631 volunteers, who supported over 1700 people. It cost us around £405,000 in operations and staff time to respond, paid for out of our general funds (not from money raised for those affected by the Grenfell Tower fire).

Our staff and volunteers, 40 volunteers on site at the busiest time, helped set up and were based at the Westway Community Assistance Centre providing emotional and practical support to those who lost loved ones or were victims of the fire. Our teams worked with the NHS to perform outreach work to identify people who had not yet accessed support. At London's hospitals our support included assisting discharges to make beds available for victims and providing emotional and practical support in the hospital.

After Kensington and Chelsea Council were replaced to lead the Grenfell response, the British Red Cross became a key part of the multi-agency Gold Command formed of officials from multiple London boroughs, City Hall and Whitehall, as well as the police and fire services.

The British Red Cross became the primary source of public information, at the request of and on behalf of the authorities. We provided information for those affected by the Grenfell Tower fire, those working on the front line and the general public. We delivered this via our Red Cross Twitter account, setting up the @GrenfellSupport account, and inputting and circulating information through the Humanitarian Assistance Guidance Pack.

The telephone support line was expanded and received more than 650 calls relating to the Grenfell Tower fire.

Our Family Reunion teams supported friends and family and helped families from abroad connect with their loved ones who were affected by the fire, including through travel assistance. £100,000 was set aside by British Red Cross from the *London Fire Relief Fund* to help bereaved families travelling from overseas.

We set up the *London Fire Relief Fund*, which has to date raised £7.1 million. We secured £2.4 million from companies towards the appeal and managed a range of 'gift-in-kind' donations, including from AirBnB, Amazon, British Airways and Primark.

120 tonnes of clothes and other items – enough to fill three football pitches – were generously donated by the public in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire. Kensington and Chelsea Council asked us to draw on our logistical expertise and retail experience, with local community volunteers, to ensure that the public's generosity would not go to waste. New items donated were directed back to the local community, excess, good-quality second-hand items were labelled as 'Shop for Grenfell' and sold in 140 British Red Cross shops across the country, and low quality or damaged textiles

were sold for recycling. £226,000 has been raised with all the proceeds going directly to the appeal and those affected.

We continue to work with the London Emergencies Trust (LET) and with the Rugby Portobello Trust, to distribute the funds raised for this tragedy. So far £5.6 million has been given to LET for distribution.

The distribution of the funds raised is targeted towards those most affected. The next of kin of those bereaved have received £90,000 for each family member lost. People who were hospitalised for a week or more by the fire have or will receive £30,000, and £3,500 has gone to those who had short hospital stays. A separate distribution of grants was made to the households of Grenfell Tower and the Grenfell Walk in recognition of the continued distress, trauma and material loss they face. Grants of £15,000 have gone to each of the 139 households from the Grenfell Tower and grants of £8,000 have gone to the 26 households in Grenfell Walk.

Parsons Green

On 15 September, our volunteers helped to support people in rest centres for people affected by the attempted attack. We used our *UK Solidarity Fund* to support those who were injured and had a hospital stay.

British Red Cross

44 Moorfields

London

EC2Y 9AL

The British Red Cross Society, incorporated by Royal Charter 1908, is a charity registered in England and Wales (220949), Scotland (SC037738) and Isle of Man (0752).

[redcross.org.uk](https://www.redcross.org.uk)

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