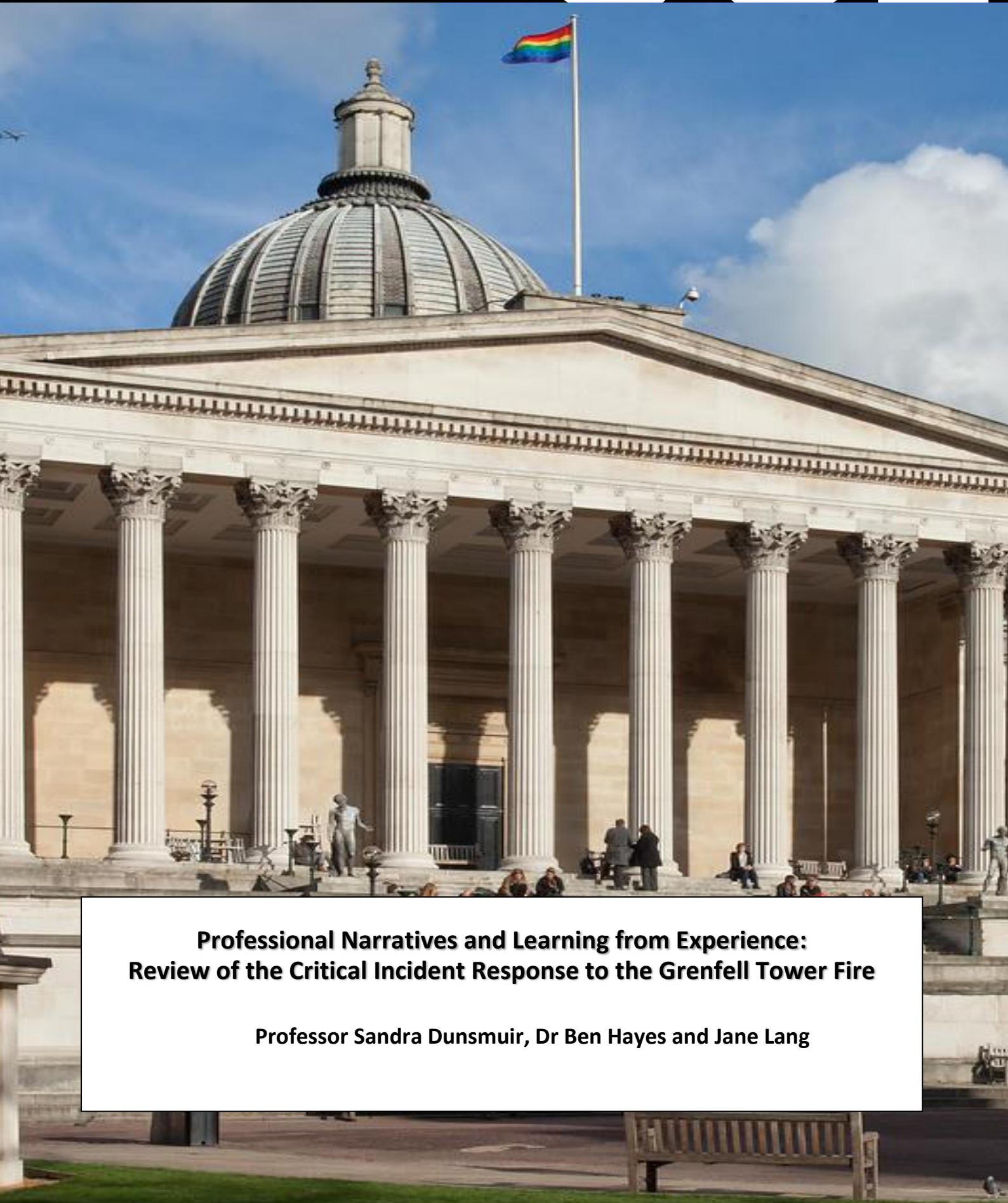


UCL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY GROUP

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**Professional Narratives and Learning from Experience:
Review of the Critical Incident Response to the Grenfell Tower Fire**

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Executive Summary

On 14 June 2017 a fire started in the Grenfell Tower in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London, leading to 71 confirmed deaths. The impact of this and how it was dealt with in local schools was the focus of this study. The aim was to gather information about the experience and perceptions of various practitioners (for example, senior teachers and educational psychologists) that worked in and supported schools and the wider community, in order to consider implications for practice with regard to making professional responses to critical incidents in the future.

Professional perspectives were obtained by conducting semi-structured telephone interviews with 19 participants – 12 head teachers or senior leaders in local schools, six educational psychologists and one local authority officer. Telephone interview transcripts were analyzed qualitatively, using thematic analysis procedures. Themes that were identified included contextual factors and pre-existing concerns. Participants described the range of emotional responses and their immediate reflections and reactions. A large number of comments addressed communication– how advice was sought, information shared, external offers of support dealt with, facts checked. There were some moving accounts of the role of school staff in listening and talking to parents and pupils, and descriptions of how space for communication was provided during the school day. Participants spoke about procedures, including decisions that had to be made relating to school opening, health and safety concerns, ensuring normality, pupil and parent welfare and the end of term. Participants discussed their critical incident/emergency plans and developments to these since the fire. Comments about a range of professional services were provided, including art therapy, CAMHS, the church, counselling, educational psychology, school governors and local authority. Dealing with external bodies was also a source of discussion, with issues relating to protocols, donations, media and dealing with multiple offers of help. Participants gave constructive comments about the psychological guidance and resources provided. A theme relating to supervision and support for professionals emerged and also the professional learning that had taken place as a result of the critical incident response, offering the potential for wider application. Finally, some continuing concerns were recorded.

The findings are discussed in the context of existing research and recommendations made for the future.

Recommendation 1:

To conduct a review of psychological guidance and resources used, in order to expand and develop resource banks further.

Recommendation 2:

Where there has been a critical incident and a need for children and young people to access more specialist support is identified, to provide clear and timely information about referral pathways for more specialised support with rapid access prioritised for critical needs.

Recommendation 3:

To define more clearly the roles, responsibilities and remit of school, local authority and other services when dealing with critical incidents, in order to enhance the systems that can be used in emergency situations to support communication and integrated, multi-agency working. Principles to take into account when defining professional roles and responsibilities should give importance to:

- Prior knowledge of and acquaintance with the school
- Understanding the consultative provision that needs to be made to support most of the individuals affected
- Knowledge about and understanding of the provision required for those who do not respond favourably to initial levels of support.

Recommendation 4:

To specify the care that is offered to professionals; both informal support and the provision of more formal supervision from trained and experienced supervisors. Ensure that high quality supervision is funded and available within existing professional networks, so there is reduced reliance on goodwill and informal arrangements.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

In 2017, two terrorist-related events occurred in London in relatively quick succession – the Westminster Bridge attack in March 2017 where more than 50 people were injured and 6 people died (including a teacher on her way to collect her children from school), and the London Bridge attack in early June with a similar casualty and fatality rate (48 were injured and 8 people killed). Then on 14th June 2017 a fire started in the Grenfell Tower – a large, residential tower block in the northern part of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London, leading to 71 confirmed deaths.

These events had an enormous impact, not only upon those who lost their lives but on their extended families, friends, and wider communities, including children and young people in near-by schools. Such critical events trigger a complexity of responses from fire, police, health, care and military services. It is through review of events such as these and those that have occurred in other parts of the world, that lessons have been learned regarding planning for disasters and provision of humanitarian assistance. Research into individual experiences of traumatic events and critical incident responses are crucial to inform future service organisation and action. For professionals involved in supporting schools, this understanding is particularly pertinent as they support communities to deal with the impact such events have upon the children and young people affected directly or indirectly.

For the purposes of this report, a critical incident is defined as *'...a sudden, unexpected event that is distressing to pupils and/or staff, it may involve violence against members of the school, a serious accident or the sudden death of a child or teacher (all the more traumatic if witnessed by others), or it could be that the school is subjected to major vandalism such as an arson attack'* (Houghton, 1996, p. 59). The Civil Contingencies Act (2004) provides guidance for emergency services, health bodies, local authorities (LAs) and the Environment Agency on dealing with emergencies through maintenance of local, regional and government plans. There are requirements for supporting vulnerable groups (such as children and individuals with physical or mental health needs), staff members involved in emergency responses and the strategy to deal with the media.

A range of professionals are likely to be involved in responding to critical incidents, and the nature and scale of response will be driven by particular circumstances. In this report, the role of educational psychologists (EPs) in supporting schools following the Grenfell Tower fire is explored. This enquiry focuses on the impact of their involvement on both the recovery of individual adults and children directly affected by the fire and the responses of those less directly affected to the distress that surrounded them.

The Development of a School-Based Response to Critical Incidents

In recent years there has been a growing appreciation of the potentially life long damaging effects that major traumatic events can have on children and young people (Holowenko, 2015; Black, 1993) and on school communities (Lowe 2011). For this reason, schools will often seek support when planning how best to support children when critical incidents occur. That can often translate into schools seeking work that focuses solely on an individual's trauma reactions, but there has been controversy about offering support such as single debriefing

sessions immediately following the traumatic event. Some systematic reviews have indicated that relying on individual or group approaches may be ineffective in reducing distress or preventing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Cochrane Collaboration, 2009). However, there has also been criticism of reviews where findings have been based on the delivery of single session debriefing, delivered by poorly trained practitioners, out of context from a comprehensive community level support plan (Hawker & Hawker 2015).

Historically, EPs have advised that approaches to dealing with trauma should mobilise the resources of the school community and enhance the capacity of adults who know children, to provide the natural care and support that is so vital in the immediate aftermath of a crisis (Holowenko, 2015). EPs are likely to focus on how they can support the systems that operate around the child (e.g., family, peer group, class and wider school community), through encouraging individuals to draw on natural coping mechanisms and support networks, in order to build resilience (Slawinski, 2005). The rationale is that loss and grieving are normal responses to traumatic events and that children/young people need time and space to process their emotions. This approach acknowledges that each individual's response is based in a unique set of circumstances, which may differ culturally. It promotes individual decision-making within the recovery process, with the aim of ultimately building greater personal resilience when dealing with future challenging life events. More intrusive approaches, such as individual or group based counselling are justified only when there is clear evidence that a child/young person is not managing the tasks inherent in the grieving process after a suitable period of time (Worden, 2008). Where children are affected by a critical incident, the role of adults is to normalise things as quickly as possible, so as to provide the external structures and routines that are important for emotional stability.

Educational Psychology Services across the UK have had a long history of developing coherent, proportionate and evidenced-based responses to supporting schools manage traumatic events affecting their pupils (Carroll et al., 1997). A review undertaken by the Department for Education and Skills in 2006 of the roles, functions and wider contributions of educational psychologists (EPs) highlighted that critical incident support had become an expected component of service delivery for many EP services in the UK (Farrell et al., 2006; Hayes & Frederickson, 2007). Conceptually, such developments can be seen to have been driven by crisis theory (Brock, 2002). Within this framework a critical incident is a time-limited episode, triggered by an external incident which causes the individual to experience great emotional confusion, upset and an inability to self-regulate using their previously adequate coping mechanisms (Worden, 2008). Within educational settings, Beeke (2013) further defines such events (illness, accident, natural disaster, suicide, attempted suicide) as being sudden, unforeseen and which may overwhelm the normal coping mechanisms of the school and its wider community (O'Hara, Taylor, & Simpson, 1994; Morrison, 2007).

Critical Incidents and Schools

In our society, schools are after the family one of the most important influences in children and young people's lives. As a result, schools and associated professionals, such as EPs have

developed approaches and protocols around 'preparing' for (before a critical incident) and 'dealing' with (after a critical incident).

Although not exhaustive the following list details strategies used to prepare for a critical incident:

- Development or review the school's critical incident contingency plans (or similar policy documents).
- Curriculum development (e.g. Personal Social Health Education materials) around critical incidents, trauma and resilience.
- Develop staff understanding about trauma and normal human trauma reactions.
- Develop staff understanding around factors that increase the likelihood of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), decrease PTSD and increase resilience.
- Ensure that staff are familiar with indicators of PTSD in children and adolescents of different ages and have an understanding of the range of appropriate responses in schools.
- Availability of a range of guidance documentation and reading materials for differing ages and abilities about loss and trauma.
- Preparation of a list of local voluntary services for longer term support (e.g. Victim Support, Cruse) following traumatic bereavement to access, keeping it up-to-date as necessary.
- Knowledge of services for critical incidents available within the LA and an understanding of how each can help, defined within a clear policy on contact with LA media staff.
- Preparation for the use of social media by pupils and their families (and by staff if there is no policy on this) to air concerns and rumours during and after the critical incident.

Again, although not exhaustive the following list details strategies used to deal with a critical incident (following the event):

- Assessing the situation and action planning to meet need.
- Implementing arrangements for timely communication to staff, parents and students.
- Advising and supporting school staff on how to help children.
- Advising and supporting parents on how to help children.
- Offering direct support from an educational psychologist to individual or groups of staff.
- Offering direct support from an educational psychologist to the senior management team.
- Identifying which staff/children might need more support.
- If appropriate, providing direct support from an educational psychologist to individual or groups of children.

Context for Current Study

The Grenfell Tower fire had an enormous impact upon children and young people, their families and in some cases staff employed in local schools, who not only lost family and friends, but their homes. A number of nearby schools were evacuated due to safety concerns regarding the structural integrity of the buildings. Teaching and support staff across these schools were involved in responding to a disaster that in many respects, lacked a recent precedent in the UK.

The purpose of the current study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of local authority and senior school-based staff that were actively involved in providing critical incident (CI) support to schools following the Grenfell fire, in order to consider implications for practice in the future. Seven schools in the Borough were affected by death and traumatic events, ten schools were affected by traumatic events and four additional schools accessed support following the CI. The support that was provided was in accordance with the available evidence-base regarding CI responses (NICE, 2005): psychological triage offered indirectly by the EP in a CI consultancy role to staff in directly affected schools, especially headteachers and senior leadership teams (Brock & Jimerson, 2017).

The study took place 8-10 months after the Grenfell fire, following a period of intense media scrutiny, high levels of community anger, national political debate and local discussion about the provision of support to affected individuals (especially in the face of pressure to pathologise responses to the fire, with demands that therapy should be provided immediately and indiscriminately). The phenomenon of containment (Bion, 1967) at an organisational level was of particular interest: how head-teachers and school staff contained the anxieties of children, young people and families, how they and their staff were contained in turn by the provision of CI consultancy from their local EP team, how the local EPs were supported, as well as considering wider system boundary management by senior LA staff.

Aims of the Study

1. To gather information about the experience and perceptions of school staff and educational psychologists who supported schools (and the wider community) to meet the physical, emotional and psychological needs of children, young people and their families affected by the Grenfell Tower fire, with a particular focus on their experience of adaptive coping during their work (e.g. the seeking of social support, availability of supervision, identification of strategies that promote professional resilience).
2. To explore the thoughts, feelings and subsequent actions of the professionals concerned.
3. To consider the possibilities and potentials of post-traumatic growth for these practitioners in their professional role, especially in terms of learning they wish to share more widely – in essence, to generate practice-based evidence regarding work in this area
4. To consider implications for practice with regard to making professional responses to critical incidents in the future.

Method

Design

Professional perspectives were obtained by conducting semi-structured interviews. Telephone interviews were considered the most appropriate method of data collection as they are less time consuming than face-to-face interviewing and the semi-structured questionnaire design enables collection of a comprehensive range of views, allowing time for participants to reflect on their contribution, with prompts from the interviewer to gain clarification or more detailed responses to questions asked (Gillham, 2000). The interviews were arranged and conducted by a researcher at UCL. The telephone conversations were recorded to ensure that nothing was misinterpreted or lost.

Participants

The views of participants involved in both the immediate and longer-term response to the fire were sought. This included head-teachers and senior leadership team members from the most affected schools, EPs who responded to the critical incident, and the senior staff in the local authority responsible for the strategic deployment and supervisory support for staff. The number of participants in each professional category is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant numbers by professional category

Participants	Number
Educational psychologists (EP)	6
Head teachers, senior leadership team (SLT)	12
Local authority officers (LA)	1
Total Participants	19

Procedure

The Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) of the local authority approached the ECPs for their verbal consent initially. The ECPs then approached the head-teachers and LA staff in a similar fashion. Once verbal consent had been agreed, the member of the research group conducting the semi-structured interviews e-mailed the volunteer participants an information sheet outlining the study and sought their written consent. When contact had been made, an appointment was organised for the interview to be conducted at a time convenient for the participant.

Participants were informed that once the interview had taken place, the audio-recording would be transcribed into text format and then the sound file deleted. Participation was in confidence; care was taken to ensure that any reference to identifiable data (names and schools) was removed. The interviews ranged in duration from 35 minutes to 66 minutes (mean: 46 minutes). Questions were asked about initial thoughts and feelings, duties carried out, liaison with services and professionals, concerns or worries, policies and procedures, and professional learning. A copy of the interview schedule is presented in the Appendix.

Data Analysis

The data from the telephone interviews were analysed using a thematic approach with the aid of NVivo software, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) programme. This enabled the data from the telephone transcripts to be organised and revised in response to emerging themes. The thematic approach used followed the phases described by Braun & Clarke (2006; 2013). This involved familiarisation with the data, initial coding, generation of themes, reviewing of themes, generation of clear definitions and final analysis and reporting. The authors held regular review meetings to ensure consistency of coding and to review the conceptual structure of the data.

Findings

Thematic analysis yielded a coding hierarchy with 13 main themes and a series of related sub-themes which are presented in Table 2 along with the number of times each theme or sub-theme was mentioned by participants.

Table 2. Distribution of themes

Theme	Number of References
01 Context - pre-existing concerns – <i>difficulties experienced by the community</i>	8
02 Emotional Responses	
Shock/Anxiety – immediate – <i>initial reaction on hearing news of the fire</i>	20
Shock/Anxiety – delayed – <i>reflections on emotions at later stage</i>	14
Concern for Pupils/Families – <i>upon hearing about the fire</i>	9
Sadness/Loss – <i>reflections on sense of loss</i>	4
Anger/Frustration – <i>from the community</i>	13
Resilience – <i>responses to adversity</i>	10
03 Immediate Reflections and Reactions	
Scale/Impact – <i>not realising the extent of the fire</i>	18
Preparing Support – <i>for pupils and families</i>	18
Day One in School – <i>as events unfolded</i>	15
04 Communication	
Advice Seeking	
- <i>between school staff e.g. about what to do in the event of evacuation</i>	11
- <i>contact with and advice from local authority staff</i>	50
- <i>confusion/lack of information around missing pupils-families</i>	8
Information Sharing	
- <i>within school staff communication</i>	8
- <i>school communication with LA and other professionals</i>	11
- <i>initial school contact with EPS/assessing needs</i>	32
External Offers – <i>dealing with donations-offers of help</i>	8
Fact Checking – <i>for safety of pupils/families on roll</i>	24
Providing Support – <i>school staff listening and talking to parents and pupils</i>	42
05 Procedures	
School Opening- <i>decision on whether to open or remain closed on the day of the fire</i>	13
Health and Safety – <i>procedures on the day of the fire</i>	13
Ensuring Normality – <i>trying to run the school in as normal a way as possible for the benefit of pupils</i>	10
Pupil-Parent Welfare – <i>practical arrangements and support</i>	46
End of Term - <i>summer holiday arrangements</i>	10
06 Policy	
Policies - <i>critical incident/emergency plans</i>	32
Development and Review – <i>updates to policies since the fire</i>	8
07 Professional Services	
Art therapy	17
CAMHS	35
Church	8
Counselling	21
EP Service	
<i>professional liaison</i>	25
<i>support for parents</i>	22
<i>support for pupils</i>	6
<i>support for/collaboration with staff</i>	35
Governors	7
Local Authority	17

Theme	Number of References
08 External Bodies	
Dealing with Protocol – <i>with agencies on behalf of families</i>	7
Donations/Funds/Spending – <i>management of donations to schools and dealing with public opinion around spending</i>	11
Media – <i>coverage and difficulties of dealing with/exposure to</i>	18
Offers of support – <i>management of offers of support from charitable and support organisations</i>	30
09 Psychological Guidance and Resources	
Resources - <i>provided to schools</i>	35
Management - <i>scripts</i>	17
Management - <i>watchful waiting</i>	14
10 Emotional Support for Professionals	
Peer Support from Colleagues	14
External Group Support	17
Individual Supervision	21
12 Professional Learning	
Ability to cope in crisis	12
Building capacity and self-confidence	14
Importance of communication	16
Importance of leadership	5
Importance of respite	5
Importance of self-care	6
13 Continuing Concerns	
Community - <i>concerns for and long-term effects on</i>	24
Community - <i>planning ahead</i>	13
Marking the anniversary	6

The findings will now be discussed by theme, with illustrative quotations provided to highlight the key issues raised. Quotations are coded by professional category i.e. head teacher or senior leadership team personnel (SLT), educational psychologist (EP) or local authority officer (LA).

1. Context

Setting the context in which the events took place, participants spoke about the difficulties experienced by the community living in and around the Grenfell Tower, an area of social deprivation. Ongoing problems with a range of issues were described; these included housing, social policy, poverty and mental health.

'It's an extremely needy community with kind of lots of children and families that struggle with mental health issues.' SLT

'The perception is that North Kensington has been forgotten or had been forgotten and that it took something like Grenfell to put us on the map...' SLT

'I think that everything came to a head that has been a problem. So, housing has always been a problem, and I've been head here for 15 years. And I think the policies are not compassionate. I think they are uncompassionate policies that don't think about families and the needs of families. And I think if there could be some ways that housing policies could be changed, for instance, people get additional points for being near their school. There's no recognition that children need stability.' SLT

'...it's a deprived area, I think a lot of people tend to say well you work in Notting Hill, and it's like, you've got no idea. In terms of deprivation we've got one of the highest incidence of free school meals in the country'
SLT

2. Emotional Response

All participants shared reflections on their emotional response to the fire. Within this main theme, several sub-themes emerged: the shock and anxiety experienced (immediate response and delayed response); concern for pupils and families; an overwhelming sense of sadness and loss; anger and the remarkable resilience displayed by some individuals. Illustrative quotations are provided below:

Shock/Anxiety - Immediate

Participants spoke of their initial sense of shock on hearing news of the fire:

'I think shock was probably the main thing, primarily shock and not knowing what to do were the two main thoughts I was feeling at the beginning. And feeling a bit useless and wondering how an earth can I be useful at this point in time, and the answer was actually there wasn't much I could do to be useful.'
SLT

'There was a sense of us being aware quite quickly that really the whole community was traumatised and without exception there is no family within the school that doesn't know somebody or is related to somebody that died.'
SLT

'I was just so shocked and it just seemed really unreal, and there were crowds and at the end of road there were several TVs with satellites and camera crews already there. But it just felt like entering the Twilight Zone, it felt like entering a horror film actually.'
SLT

'my phone was ringing about 4 in the morning and one of the admin officers who lives in the local area was calling me and she said that there's been a fire and I always remember she said, it's really bad, it's really, really bad. And she's not one to be dramatic so I knew that something terrible had happened...'
SLT

'...I remember sitting at my desk absolutely mute, I couldn't quite get my head around what was happening or what had happened, I couldn't quite find a way to articulate to anyone else in the office and who hadn't perhaps turned on the news that morning for whatever reason.'
EP

Shock/Anxiety - Delayed

Reflections were shared about the strength and intensity of emotions that participants felt at a later stage and how it had affected them:

'there has been twice when I have been walking home from school and there has been a fleet of three or four fire engines that have gone tearing past me. And the first one was perhaps about six weeks after the fire and I had an almost physical reaction to that and you know, it was really hard not to cry. And it then happened again about last week, and I didn't cry but I felt this lurch inside and that's when I realized the shock is still in there really.'
SLT

'I suppose I didn't think I had been affected or overwhelmed by it, I thought I was able to detach myself from it, but now looking back I realise that I was. I was in a bad mood for about a month and you know, I didn't sleep well and I wasn't able to talk about it and I ignored any news and anything related to it and I think I was really just avoiding it.'
EP

'it's a locus for me in terms of where I picture things in my life. The first thing I always think of is, is that pre- or post-Grenfell, if that makes sense. So it's changed me to that degree that I feel that from that moment and coming into where I am as a person I see it as almost two different experiences' SLT

'... someone said 'I had the most awful night and then we got to the door at school and then (*head teacher*) was there and I thought it's going to be all right' and I thought my God, is that what people think and meanwhile in my tummy I am like what are we going to do, this is awful, and they just assume you've got the answers. So, I think the hugeness of the role weighs me down a bit really.' SLT

'you think that you are dealing with something really quite well in the early days and then it can sometimes hit you later on. And I am not just talking about myself here, I'm talking about staff members. So a lot of our support staff live very locally and I don't think it was a coincidence that absence rates in the first half of the autumn term were far higher than usual.' SLT

'It was not an experience I would ever like to repeat, let's put it that way. I think it was just one of those things. It felt like I was on a runaway cart and I had lost control, I was basically like so my objective is to stay with this cart and make sure it doesn't come off the rails...' SLT

Concern for Pupils/Families

Upon hearing about the fire, participants spoke about their immediate concern for their pupils:

'I wanted to get to work and I wanted to know and make sure everyone was safe...' SLT

'My first thoughts were: how many of our children live in the Tower?' SLT

'for me it was sort of, I need to get to work because I won't be able to think straight until I get to work and I need to establish if (*pupils and family*) are in the mosque which is just up the road here.' SLT

'I just wanted to get to school to open it up really and to offer tea, coffee, breakfast and shelter.' SLT

Sadness/Loss

Some participants described their sense of sadness and loss and the impact that had on their lives:

'just seeing the impact on the children and I'd say probably about 80% of the children watched it burn and I find that so heart breaking that children this young should have to know that something like that could happen and to watch something so absolutely terrible or to hear something or to hear some of those stories about the beginning of hearing people screaming and then not hearing people screaming and that is just terrible to think. You know, when I was that age I didn't know anything about such things.' SLT

'then of course, the other thing, you get a call from the safeguarding team that you have to then attend a meeting because of the death of a child and then that brings it all up again. And when I went to that meeting I thought well I'm adamant that there's going to be photographs of these children because they are not just names, and that was hard...' SLT

'...at times you couldn't detach yourself because, you know, through the course of this work I've cried in my school, I've never done that before, but sometimes you just can't help it. And I think there came a point where I thought well this is just a humane response to an absolute tragedy I can't be an EP all the time, it's just impossible. And so when I sat through these assemblies and the head teacher was talking about all the

children who had died it was hugely emotional. And sometimes you were just there and experiencing it as a person. It was hard to give myself permission to do that all the time, but I couldn't help it...' EP

Anger

Some participants described how in the immediate aftermath of the fire, people came together in a positive way but that the strength of anger felt by members of the community became very quickly evident:

'...the public became very angry and suddenly we were having texts, being texted by the council on our work mobile phones to say that there was a demonstration and to not look out of the windows and to go out through the back route and wait until the police helped us out (*and*) you started to realise something was happening here that was really quite scary and enormous.' EP

'...in the first instance it really did bring everybody together but then as the days went on and you know, it felt that the response wasn't co-ordinated and other voices were popping up amongst the narrative for people, people who weren't necessarily affected but were using it as an opportunity and a platform. Things got quite tense and quite angry.' SLT

'I do think as well, in the first couple of days after the event it was just shock and anger and outrage at some of the things that may or may not have caused things, I think there were actually a number of people who were jumping on the bandwagon and were not from this community and just came in for the drama...' SLT

'as the weeks ticked by, if I can jump to the autumn term, it was clear that the sorts of problems that families were experiencing were changing. So, certainly when we came back in September I felt that the community were angry. There was an anger there and we realised that far more families had been affected than we had realised.' SLT

Resilience

Participants described how individuals dealt with adversity and discussed the importance of professional responses observed:

'I think the enormity of Grenfell and the way we tried to keep things positive and to try and think about how can we use psychology to recover from something like this. So, using the best of what's out there from psychosocial support and NICE guidelines and all the stuff and research that we could draw upon.' EP

'...I have to say, my staff were absolutely amazing and a lot of them live locally so it's had a personal impact on them as well and they have acted with such professionalism and such care for the children...' SLT

'...there's something about being a professional that means you have this professional cloak. And I believe something about that, you don't have to let everything that happened in your professional life affect you personally and I think maybe something about teachers, they understand that.' SLT

'the way that I put is that it has had a massive impact on me, I would say at this stage where I have got to now I wouldn't say it has had a wholly negative impact on me and I think I have gained a lot of strength by having come through something like that.' SLT

3. Immediate Reflections and Reactions

Participants spoke about their immediate response on hearing about the fire. Their responses were divided into three sub-themes: not realising the extent or impact of the event, preparing to support pupils and families and day one in school.

Scale/Impact

Participants spoke about how they first heard about the fire and their initial shock, but how, initially, they were not able to comprehend the scale of events:

'When I just first read the text, I think it said 'big fire in Grenfell Tower' and I thought 'Oh no' but I didn't really realise just quite what a big fire' SLT

'I don't think at that stage that I fully grasped the scale of it really, I'm not sure anyone did. And I'm not just talking about how many people were affected and how many people died and how many students in our schools we lost or had escaped the fire, but also I think everything else that happened around it. It was really impossible to anticipate the many ways this would affect us at work as well.' EP

'on that first morning it really wasn't quite apparent how catastrophic the whole event would be. So we could only really glean from accounts from parents and children at the school gates that the Tower was clearly still burning, the helicopters were up, the air was thick with smoke, but we could only assume things were far worse than we had ever imagined.' SLT

Preparing to Support

Upon hearing about the fire, participants talked about how they immediately felt the need to begin to support their school community:

'...my first thoughts were that this would involve us in some way and we needed to make sure that we were ready to be able to support in whatever way we could.' EP

'One of my colleagues rang me around 6.30 in the morning and we then talked about it and from then on in we were liaising directly with head teachers' EP

'I knew I just had to get in as soon as I could. I remember kind of thinking should I take something, I remember looking round my flat and thinking should I take that blanket? Just in that moment of what immediately is going to help.' SLT

'One of my colleagues, head of resources, rang me around 6.30 in the morning and we then talked about it and from then on in we were liaising directly with head teachers.' LA

'I was shocked and panicked and just felt this kind of instinct to need to get to school as soon as possible.' SLT

Day One in School

Of the schools that opened, participants spoke about how the first day unfolded:

'...we had a briefing in the staff room and I can't remember exactly what was said at that meeting but there was nothing other than we just open the doors, we support one another to get through this...' SLT

'children wandered in, some wandered out again and some parents said I don't think I can cope I need to take them home and we had about half the school in that day... So, it was a rough day and lots of children fell asleep in the afternoon, it was just keeping everybody going. SLT

'For most of the school it was business as usual from a curriculum perspective but the younger children, it seemed to be really playing on their minds, so we took the decision to suspend the curriculum in the morning and go with a freer morning in classrooms and I directed the Key Stage 1 teachers to work a morning with more free play and choice and give the children the opportunity to explore play within the classroom rather than expect them to have a more formal learning morning.' SLT

'So the job of clearing up the playground was begun and the site manager and the teachers got brooms and they were sweeping everything up, which was just awful....' SLT

4. Communication

Responses under this theme have been organised into sub-themes around advice seeking, information sharing, dealing with external offers of help and donations, fact checking for the safety of pupils and families and providing support for pupils and parents.

Advice Seeking – school staff

School leadership spoke about how they communicated with each other in order to share information and form contingency plans to put in place in the event of evacuation:

'on that day we still thought the building was going to collapse and so there was that conversation going on and there was the worry, well if the building collapses what do we do... And (*head*) called a local school but far enough away and said if we have to evacuate can we come to you, so that would have been the plan. So that kind of network of schools and us knowing we could go there, that was important.' SLT

'I think the professional network was so strong amongst the heads that we did manage to get information around each other so fast that actually we weren't left in the lurch.' SLT

'...I had already called one of our schools in the other direction and said look, it's happened I am going to have to evacuate everybody, can we come to you. And she said yes. So we knew what we were doing, it was just the fact, it was very, very worrying.' SLT

Advice Seeking – contact with local authority

Participants spoke about their contact with and advice from Local Authority staff. Some participants spoke about the clear and helpful advice they received, whilst others suggested that they did not feel supported. Additionally, concern was voiced about the way in which information was communicated from the Local Authority:

'a letter from the council telling us what the situation was with the emergency plan at 9.50, follow-up from the Head of Standards at 10.44.' SLT

'Then we had a contact from, (*LA officer*), she's like a kind of link person she's fantastic, a very trustworthy person who we know and she very quickly got the information out of us about what we thought was going on and she told us what to do practically.' SLT

'there was a special head teachers' meeting with local authority officers and that was focused primarily on the support that could be offered to children and families and that was the right thing to do...' SLT

'I would just say that from a school perspective I think there should have been some direction because it was left to head teachers to work out what to do for the best for their own communities' SLT

'...they contacted the schools that were really near, but I don't think they had understood that there was wider impact on other schools as well, so we were, if you like, the second tier. And then after that people were very responsible, but before that we had really just been getting on with it on our own. We didn't quite know exactly what to do.' SLT

'I think the bit that really didn't go so well and was upsetting was how badly the information got out from the local authority into the general public. And I think, it's a shame that the local authority became timid quite fast and told colleagues to hide their badges when they were going out on visits because they were getting treated badly when they were greeted. And had they carried on and allowed front line staff to be front line staff and say we are all here and we are in high viz jackets it would have been different...' SLT

'And we were told not to wear our council badges out and about and we were like, I can remember walking to my first parents' workshop thinking am I going to be seen as the psychologist that's worked with these families for 20 years or am I going to be seen as a council member? And that's what was worrying and in fact, they were unfounded because the parents we were talking to, there was such a focus on how do we support our children and that was the priority...' EP

'I think one of the big mistakes that the council made was not to understand that the schools were a key support service in themselves. I mean, that's not what we're here to do, we are educators as a school, but I think there was a massive loss opportunity and a misunderstanding, particularly in primary schools and the role that they play. We actually, yes we needed support, but we were the support for these families and I think that people in the council didn't really get that to begin with.' SLT

Advice Seeking – confusion around missing pupils/families

At the time when people were known to be missing, but formal identification had not taken place, participants talked about the difficulty of being in an uncertain situation, unable to share information:

'The not being able to share information was incredibly difficult. The anger around why are they using the word 'missing', but what else can you say, and parents don't have those shackles on them, they can say 'I know this is what's happened' and they were saying lots of things with great certainty and actually not all of it was right.' SLT

'I didn't have lots of information to give out towards the end of that day... I think one of the really difficult things was, we weren't hearing information officially.' SLT

'At the start our role really was to help the school manage a really uncertain situation and this whole concept of students being missing was so difficult, because they were really stuck and they felt like they couldn't do anything concrete, they couldn't say anything, they had to be really careful' EP

Information sharing – within school

Head teachers spoke about how they discussed with their staff members how they would manage the situation in school:

'I had already had a staff meeting on the morning, of that morning, where I went through with them what they could do about difficult questions from children. I did it on the first day as well, I had a meeting with the whole staff and talked through what they could say and how to say it and how to manage information' SLT

'at the end of the day we all gathered and sat around in a big circle, all the teachers and basically just talked about things. We talked about what did we think was happening, what were we worried about, we were questioning when was the school going to re-open, all of that sort of thing' SLT

'I sat down with my leadership team and we talked about how we were going to manage the following day' SLT

'I suppose what we established in those 10 days afterwards was a meeting at the beginning of the day and a meeting at the end of the day, with all staff who wanted to come. And it was just to kind of catch up and if we knew anymore details to tell them, if people were anxious about things they could say or if they didn't fancy saying it then at least there were connections with the leadership team if they felt they needed to say anything' SLT

Information sharing – school communication with LA and other professionals

Participants spoke about how they communicated with other professionals (school staff, educational psychologists, local authority officers) in order to arrange necessary support and make arrangements:

'I had become aware that tower is very close to home, and clearly the main focus was to provide direct advice and support to local head teachers. And that was absolutely number one from a safeguarding and a health and safety perspective,' LA

'there was direct contact with those heads as to whether those schools should open or not on that day. Those were the two schools that weren't able to open. But there was regular contact with those heads throughout the day as to what could happen the next day and the day after and indeed by the Friday all schools had re-opened for pupils.' LA

'So, our school improvement partner was at (*school*) that morning to do some work there and when I made that call and she was aware then she immediately came up here and said right what can I do, how can I support.' SLT

Information sharing – initial contact with the Educational Psychology Service (EPS)

Participants spoke about their initial contact with the educational psychology service, commenting on their rapid response, and spoke about how individual needs of schools were assessed in order to provide the necessary and appropriate support from the EPS:

'the educational psychologists were brilliant and again their response was really immediate. They contacted us really quickly and our designated EP made herself available, she said to call me at any time, she came into the school very quickly, she came in one morning early and came out to the main entrance and was just there...' SLT

'... the way the EP team rapidly responded and were on the ground in that second which was exactly when we needed them I think was just incredible. And also the way that they kept their cool, I don't know how they do this, when even the teachers and everyone else around them, we were losing it, there was

panicking and they managed to keep their cool and ask the important questions at the time and get people to what they needed to be doing.’ SLT

‘by the time I got in one of my EP colleagues had already emailed me to say that all schools had been contacted by their link EP offering advice and support. And alongside that strategic advice from myself and colleagues it was actually the link EPs, we have some well-established link educational psychology-SENCo/head teacher relationships, who were offering advice and support really from hour one with regard to working with parents...’ LA

‘I do think it’s about listening and about different schools and about responding differently and them having different needs. Because they very clearly did and do...’ EP

‘...And it feels like (our EP) was here pretty quickly, whether it was that day, and she said ‘OK what’s happening, how are things going, what do you think you might need at this moment, I’ve got some information here about supporting young children with loss, with news, here’s some information that you can share with parents’, which was really productive. You know, sort of trauma emergency guidance if you know what I mean. And she said what would you like me to do, I can spend some time with you, I can do some support with the staff, it’s very early days at the moment.’ SLT

External Offers

Participants spoke about the extensive number of donations that were offered in the initial time after the fire and how they were involved in their distribution:

‘people who had come past had asked if they could leave donations, bring in food and water and things like that, so we started taking in things that people wanted to bring and wanted to give and then we started calling other parents because it became apparent at that time there were places where people were going to get resources or bring people together, so we were working on that.’ SLT

‘I mean trolley loads of stuff, we had a whole 8 x 6 metre room almost full of stuff within an hour. Then one of my colleagues was able to commandeer trolleys from a local supermarket and they trolleyed the items down to the place. It was unbelievably rapid.’ SLT

‘one of the things that I noticed particularly was how much the community, particularly around Ladbroke Grove, are very, very involved with their community and they kind of enveloped their families. So their response was extremely pro-active and so they wanted me to work in with that very much. And they collected £4,000 in cash within about three days.’ SLT

Fact Checking

On the first morning after the fire schools were concerned to account for their families and described how they began the task of checking for the safety of their pupils on roll:

‘...we searched and got a list of the families that we felt were closest and most likely to be affected... and one set of office staff were calling families to see if they were OK from that list’ SLT

‘And then there was the following up of absences of any children that were not in and making sure they were accounted for and then getting information back to the borough about children that we thought might not be accounted for’ SLT

‘...our immediate concern was obviously for our families and our children so we generated from our SIMS a list of all children both current and former pupils that had had an address at some point in Grenfell Tower and then we went through those quite systematically.’ SLT

Providing Support

Participants spoke about how they made themselves available to communicate with pupils and parents in order reassure them and support them appropriately:

'...Day One really was just a lot of wandering and talking to people and trying to reassure our children as best we could...' SLT

'I did also a sort of an outline for teachers to use as a circle time straight after assembly so there would be a place for children just to air what they wanted and to ask questions' SLT

'the head ran assemblies for every year group and wanted our team to be there as well to support him and (we were) running workshops for groups of staff in the schools' EP

'I have an open-door policy anyway so that just continued as it would always do and the teachers were kind of prepped that if the children seemed to be struggling at all they were able to come out straight away and just come in to see me.' SLT

'But it was really the gate in the mornings that I remember mostly, where parents would come for hugs or break down on you and just pour their heart out really. And it was our task to give them a safe space, somewhere they could talk, somewhere they could feel secure and stay with friends and family and have coffee and what have you.' SLT

5. Procedures

Participants spoke about varying procedures, which have been divided into themes around school opening, health and safety, ensuring normality, pupil and parent welfare and end of term arrangements.

School Opening

Head teachers had to make a decision about whether to open or remain close on the day of the fire and make appropriate arrangement:

'A decision was made early on that we were going to open as early as possible. And obviously we couldn't use our original site because it was in such close proximity to the Tower that we couldn't go back there. So the head teacher did some incredible work in sorting some other local schools that we could share with.' SLT

'And other people were ringing me to say things like (school) is shut are we going to open? And I said I don't know until I get there, but my plan is yes, we would be unless we are told otherwise.' SLT

'They had opened from 5 o'clock that morning. The head teacher had come in, they had children come in in their pyjamas, so they were supporting from the very beginning.' EP

'on the first day we got a number of emails early in the morning from the head teacher saying we don't want anybody to come into school, you shouldn't come in today you should stay at home' SLT

'...the other thing I needed to know was could I open the school. When I was on my way to school I wasn't even sure I would be able to, if there would be a safety cordon, if we would be able to get into the school. None of our roads were closed off, but I needed to phone the borough emergency numbers to check that it was OK to open...' SLT

Health and Safety

Health and safety information was provided to schools by the Local Authority officers. Due to the severity of the incident, concern was that the Tower may fall and participants described the difficulty of dealing with the uncertainty and the weight of responsibility they carried in the circumstances:

'About 7ish, I received a phone call from the Health and Safety lead in the borough and he said we are phoning all the schools and we are giving you the option as to whether you make a decision to close or you decide to open' SLT

'...Health and Safety came down and he just said if the Tower goes you close all the windows and you close the door and keep everybody inside. He said there will be a big smoke cloud and then it will be gone and there's nothing else you can do...' SLT

'clearly the main focus was to provide direct advice and support to local head teachers. And that was absolutely number one from a safeguarding and a health and safety perspective' LA

'...it seemed like a reasonable conclusion to come to that the Tower might come down because it was very clear that it was still burning through the day and we didn't have masks in school but when I spoke to health and safety he suggested that all the children have wet paper towels just in case. So then I spent part of the afternoon with my learning mentor delivering paper towels and very discretely explaining to the teachers what they should do if the hand bells ring, encouraging them to close their windows and just getting ready for that event.' SLT

'They were just saying wait, it's OK at the moment, but we don't know, we'll know within the next half hour. And then you'd phone again and it's we'll know within the next half hour and you're like how will you know within the next half hour. I just found it all a bit unnerving and naturally as well you have so many different things going through your head about what we are all going to do. I knew that we had all the critical incident stuff in place, I wasn't worried about that, in that kind of way, I was just worried because of the enormity of it and I didn't want to make the wrong decision because I didn't feel I was getting enough information for me to make an informed choice about what I should do and no one was telling me what to do. And the bottom line is the buck stops with me, doesn't it?' SLT

Ensuring Normality

Participants spoke about being aware of the importance of ensuring routine and a sense of normality for their pupils:

'I suppose as a school our response that we are not going to underestimate how important this is but we are going to maintain routine, we are not going to stop everything because it is routine and normality that will support children most.' SLT

'And also we always were aware as well that we offered a sense of routine and normality and we wanted to get a real balance, even for the children that had been really affected. We were wanting to get the balance right for children, so most of the time being in class with their peers, learning with their peers and having some therapy to support, but not having so much therapeutic support that they were coming in to school but then hardly being in class at all. And I think we have to remember what we are, and what we are is a school and what we are here to do is educate the children and offer normality.' SLT

'I think now the advice I would give to people is normality, something to take children's minds of things, fun activities, not to do debriefings where we all have to talk about this that has happened to us all because that is a place for families to make that decision about what they need' SLT

Pupil-Parent Welfare

Practical arrangements and support ranged from sourcing equipment, providing learning support, parent workshops and being available to pupils and parents:

'we had to do lots of work to help them find things like new phones, lots of things that they needed, find out if their car was OK, all sorts of stuff.' SLT

'from then on, our social work team, our housing team worked out there from the very early hours, were working with families' LA

'I think the personal aspect worked incredibly well, the fact that we were a safe place, that we were approachable, that we were available pretty much 24/7 after the incident.' SLT

'we were developing workshops for parents and staff in each of the schools, obviously parent workshops, sometimes there were two or three, so this is in the two to three weeks afterwards, we would be running parent workshops and staff workshops...' EP

'Because we made the decision to close that day some of the staff who support our SEN children, we phoned those parents and said would you like us to come and do an hour's work with the children at home, so some of the staff went out to some individual families and did a little bit of support and learning with the children at home...' SLT

'we wanted to make sure the children and the families felt as safe and comfortable as they possibly could.' SLT

End of Term

Concern was voiced about pupil welfare over the six-week summer school holiday. Participants recognised that school was a place of support for families, and school closure would leave many families vulnerable. Schools made lists of children they felt may need extra support during the time. The Local Authority provided additional activities and access to counselling over the summer which were spoken positively about but also it was noted that communication around the timing of the offer was slow:

'I worried a bit about what would happen over the summer for the children, especially the ones who didn't have a home. And to be fair, the local authority put a lot of effort into making sure things were available, you know, activities, support, opportunities to go to places, trips to the seaside, that kind of thing...' SLT

'we were very aware that there was a list of vulnerable children who might be more at risk and we really learnt that we had to support schools in making that list before the end of the summer holidays, who do we have to be particularly mindful of. And so that meant when the holidays came they were more in a position to provide that information to CAMHS' EP

'And we did a lot of work with the schools to put in place a whole range of additional activities over the summer. We do commission quite a lot anyway in terms of holiday and youth provision. But also to make sure that all of those providers had on site access to counsellors, so if parents of people who came to access, I don't know, football, you know, to ensure that there was a safe space for counselling and post need support as well.' LA

'...I had to spend so much time basically fighting, saying that all the children, not just the ones that were in the [surrounding] finger blocks or that immediate area, I said all the children who come here should have free play for the summer because they have all been affected and they are all having to stare at it every day and all those terrible memories. And it was quite ridiculous and it wasn't until the very last day that I got the agreement...' SLT

'...early on we decided we wanted to be able to provide a play scheme for the children over the summer holidays. I mentioned that to one of the school improvement team, and probably others did as well, and I then spent a lot of time negotiating with a play centre with a company that might run the play scheme and they've been given money as well. I spent hours trying to work it out and then suddenly there was an announcement in an email 'you will be pleased to know we have set up a play centre at blah, blah, blah' and I'm like oh my God, I know that takes time to do but couldn't you have just said, by the way headline, we are proposing to set up a play centre scheme across all these schools to make sure any families that need it get the service...' SLT

'We were very concerned at the end of July that because we opened so quickly after the fire, school was a really important holding mechanism for those kids and those families and all of a sudden in July we were going away and they were going to have six weeks without that structured support. So we used the basis of that to share information with CAMHS and basically give them a shortlist of students that we felt they needed to assess or at least make contact with those families over the summer break.' SLT

6. Policy

Critical Incident/Emergency Plans

Participants spoke about the emergency plans they had in place:

'And then the DfE got in touch to say can we please see your critical incident policies and we need to know what your response is. And I think I spent an hour or an hour and a half on that first day writing an email to the DfE about what our critical incident response was and how we were going to approach this and what our approach was and what our resources were, so that they could feel confident that that they knew what we were doing.' EP

'We have got emergency planning policies and we did refer to them but I suppose in the moment, I think they were there subliminally, we were aware of health and safety and we were aware of emergency procedure and we were in the middle of having a conversation about whether the school should be open and what should we be doing and luckily the health and safety officer arrived. So I think we were following the policies but we didn't necessarily have them out and we weren't necessarily looking at them.' SLT

'I remember the head teacher saying I never thought I would have to use this but here's the critical incident plan, let's do what we have to do and opening the critical incident plan. And I remember being relieved that the head is so on the ball that the critical incident plan doesn't even need printing off, it's on the wall and it's there...' SLT

'We did have a borough emergency plan in place that we had adopted and as you know they have to be quite vague because you can't plan for every eventuality, but it was robust enough for us to have an evacuation kit ready to roll.' SLT

Development and Review

Some spoke about policy development and review that had taken place since the fire:

'Since Grenfell we have additional policies in place now, so we have a lockdown policy in place for example, we didn't have that prior to Grenfell.' SLT

'... Small things, but really important, so say we couldn't have got to the school, say if we were in the area that was cordoned off, how would we have texted the parents, where would we have gone, so that was quite key that we needed to know how to do that. So, there were those things that were quite important. So, from that point of view it made me go back and read the policy and improve it.' SLT

'Well our mental health and wellbeing policy is even bulkier this year than it was last year, there are certainly more services in there...' SLT

7. Professional Services

A range of professional services worked within schools after the fire. The roles and responsibilities were varied.

Art therapy

Some schools engaged art therapists (discussed in 8 out of 12 interviews with school staff) and spoke of their input with high regard:

'We had enormous support from a charity who provided an art therapist and it's still ongoing, the Thomas's Foundation, they have been absolutely amazing and I don't know what we would have done without them' SLT

'and we decided with the art therapist that she would start with little groups and then she would see if anyone needed to work individually, and if it was slightly more complex she could carry on with them' SLT

'Fortunately, we already hosted (*art therapists*) so we had them on site and we have had for nearly four years now. And the reason we had them originally is because we are in an area of deprivation, our families face a huge amount of challenge in terms of their social and emotional needs, so partnership with them is already in place and they stepped in and prioritised Grenfell support straight after the disaster.' SLT

CAMHS

Schools spoke about their experience of working with CAMHS. Some school staff found the advice and support of their link CAMHS worker to be helpful, while others were critical of the guidance relating to 'watchful waiting', considering this to be insufficiently responsive to individual needs. Educational psychologists discussed their efforts to collaborate and link with colleagues in CAMHS.

'We had a CAMHS worker here, she was around quite quickly, who was really, really good and she gave us some advice and she said you shouldn't do anything quickly here, all the research says we wait. She was really helpful.' SLT

'CAMHS support has been available and we have referred children to CAMHS and we have got one child who has particularly needed CAMHS support who already was not in a good place previously, and we have referred to CAMHS.' SLT

'...even now CAMHS, I feel there is quite a lot of batting back to us which is, we were referred to CAMHS and they said can you provide something in school and we were saying well no, we have referred to CAMHS, we need some specialist support.' SLT

'...we had a first meeting with the CAMHS worker in the summer, who explained what the process was. Our first meeting was a little bit unsatisfactory because I think I asked the question 'if after our watchful waiting period is over and there are children we are particularly concerned about, will there be a speeded-up referral system?' And she said 'no' and I subsequently found out that that was not correct, but at the time it was a bit frustrating.' SLT

'every school was given a link CAMHS person and as soon as we knew who that CAMHS person was we would invite them along to our workshops and we were linking up with them really closely and making sure they knew what we were doing and we knew what they were doing' EP

'...CAMHS took the view of watchful waiting and some of my schools expressed real disdain for that, the NICE guidelines, they said we need someone now, we have got staff falling apart today, we have parents crying, we have children crying, we don't want watchful waiting, we understand the concept but that's not

what we want. And that was a little bit frustrating I think. But they have a view about that and that was their view...' EP

Church

Church involvement was mentioned:

'The Catholic Children's Society were in there because there are a number of agencies that would be associated with particular schools and the Catholic Children's Society had offered previously support, counselling to the school, so they had strong links through the diocese because it is a catholic school...' EP

'What was brilliant was the church. They were brilliant, had probably the most sensible and pragmatic response as a group of anybody in kind of collecting resources and materials. I contacted somebody at the church and they found somewhere for the family. And they found them somewhere for a few weeks until we could get social services and they found them somewhere temporary to live in Chelsea...' SLT

Counselling

Some schools had counsellors who they already knew and trusted and were able to extend the use of their services. The Place2Be, a national children's mental health charity, was singled out as providing good quality support. Schools were approached by other charities offering counselling, but found it difficult to assess if the offer was appropriate for their school:

'We have a school counsellor on site and we do use that - that colleague has been used a lot and we have been successful at getting some funding from the local authority to extend how many days a week they will work with us. They have been working with various children' SLT

'We already employ a counsellor, that's probably one of the best appointments that we ever made. She was working flat out.' SLT

'...Place2Be brought in a lot of volunteer therapists and counsellors to provide on-demand, drop-in counselling for anyone really who wants it. So, that was very important for us to be able to say that to families and parents that no matter what time of day it is or what's happening your child will have someone to talk to about it that is professional and trained to have these conversations. So they were on board from a very early stage and day to day, I had a lot of conversations with them in my role.' SLT

'I had one experience where a charity came into school, a grief counselling charity, and persuaded the school that what was being offered was not enough and that they needed X, Y and Z for their children and for parents. The head contacted me and I thought well rather than get up in arms about this maybe it will meet the needs of some of the children or parents that some of the other services haven't been able to reach yet. So, this counselling charity did come in and do a piece of work, but in fact, when I met the parents at the workshop the following week they said that they had found it hugely unhelpful to be asked to recall their experiences, so to me it was a direct affirmation of the importance of holding on to appropriate models...' EP

'Very early on Place2Be linked up with (school), they have been a core provider of support and they have a huge number of therapists. Right from the first day they really activated, because they already worked with the school and they made so many of their therapists immediately available to the school, they were on the ground and they were there...' EP

Educational Psychology Service (EPS)

The EPS was the professional service that was commented on most frequently by participants, with professional liaison, support for parents, pupils and school staff being the aspects of their involvement that gained significant positive feedback.

Professional liaison - Educational psychologists highlighted the importance of liaising and working with other professionals to ensure that actions were considered, coherent and supportive.

'Also the importance of working as a team, supporting each other and coming together when involved in this kind of work. I definitely learnt to appreciate my team and will never forget the amazing way we pulled together in the midst of such a tragedy...' EP

'...we always knew where each other were and people would offer to link up if they had a spare couple of hours- we could also ask each other to join us if we were going in to a meeting we felt we might want extra support with. We always ran the workshops together because we ran these in groups of 8-10 and often we would have more than this attending.' EP

'I think from my perspective it's always good to have alternative perspectives, because I certainly don't feel that mine is the only perspective that has validity and sometimes when other professionals are saying the same thing.' EP

'And children's commissioning services, again they have been hugely supportive. I went to a head teacher's briefing and I was speaking to the head teachers and sharing various resources from Winston's Wish and the Marge Heegaard book and various books that I was sort of saying every child needs a copy of this, every teacher needs a copy of this and before I knew it the Director of Education said pass the titles to the resources officer and we will do a bulk order for everything...' EP

Educational Psychology Service

Support for parents – school staff commented on the appropriate, high quality support that educational psychologists provided for parents:

'they came and did a talk to parents and a discussion mainly to talk to them about the best way to talk to their children about what had happened and about sadness and the best way to deal with that and the experiences at this time. So, they did that for us which was very good.' SLT

'I went to that meeting and again that was about trying to talk to people about ways of supporting children, that meeting had a lot of parents of children with autism, so we were talking about, by that time we had developed some basic ideas around social stories and we were talking about ways of explaining specifics again to parents who were feeling very stuck about what they could say to their children.' SLT

'she did two parent meetings, one fairly quickly after the fire and then a follow-up one in September and it was more of a forum for parents to share what their experiences were and what they were finding with their children and it was lead very much by what they needed. And there was advice and it was really reassuring I think, you know, a parent was really worried that their child had started wetting the bed and hearing that's to be expected and the time to worry will be if that still happens in six weeks' time and to watch and see and give lots of reassurance...' SLT

'she came in one morning early and came out to the main entrance and was just there and we made some little flyers with her mobile number on it and again, she is known within the community because she has been our EP for many years, so she is trusted and known and we gave out flyers with her number on and she was there and had some conversations with people there and then and give a little bit of advice to people that were in desperate need, but then also people called her later...' SLT

Educational Psychology Service

Support for pupils – educational psychologists also provided direct support for pupils:

‘when we arrived at the school some of the students had just finished taking their GCSEs and most of the children had gone home. The head teacher and the deputy head teacher were there and we just talked to them and they requested that we speak to some young people who were very distressed...a’ EP

‘...and I spent time really over the next three days with that class. And it was partly about helping to explain, partly about supporting the teacher, partly about supporting the school, partly about, not to put too finer point on it, making sure they had water and sandwiches and could get to the loo’ EP

Educational Psychology Service

Support for and collaboration with staff – in addition, educational psychologists worked directly with school staff, working to develop systems where required:

‘We have support in terms of EP support that came in and they were in and around the school offering, having advice for any colleagues that needed advice or support. That helped colleagues set up internal systems to identify children that were needing support.’ SLT

‘Primarily, I think the strategic support came from the EP team, they were working with the senior leadership team a lot and they did some workshops on the Friday with the staff. So the EP team were really the primary supportive service that we had initially.’ SLT

‘we had a group for staff so that they could learn how to handle any conversations with parents and the kind of helpful advice they could give – really, really helpful. So, talking about death, the kind of things to say when somebody has died and things that we can say to the children. Talking about how we can talk to parents about trauma and what to look out for and when to become more concerned. So, everyone is going to be traumatised for the first four weeks and that is perfectly normal and we shouldn’t worry and it would be after that period that we would then start to be more concerned.’ EP

‘So the EPs from that point on were in attendance pretty much all the time. And they were seeing various other schools too but they were kind of available on the phone to provide guidance and advice, and there was usually one or two of them with us at all times, kind of supporting us through the process.’ SLT

Governors

Some participants spoke about their governors being supportive:

‘The governors tried to be really helpful and supportive as much as they could. They were trying to help find housing. When I was just casting around trying to find some help for this family they tried to help with that. They were very sympathetic. They’ve been good.’ SLT

Local Authority

Participants spoke about the Local Authority response. Recognition was given to the support that was made available for the families and the task group set up for mental health and well-being. Some participants considered the LA response to have been slow to materialise and lacking at a ‘human level’:

'The response has been slow and it remains slow. I have a list of children this week, the first list I have ever had of all the families who are still displaced and their key workers. How useful is that seven months down the line, I've figured most of it out for myself...' SLT

'I think the whole thing was far too slow. I think the response was far too slow, people weren't getting what they needed, what was seen on the television was not what was happening...' SLT

'I just felt in terms of education, they were here, they came down and supported us and kept saying if there's anything we can do but there's nothing they really can do. But in terms of the Royal Borough I think it was pretty shocking. I think there was a lot of confusion, nobody knew, there was no central hub, that should have been established right from the word go...' SLT

'one of the other things that was good, that the borough did do, was that they said there is money for anything you need for the families. So if you need to buy them uniform or get them taxis, then just claim it and don't worry, you don't have to do lots of paper work, just do it.' SLT

'I suppose you could argue you need to give people a chance to organise themselves, but it was such a massive tragedy that it required I think a human response, and I think that was what was lacking. I think people at the council hid behind protocol, well not hid behind, but they were very protocol, procedurally driven and probably had many meetings on that day about how should we proceed but actually didn't do anything on a human level. I think, of course we are all professionals and that's really important, to maintain your professionalism, but in circumstances like that you become a human being and do what's right on a human level. And I think that's what we did and we did that from a couple of hours in and that didn't happen.' SLT

'I understood the terrible anguish and grief and I got that, and I think that people working for the local authority, councillors, politicians even, were so shocked and saddened by it but I think they did a terrible job of extending those feelings in a way that made sense to people. And I couldn't help thinking that PR machine in the aftermath was shockingly bad and the disservice they did to themselves was just huge. Because what I saw inside the confines of the Town Hall for instance, was just blind panic and misery. It was evident to me that people were so saddened and shocked by it and in some ways that didn't get out there in a way that it made sense to people. But then maybe it would never have made sense, in such terrible circumstances maybe it wouldn't have mattered what was said.' EP

8. External Bodies

Dealing with Protocol

Participants spoke of the work they did contacting agencies on behalf of families to help them to access the support they needed:

'...I remember talking to the other family who were displaced and they were worrying about paying their rent, they were still told they had to pay their rent at that point, so we did some interventions to ensure they didn't have to pay their rent. So, it was just doing a lot of work like that for people just to try and sort out ridiculous, unreasonable red tape.' SLT

'we knew of an organisation, Place2Be, that we were trying to find out more about and about how they could support us but there were difficulties and the challenges of sustainability and funding, and unfortunately everything comes down to funding' SLT

Donations/Funds/Spending

Participants spoke about management of donations to schools and dealing with public opinion around spending:

'The other thing was donations, I had local schools just trying to provide as stable environment for the children and they were overwhelmed with people walking in the door bringing donations for someone, but they were trying to run a school at the time and in very difficult circumstances. And so I would like to have provided, from the feedback I've had from parents and schools, to just support them to manage that overwhelming emotional response from residents, schools around the country and other organisations.' LA

'And then there was a phase around the time where it started to become apparent there was charitable money and things like that where parents who weren't affected were, why don't we get this for free and why don't we get that for free. There's money for Grenfell, you must be able to get money for that.' SLT

'I think people can't understand where it's all gone. I think the people who are spending that money have succumbed to a lot of different pressure from a lot of different routes and I think there has been some reckless spending that has gone on...' SLT

'Well, you know on the television they were saying there were millions going in and this and that, well relief goes in stages and there's the immediateness, well because you are working in schools that have had their budgets slashed all the services within the Borough have gone because of cuts you are left standing there saying well what on earth am I supposed to do?' SLT

Media

Participants spoke about ensuing media coverage and the difficulties, for themselves and their families, of dealing with and exposure to the journalists and TV crews:

'...I think for many of them, to be door stepped by cameras and journalists when children are coming in to school along with that whole fear that was out there in North Kensington at that time I very much wanted to provide more support for schools and to enable that.' LA

'I think one thing that was hard that needs a bit more thinking is how to separate yourself from things like the media and that level of scrutiny because we are not used to it and that is something that really does make people feel panicked. So, I think that was something that you can't anticipate, you can't imagine how much something is going to be a story and you never know which directions it's going to go in so just keeping yourself completely out of all of that and feeling robust against it.' EP

'I started to feel quite angry for people who were working quite hard and try and to support with things. Only the charities were getting publicity. People were coming in and rubbishing the council and saying we are the only people here helping and you could see people in the background who were the council in the films and they were there and it was just nonsense, completely wrong news, so that sort of thing was making some of us quite angry and upset.' EP

'The one thing that I think was obvious to some of us, but would not be obvious to anyone watching the news was that, well there is quite a lot of mental ill health in this area and I think that I could see some people that I knew and had connections through the school being interviewed, some of the vox pops on all the news programmes. And you know, I had a parent who I know has had mental health issues and some of the things that she was telling me, I was quite worried that this was sending her over the edge.' SLT

Offers of support

Many charities and services contacted schools offering varying forms of help. Participants spoke about the difficulty of assessing these offers:

‘there were lots of services or charities who wanted to help and they came either the mosque or via this, that and the other and it was really hard to unpick and so there was a lot of just meeting people and being polite to them and thinking well that’s not really going to suit us and agonising a little bit over what to do.’ SLT

‘...there’s been lots of projects that have been suggested that schools might like to do and I have found that quite difficult to navigate, because you don’t want to say no to something that you find all the other schools have agreed to do and there will be some parent who will be extremely upset because the children haven’t had a chance to do that, but then also, this is quite time consuming and I’m not sure that this is the right thing for my children...’ SLT

‘We really struggled with managing the offers of support from across the country and internationally, I mean we were literally inundated, but heads even more so. And it’s very challenging to manage with so much front-line work that you need to be getting on with...’ EP

‘The thing that was difficult initially was co-ordinating it. I was getting emails through every day for a period of two weeks in dozens. I was drowning in the emails, because it was constant offers of support and from all angles as well really.’ SLT

9. Psychological Guidance and Resources

Guidance and resources were provided to schools mainly by the educational psychologists. These are themed as resources, management – scripts, management – watchful waiting.

Resources

Participants spoke about resources they found helpful:

‘...there’s a wonderful book by Marge Heegaard called When Something Terrible Happens... and we were able to go down to the print room and... we managed to get a production line going so that we could give one at some point for everybody that was a resident in the Tower and the schools were able to hand out those.’ EP

‘we managed to get together... booklets of relaxing activities or calming activities for all different ages, you know, primary and secondary and again with support from printing teams we got 30 books out to each so that teachers, during their circle times could have a real focus on not let’s talk about the fire, but what do we know, what are the sorts of things that we can do that are helpful during in such stressful times or after such a catastrophic incident.’ EP

‘...the one that we used most was what we had developed on the first day in the evening which was the Frequently Asked Questions, and we were giving that to schools to give to parents.’ EP

‘So, (EP) brought lots of resources that had been used in 9/11, other things that had been developed. We had a programme that was developed for every year group that they went through, to enable them to deal with this and the whole idea was that, with their teachers, they would work their way through dealing with it’ SLT

Management – *scripts*

Educational psychologists assisted schools staff with the production of appropriate scripts to use in letters to parents and when speaking with pupils and parents. School staff valued this support:

‘in those few days we were writing scripts for letters for parents from schools. With heads we were writing them scripts for assemblies so that the senior management teams in the school could go round to each class to talk to the children about what had happened and helping them to use age appropriate scripts and what’s age appropriate understanding and how to be as honest as possible without adding to any rumour or speculation or causing additional anxiety’ EP

‘They gave us really sound advice on what language we should use and how we should phrase the fact that there were students missing and we didn’t know what had happened to them. And they had a worksheet available for us basically on how to talk to a child about traumatic events, which was incredibly helpful because we were able to disseminate that very quickly amongst all the staff, so I think that helped with their conversations and I think it was also very reassuring for parents to know that there were experts there with us...’ SLT

‘She gave us scripts to use with the children that were useful about, the most useful one that I thought was very useful was saying to the children that everyone is really sad about what’s happened and you mustn’t be afraid to ask a question. If you ask a question and it makes someone cry, you haven’t made them cry, it’s the awful events that have made them cry. Making the children understand that, don’t be afraid if we cry, because you will see us cry, that’s not bad. So there are those things, not a day to day thing that you have to deal with at school very often.’ SLT

‘The one thing people wanted to know was how on earth do I talk to a child about something as horrible as this and the advice they gave about being honest and giving honest factual answers to things is something that was really helpful to know. Because I think a teacher’s natural response might be to try and protect children from the reality, but you can’t really do that because it’s there and it’s visible, so that was really important advice as well.’ SLT

Management – *watchful waiting*

The importance of active watchful waiting was widely commented upon, with a recognition that there would be differential responses to the trauma and it may not be immediately apparent which pupils most in need of longer-term help:

‘And there was advice and it was really reassuring I think, you know, a parent was really worried that their child had started wetting the bed and hearing that’s to be expected and the time to worry will be if that still happens in six weeks’ time and to watch and see and give lots of reassurance.’ SLT

‘there were quite a few key things for us around the importance of holding on to watchful waiting even though that was often challenged by other counselling organisations. We really had to emphasise the difference between watchful waiting and a wait and see approach, because it really wasn’t wait and see. We were supporting schools to actively monitor. We were highlighting those families and children who were likely to be more at risk of post-traumatic stress disorder because of pre-existing conditions or experiences’ EP

‘We talked about what was the best model for providing support and we had those conversations early on and we talked about the fact that we weren’t going to do debriefs because recent evidence has shown that debrief can do more damage. So we talked about watchful waiting and that was a policy and approach in terms of managing the trauma and emotional upset of it - watchful waiting, very actively watchful waiting’ SLT

10. Support and Supervision for Professionals

Participants spoke about the various offers of emotional support and ways in which colleagues supported each other during the time after the fire. These included informal peer support from colleagues, external group support and more formal individual supervision.

Peer Support from Colleagues

Participants spoke about the importance of their colleague support networks:

'I think we supported each other firstly. I have an open-door policy for everybody and staff members would come in and talk to me.' DHT

'I think really, having supportive colleagues here, I think that really helped me to be able to manage it. So we had daily kind of informal supervision of each other and any questions you had we would meet for a coffee and we would discuss anything that was happening. And certainly, I felt that was very reassuring...'

EP

'I think really appreciating the work that happened at a human level, having those good relationships with people really was the key to being able to work with them through this time. It was almost the most important thing and as a team that meant having good relationships with each other and supporting each other and being there for each other and being in close communication. Because without that it would have felt quite overwhelming I think...'

EP

'What really helped me were my friends who work at the school because they understand the enormity of Grenfell, whereas my family don't even understand the enormity of Grenfell.'

SLT

External Group Support

Group support sessions were offered, but several participants talked about feeling that either they did not want or did not need the support:

'There was a group counselling and individual session if we wanted it, was offered to the heads from the Tavistock Clinic. That's something that I didn't take up. I honestly felt that I couldn't take the time...'

SLT

'we were offered support by the local authority and head teachers were invited to the Town Hall to meet with some professionals from The Tavistock. And I'm not going to speak for anyone else, but I thought we had been brought there under false pretences really. Almost as if, well you need counselling, we are going to give it to you, here you go...'

SLT

'And we were offered support from the local authority to go for group counselling or individual counselling. We were kind of lured into a meeting that we thought was about something very different and we realised it was therapy and didn't mean to do that, it was just how we read the email! And it was not what I needed really.'

SLT

Individual Supervision

Supervision was provided for some, provided by a range of personnel. Arrangements varied depending on need, access and professional background:

'I gave the opportunity for any staff members to have a one-to-one session with our play therapist who is also a psychotherapist and she offered a one-to-one session and for some staff it became two sessions and then a couple of staff it became that after the two sessions she was giving them guidance about where they

could go for more support. So we did put that in place because we understood that we needed to be OK, so we could make sure that the children were OK.’ SLT

‘I have taken up the offer of one-to-one supervision as well, I’m really glad that I had the opportunity to do that one-to-one and so I took that up and we met for the first time in the summer holidays and I still meet with her now and it’s just to talk about the critical incident work and it’s just been so helpful for me...’ EP

‘We made it clear to staff that they didn’t have to tell us, you might not want to tell, but we know that people have gone to any of our individual therapists who are available in school two days a week. The therapists have now left us half an hour at the end of the day where people can just drop in...’ SLT

11. Professional Learning

Participants spoke of the things they had learned about themselves as a result of their professional involvement in the aftermath of the fire and shared advice they thought may be useful to others who may be involved in a critical incident in the future. The themes that emerged were the ability to cope in a crisis, building capacity and self-confidence, and the importance of communication, leadership, respite and self-care.

Ability to cope in crisis

Participants spoke about how they were able to switch into professional mode which enabled them to stay calm and cope during the crisis:

‘I think I’ve learned that I’m good in a crisis. I thought I probably was, but I think you have to take a fairly calm approach to it and not panic, so to be honest most of it is common sense anyway.’ SLT

‘I think I was able to switch into the kind of ‘we’ve got a role here and it’s a helpful one and we know we can be helpful and we want to get this right’ and that was really, really important and that all sounds a bit like it’s a mission and I don’t mean it like that, it’s more kind of thinking, but we have been trained to do this, we are in a good position...’EP

‘I think the head was very good at maintaining a very consistent persona and feeling that everything else might be upside down but he would every day appear as he always has.’ SLT

Building capacity and self-confidence

Participants spoke about how their confidence developed during the course of working through the crisis. Others spoke about the importance of not being pressurised into making decisions and taking the time to think things through:

‘In terms of working with schools I think it’s definitely developed my confidence in working at a systemic level. I suppose I haven’t had huge amounts of experience working directly with senior leaders and head teachers in secondary schools in this way and suddenly they were really turning to us as a key resource and the secondary head really values EPs and obviously found the advice and working with us really helpful.’ SLT

‘...In that moment when you think, God, what will I do, and I found it’s to give yourself the time to go what will I do and think. So, give yourself time to think. Because you know what you have to do and it will come to you, but it’s about giving yourself time to think for that one minute and say just leave me alone for a minute and let me think.’ SLT

‘And it’s the kind of work you are almost afraid of doing because it’s hard to do. So, I think for me I definitely developed a huge amount of knowledge and experience. We all had to skill ourselves up and as a

team I think we have developed now this amazing bank of resources, we've pulled together loads of research and theories and really useful things... and conversations still come up all the time of the grief and trauma and it's not a subject that I shy away from anymore, it's a subject I can be really helpful with.' EP

'...don't be pressurised, talk things through and don't rush into a decision but then when you have made it, you have made it because you know you have good reason to make it and that you've got the answers to the reasons why.' SLT

'I think the value of working through things together is really important, I think the value of working through things with other people and not sitting there thinking that you've got to make the decisions on your own.' SLT

Importance of communication

Participants spoke about the importance of communication and not working in isolation:

'I think it's about sharing as much as possible so that people don't feel in the dark, that communication was really important and it underlined the importance of that for me.' SLT

'I do think it's about listening and about different schools and about responding differently and having different needs. Because they very clearly did and do.' EP

'I think it's important not to isolate yourself... it's to think that you can pick up the phone and talk to your colleague up the road and meet up and have a sandwich and have a kind of a talk and you can go back. But if you try and keep it in your head then that's not comfy.' SLT

Importance of leadership

Participants that were headteachers spoke about the leadership role and the weight of responsibility that it carries:

'...Whatever you are feeling at the time you have to be the leader. You have to give reassurance; you have to be decisive for people around you. You have to lead by example and you have to be really honest and authentic...' SLT

'And I genuinely believe that you take on the running of an organisation you have to be at the front, as in me, so you take on and absorb other people's concerns and worries.' SLT

'And I also learnt that my role as head teacher, I knew it carried a huge weight of responsibility but what I learnt from the experience is that the job title is that also very often people want answers from you, answers that you can't possibly give. So I also think you shouldn't underestimate the emotional impact on professionals who are dealing with community members who are going through such a horrendous time.' SLT

Importance of respite

Participants commented that the summer break was valued as a time for a break and to support wellbeing:

'I think it was both a blessing and a curse that the holidays came when they did because it was just absolutely bang on six weeks after. And so I think everyone was very ready for a break at that point and you come back in September refreshed' SLT

'I suppose luckily for us the six weeks' holiday came six weeks after the event. If it had happened in September I'm not quite sure how we would all have coped for a whole academic year' SLT

'were fortunate I guess, because we had the summer holidays where we had the first five weeks to get through to the summer and then then it was fortunate there was a break for everybody's wellbeing' SLT

Importance of self-care

Participants stressed the need for self-care:

'Don't under estimate the impact it will have longer term. I think that's key really. Because adrenalin is pumping at first and I think that adrenalin can keep you going for days and weeks and months but eventually it's going to catch up. And if support and help is offered don't close your mind to it, be open to accepting that support' SLT

'None of us prioritised our self during that time and people were telling us to and even when they were telling us to I could see we were thinking we won't!... But everyone would tell you to look after yourself. And research shows that the people who are looking after other people are the last people to look after themselves and that is absolutely 100% what happened.' SLT

'...I think listen to yourself, I think that was important because if I hadn't done that I think you would sustain it for a little while but eventually you can't sustain it any longer and it would become too much so I think it's that. It's about looking after yourself.' SLT

12. Continuing Concerns

Participants highlighted the ongoing nature of the problems and the need for future planning in order to support the community.

Community - concerns for and long-term effects on

Participants talked about the difficult conditions in which many members of the community live from day to day and likely long-term effects:

'there's so much that's broken here, it's such a desperate place to work. So many children have what's happening with their families, in addition to what happened at Grenfell, there's so much disadvantage here and things they miss out on...' SLT

'we are not through it and we won't be through it for years and years. I mean it's a generation that has been affected.' SLT

'the people who were lost or missed out and the people who still are, are the people who live facing the Tower in Whitstable or in the surrounding area, who open their curtains every day and look at it. Because they are affected every single day and they are the people who are just living with it and they don't want to

come in and say to the person in the office I'm sick of opening the curtains and looking at it or I can't bear to open the curtains. Without a doubt we have families here who are still living with their curtains closed in the house the whole time because they can't bear to open their curtains. And we don't know who they are necessarily. You can kind of work out those with that address or that address, but actually you don't know how everyone's feeling.' SLT

'I would say longer term it really isn't going away, I would say it's far worse now for the community and families. I know with families and core attendance and a third of them are Grenfell related, the kind of stresses on the families, the stresses on marriage...' SLT

'We are not through it and we won't be through it for years and years, I mean it's a generation that has been affected.' EP

Community - planning ahead

Participants stressed that the community is in need of long-term help and support and the importance of ensuring that the work is continued:

'I do think the long-term support for life is very important because this whole community will need support and guidance ongoing forever... I think we just need to be ready and have the support there to enable them to get over each of the hurdles as and when they hit them to make sure they are all OK. This has been just so terrible. And the people here are just so amazing and so vibrant and that's why I've been here for so long, but I think it's up to us who are in those positions of trust and work within the community and schools etc to speak for them to try to help.' SLT

'I think it's also important to remember that this work has not finished, we are only at the very beginning of ongoing work in this area. We are still calling it ongoing critical incident work and have an enhanced offer of support for our effected schools. The critical incident team have been given money from the DfE so we can continue to offer a higher level of support to our schools...' EP

'I really hope that the disaster doesn't fall off the agenda, because it's not something that can be fixed in a year. So a lot of the services that we have been offered, as far as I can tell, they are going to expire in July and I think it's very important that a longer piece of work is maintained to keep the support in place.' SLT

Marking the anniversary

Mention was made of the one-year anniversary and the importance of marking it appropriately:

'...I think there will be pressure to do a one-year thing, we are planning to do something as a school but we are keeping it a bit fluid at the moment' SLT

'And that's kind of my worry that when it's 12 months, will there be some kind of support for us to help us all do something, a kind of united thing, I don't know, we haven't talked about it. And before you know it will be here.' SLT

'...one thing I do worry about and that's I worry about what we will do when it's a year. I am really worried about that. So for support and advice on that, and about a joined up picture. Because one of the things, if we don't do something here, so if we don't take part in something there will be like 'it's not fair, all the other schools have done it and we didn't do it'. As heads, we see each other and we will talk about it if we need to or what's going on...' SLT

Summary

The background context was a central feature of the narrative accounts provided by those that participated in this study. The situation of the Grenfell Tower in an area of social deprivation, where many families were living in severe hardship before the fire took place was linked to concerns for the welfare of the community that extended beyond psychological responses to trauma, bereavement and loss, to take into account political and economic factors and the impact of poverty and homelessness.

Upon hearing of the fire, participants spoke of feeling the need to respond quickly in their professional role. They realised that the fire was extensive, but found it difficult to comprehend at first the extent of the tragedy that was unfolding.

In the immediate aftermath the fire, response from the public in terms of donations of money and resources for those displaced was on a large scale. Additionally, schools were sometimes overwhelmed by offers of support from charities offering emotional support. In some cases, participants found it difficult to find the time to be able to sort through these offers to decide what might be appropriate for their school.

Participants commented that management of information in the early time after the fire, when some families had been unaccounted for, was difficult. Additionally, the response by the Local Authority was perceived as either confused or slow, which led to public anger and in some cases fear for safety. Some commented on the intrusiveness of the media.

School staff spoke about how they felt the need to try to ensure a sense of normality within school for the wellbeing of the pupils. The fire took place in the term before the long summer holidays. Participants shared their concerns about what would happen to pupils and families, for whom school had become place of stability, over the summer holidays. They also noted that for involved professionals, the summer holidays provided an important time of respite.

School staff praised the swift response and specific support given by the educational psychology service. The EPs contacted schools immediately and together with school senior leadership planned the most appropriate support for the individual school. They provided resources and scripts, which were considered to be extremely valuable. They emphasised the importance of active watchful waiting, in order to highlight those pupils who were at risk and in need of help.

The professionals interviewed for this study described their longer term emotional response to the fire and the factors they considered important in dealing with a critical incident of this scale noting the importance of communication, leadership, self-care and respite. The importance of maintaining ongoing support to schools in the longer term was also highlighted.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Grenfell fire was major critical incident that had a devastating impact on significant numbers of children, their families and communities, with the effects extending to school staff and professionals that were centrally involved in the critical incident response.

There are many elements of good practice that were reported by participants in this study:

- The offer of immediate contact from professionals that were familiar with the schools and their systems
- The professionalism of school staff and collaboration between professionals
- The provision of evidence-based advice, consistent with NICE guidelines (2005)
- The effective use of existing resources
- The provision of additional resources, such as scripts for school staff to use with pupils and their parents

In order to learn from this and build on good practice, we will now focus on less positive elements of the response and link this to recommendations for the future.

Support Provided for Children and Young People

Openshaw (2011) argues that “...when working with children, the primary goals in school-based grief and trauma work are to help children in the following areas: to feel safe; to stay connected with supportive peers, school staff, and family; and to adaptively cope with resultant thoughts, feelings, and associated behaviours” (p. 164). Did the Grenfell CI response achieve this? What about longer-term follow-up and access to services for the most vulnerable and severely affected?

Participants reported the confusion and high levels of emotion that were experienced in the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire. There was acknowledgement that help provided to children should be evidence-based and wide acceptance that teachers and other school staff were best placed to help support children to deal with their experiences (Cohen & Mannarino, 2011). This study indicated that effective support was provided within schools. Participants described a great deal of good practice, where children were given structured time to talk with familiar, nominated adults. This enabled them to process their emotional responses to the event, normalise it and obtain some equilibrium in the immediate aftermath. Access to resources was valued.

Recommendation 1:

To conduct a review of psychological guidance and resources used, in order to expand and develop resource banks further.

The importance of the cultural context was recognised when supporting children and young people. Participants showed a clarity of understanding that individuals varied in how they interpreted the experience, based on their developmental level, emotional stability and the social and cultural norms in homes and schools. Participants indicated that professional responses were developmentally appropriate and adapted to take account of individual

sensitivities and cultural considerations. There was therefore evidence that professionals took individual and contextual factors into account when providing support, making efforts to accommodate existing cultural rituals and belief systems rather than imposing particular interventions or standards, as advocated by Heath et al. (2009).

The Educational Psychology Service provided school staff with immediate support and based recommendations on NICE guidelines (2005), advising active 'watchful waiting' to highlight those in need of support. Some participants indicated that there was less clarity about processes and referral pathways to follow when there were concerns about individual children exhibiting signs of more enduring distress and problems with psychological adjustment.

Recommendation 2:

Where there has been a critical incident and a need for children and young people to access more specialist support is identified, to provide clear and timely information about referral pathways for more specialised support with rapid access prioritised for critical needs.

Professional Roles and Responsibilities

Many agencies contributed to the critical incident response following the Grenfell fire. Of particular note was the key supporting and co-ordinating role of the EPs in the Borough, consistent with the 2006 DfEE report into the role and functions of EPs (Farrell et al., 2006), as well as international research conducted by Rees and Seaton (2011). Participants in this study spoke positively about the contribution of the local authority EPs, valuing the provision of sensitive, appropriate, evidence-based guidance from colleagues with knowledge and familiarity with the schools and their personnel. There appeared to be less clarity about the role and responsibilities of some of the other agencies.

Recommendation 3:

To define more clearly the roles, responsibilities and remit of school, local authority and other services when dealing with critical incidents, in order to enhance the systems that can be used in emergency situations to support communication and integrated, multi-agency working. Principles to take into account when defining professional roles and responsibilities should give importance to:

- Prior knowledge of and acquaintance with the school
- Understanding the consultative provision that needs to be made to support most of the individuals affected
- Knowledge about and understanding of the provision required for those who do not respond favourably to initial levels of support.

Supervision and Support for Professionals

Hayes and Frederickson (2008) highlighted the importance of providing support for the front line professionals involved in critical incident responses due to the stress experienced in carrying out this work, the impact that this has on psychological well-being and the risk of experiencing secondary trauma. Supervision is important as it can help professionals to

reflect on and process their experiences and identify coping strategies, within the safety of a confidential professional alliance. Indeed, the importance of good supervision in the implementation of evidence-based interventions is recognized (Falender & Shafranske, 2009), although it is challenging to understand exactly why that is, due to the complexity of social relationships, networks and service delivery contexts.

The supervisory arrangements described by participants in this study were varied. A great deal of informal support was provided by colleagues within pre-existing, established professional networks which became a forum for sharing and normalising experiences and seeking guidance. The support provided by colleagues was particularly valued. Some formal supervisory arrangements were described but these were variable and provided by a range of personnel following different models. Participants that had the opportunity to receive individual supervision appreciated its benefits. Less positively received was group support offered by agencies that were external to the pre-existing local networks.

Recommendation 4:

To specify the care that is offered to professionals; both informal support and the provision of more formal supervision from trained and experienced supervisors. Ensure that high quality supervision is funded and available within existing professional networks, so there is reduced reliance on goodwill and informal arrangements.

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Appendix. Telephone interview schedule

1. What is your current job title?
2. What does your job involve?
3. Can you please tell me how you first heard about the Grenfell Fire?
4. What were your first thoughts?
5. What were your initial feelings?
6. What did you have to do first in your professional role?
7. What else did you do in relation to your professional role in response to the fire?
8. Who did you seek personal and professional support and guidance from i) immediately?
ii) longer-term?
9. What support services did you contact? (*Follow-up Question: Did you contact your local CAMHS, EPS, School Improvement, School Counsellor, Governors?*)
10. How helpful were the support services you accessed and in what ways? (*Follow-up Question: What did you find to be the most helpful?*)
11. Did you come across anything that concerned or worried you about the collective response to the fire?
12. What have you learnt from the experience that will inform your current role? (*Follow-up Questions - What would you do differently next time? What did not work? What was effective and why?*)
13. Were you aware before the Grenfell Fire event of any policy/procedure/good practice guidance in relation to responding to a critical incident? (*Follow-up Questions – If so which ones? Was it used? Did it make a difference and in what ways?*)
14. In what ways have you been personally affected?
15. What have you learnt about yourself in your professional role as a result of responding to the Grenfell fire? (*Follow-up Question – What would you like others to know? (e.g., others who may have to respond to another similar scale issue in future)*)
16. Many thanks for taking the time to talk with me. Do you have any final comments or observations?