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Friday, 15 March 2013

(10.00 am)

Housekeeping

THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Compton?

MR COMPTON: Good morning, madam. May I just raise one very short matter, I hope it will not keep the jury out for too long, and that is this very late service of the legal arguments under section 20. I hope I'm not one for complaining, but it is extremely unfortunate that here we are at the last day in evidence to have such an argument thrown at us. It may be said it's a pure matter of law. That's not something I anticipate you look forward to with any relish. I'm not sure it is, I think there are issues of fact here.

It doesn't help me complaining, in a sense, to talk about ambush or anything else, but there is a great danger that we are going down yet another dead end on matters of law that I hope don't have to be argued in front of the jury, obviously. But it seems to me -- and I'd be grateful for views expressed by my learned friends -- that this has a big potential impact on my clients.

It affects, in some respects, the whole equilibrium of the way we put our case and questions and so forth. I say now that this is wrong in law, but there it is, it

1 will need to be argued out.

2 The reason I raise this now is we have the two  
3 submissions that continue in the same vein. It seems to  
4 me that the only way to really assist you is to ask  
5 Mr Martin, who is the expert, to give his written  
6 opinion on this. I understand he's prepared to do that,  
7 and I know that leads us into the unfortunate position  
8 of recalling him.

9 The alternative is that we all struggle with this  
10 area of law, which is not straightforward, although we  
11 can take to you the various repealing sections, and of  
12 course I think I'd be right in saying that the onus  
13 rests with Mr Hendy to argue this out and show that it  
14 is relevant and still a matter of good law.

15 But I raise it now because it does cause concerns  
16 that one, as I've said, is on the Thursday evening  
17 receiving submissions, I kept very quiet on the previous  
18 one because I thought there was likely to be  
19 a concession. I was optimistic on that. So it's  
20 regrettable that I have to make these comments so late  
21 in the day.

22 THE CORONER: What are you asking me to do?

23 MR COMPTON: Well, I would ask that we make inquiries as to  
24 whether Mr Martin can put something in writing that  
25 deals with this. I'm quite prepared to make

1 a submission over this, and to serve it -- I can  
2 probably serve it on Monday -- but I'm thinking through  
3 the ways that we're going to deal with this and how it's  
4 best to assist you in coming to the correct conclusion  
5 on these submissions, and I would have thought that --  
6 I'll be told if I'm wrong -- that Mr Martin is probably  
7 the right person to put that in writing.

8 Now whether, if Mr Martin puts something in writing,  
9 and it's shown to Mr Hendy and Mr Edwards as well, they  
10 withdraw it -- but the last time that didn't happen, so  
11 we went through that tortuous exercise with the jury  
12 where we all came to the same conclusion at the end of  
13 the day, the correct conclusion -- whether we have to do  
14 that is not a matter I can comment on, but at least  
15 I hope that we can put this matter to rest if those read  
16 what he has to say about it, and I'm quite prepared to  
17 assist as much as I can on what we say is a bad point,  
18 but there it is.

19 So I raise it now because I know that you said no  
20 more evidence, and I do understand and sympathise with  
21 that entirely and whether it's simply a question of  
22 hearing from him perhaps in the absence of the jury,  
23 I don't know.

24 THE CORONER: Well, I think we shouldn't be hearing evidence  
25 in the absence of the jury.

1 MR COMPTON: That's right, you can't have a voir dire in  
2 a inquest. But I would ask that steps are taken to  
3 enlist the good patience of Mr Martin again to see if he  
4 can assist on this.

5 THE CORONER: I've read very quickly the revised submission,  
6 I haven't actually brought it down with me this morning.  
7 In what respects does it raise questions of fact?

8 MR COMPTON: Well, I was just reading through about the  
9 composite panels, and -- forgive me, there was one area  
10 that I thought that it would possibly -- the elements of  
11 construction, I thought, may need to deal with some  
12 findings of fact. I think that was the main area. What  
13 I can do is I can go through and later on today give you  
14 a further indication of where there may be areas of fact  
15 to deal with. I don't think it's complete law, though,  
16 that was my initial impression from reading it last  
17 night.

18 THE CORONER: Then in what respects would you be asking for  
19 an expert opinion from Mr Martin?

20 MR COMPTON: To deal in particular with whether or not the  
21 repeal of the various pieces of the legislation -- and  
22 I suppose the answer to that is that we can deal with  
23 it, but he knows the area, that's the point, and rather  
24 than us -- it's a bit like the Building Regulations --  
25 trying to find our way through in the dark, we may be

1           able to take a straight point and to put it to him very  
2           quickly.

3   THE CORONER:   So in effect you are saying that you would  
4           find it helpful to have him as a path finder to take one  
5           through the legislative provisions?

6   MR COMPTON:    I think that's right.

7   THE CORONER:   But it's essentially a matter of law, isn't  
8           it?

9   MR COMPTON:    I think essentially, there are one or two  
10           passages in the submissions that I thought may be  
11           interpretations of fact.

12   THE CORONER:   Yes, all right. Thank you. That's helpful.

13           Mr Maxwell-Scott, did you want to say something?

14   MR MAXWELL-SCOTT:  I was going to say that we've sent  
15           Mr Hendy's submission to DCLG and have asked if  
16           Mr Martin could have a look at it and send us by email  
17           any comments that he may have, and once we've received  
18           those I suggest we review the position.

19           It may be that, as Mr Compton says, he makes helpful  
20           comments that can be circulated but which are in effect  
21           comments on the law rather than raising matters that can  
22           or even should be given as factual evidence. From  
23           a case management point of view, I would recommend that  
24           the jury are told that they're likely not to be required  
25           until Wednesday, but that there should be some means of

1           contacting them in case that position changes.

2   THE CORONER:   Okay.  Thank you, that's helpful.  Does anyone  
3           else want to add to that?  Mr Edwards?

4   MR EDWARDS:   Madam, simply to say that I'm of the opinion  
5           that these are submissions of law.  Mr Compton has  
6           effectively alluded to repeals of various statutes of  
7           the like or bylaws.  Those are pure matters of law to  
8           me.  Of course, it would be helpful to have Mr Martin's  
9           comments, and if he can act as a path finder that's  
10          likely to assist you, but these are matters of law and  
11          I say that very firmly.

12                I can't see what evidence Mr Martin could be able to  
13          give in any event on bylaws from the 1950s and the early  
14          1970s, which are presumably had somewhat before his  
15          time, in any event.

16   THE CORONER:   Where do you say the significance of this  
17          lies?

18   MR EDWARDS:   The significance of Mr Martin or of the  
19          submissions?

20   THE CORONER:   Of your submission.

21   MR EDWARDS:   Madam, it goes to the fire resistance of the  
22          panels principally and it also goes to the fire  
23          resistance of, essentially, the maisonettes as a whole,  
24          but it's principally the panels.

25   THE CORONER:   All right, well thank you very much, that's

1 helpful.

2 I think that probably the better course of action is  
3 to see whether Mr Martin can offer a helpful path  
4 through this, as you're suggesting, Mr Compton, and that  
5 may help to resolve matters, it may simply leave  
6 everything even murkier. I'm very reluctant to be  
7 calling further witnesses -- or rather, to recall  
8 Mr Martin -- but if that's the only way forward we can  
9 have a look at that, and I think I'll respectfully adopt  
10 the suggestion that Mr Maxwell-Scott has made as to what  
11 we tell the jury for next week.

12 MR COMPTON: Yes, thank you very much.

13 THE CORONER: Yes, thank you very much. Does anyone else  
14 want to raise anything else? Thank you, in that case  
15 could we have the jury in.

16 (In the presence of the Jury)

17 THE CORONER: Members of the jury, good morning. Apologies  
18 for keeping you waiting, there was an administrative and  
19 legal matter that we needed to sort out before you came  
20 in. We have tried extremely hard throughout these  
21 Inquests not to keep you hanging about and not to keep  
22 sending you out of the room, and thanks to the huge  
23 cooperation from everybody in the room, I think, that  
24 we've -- or I hope that you feel that we've largely  
25 succeeded on that, and haven't irritated you too much.

1 I explained yesterday we're going to go to evidence  
2 from Mr Dobson. In fact, there's one very small matter  
3 I want to deal with in terms of formal evidence before  
4 we get to Mr Dobson, it will only take a few minutes.

5 You'll recall that right at the very beginning we  
6 showed you the inquisition form, and it's in your jury  
7 bundles, the form which we would be asking you to help  
8 complete at the end of these inquests. There are some  
9 formal pieces of information which need to be added to  
10 that form, and we're missing a couple of pieces of  
11 information. Mr Clark, who is the coroner's officer,  
12 has that information and I'm going to ask him to come to  
13 the witness desk and briefly give that information so  
14 that we have that for you. Thank you. Mr Clark, if  
15 you'd like to come forward.

16 KEN CLARK (recalled)

17 THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr Clark, you've been sworn so  
18 I don't need you it to take the oath.

19 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

20 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Mr Clark, it may assist you and the  
21 members of the jury if you take up the jury bundle at  
22 tab 3. We can see there a copy of a blank inquisition  
23 form of the type that the members of the jury will have  
24 to complete in due course, and section 5 is the section  
25 for particulars for the time being required by the

1 Registration Act to be registered concerning the death,  
2 and (a) is date and place of birth, and in respect of  
3 Catherine Hickman, we haven't yet heard evidence of her  
4 place of birth, so can you tell us what the answer is  
5 that should be put in that section of the form?

6 A. Yes, Catherine Hickman's place of birth was the city of  
7 Southampton in Hampshire.

8 Q. Then if you see there's section (d), maiden surname of  
9 woman who has married, and we haven't heard in evidence  
10 the maiden name of Helen Udoaka, so if you could tell us  
11 that and then spell it for the transcriber, please?

12 A. Apologies for any mispronunciation: it's Ojeyokan, spelt  
13 O-J-E-Y-O-K-A-N.

14 Q. Thank you very much, Mr Clark.

15 THE CORONER: Thank you very much. I take it no-one has any  
16 questions? Thank you.

17 Yes, thank you, Mr Clark.

18 (The witness withdrew)

19 THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Dobson, would you like to come  
20 forward? Thank you.

21 RONALD DOBSON (sworn)

22 THE CORONER: Mr Dobson, thank you. Do sit down. Thank you  
23 for coming. I think you've been sitting at the back of  
24 the room, so you'll appreciate that the sound isn't  
25 always easy in this room, so please could you keep your

1 voice up when you're answering questions and speak  
2 closely to the microphones. It may seem a little  
3 artificial, but if you direct your answers across the  
4 room towards the jury, then they can hear your evidence  
5 and it will help to keep you close to the microphones as  
6 well.

7 Mr Maxwell-Scott, who is standing, will ask  
8 questions on my behalf initially and then there will be  
9 questions from others.

10 A. Thank you.

11 Questions by MR MAXWELL-SCOTT

12 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Good morning, Mr Dobson. Could you give  
13 the court your full name please?

14 A. My name is Ronald James Dobson.

15 Q. You are currently the Commissioner of the  
16 London Fire Brigade?

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. When were you first appointed to that position?

19 A. 1 October 2007.

20 Q. Can you briefly, for the benefit of the jury, summarise  
21 the positions that you'd held and the career that you  
22 had had in the London Fire Brigade before you were  
23 appointed commissioner?

24 A. I joined the London Fire Brigade in November 1979 as  
25 a firefighter, and I've served in every rank in the

1 London Fire Brigade between there and commissioner.

2 I was the divisional commander operations for the  
3 eastern command for four years in the 1990s, dealing  
4 with a range of inner city and also outer London fires  
5 at senior command level. I was then promoted to  
6 assistant commissioner, where I was first of all  
7 responsible for development of operational policies and  
8 procedures for the London Fire Brigade, and representing  
9 the brigade on a number of national committees where  
10 such policies were developed at a national level.

11 Subsequent to that, I was moved across and I became  
12 the assistant commissioner for service delivery and the  
13 third officer for the brigade, where I was responsible  
14 for all of the fire stations in London, their  
15 operational performance, their community safety  
16 performance, discipline and management of all those  
17 stations, and subsequently to that I became the  
18 commissioner.

19 THE CORONER: Mr Dobson, not so fast, please, the  
20 transcribers need to keep a record of what you are  
21 saying.

22 A. My apologies.

23 THE CORONER: You're going quite quickly for them. Thank  
24 you.

25 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Mr Dobson, my questions today about focus

1 on the issue of how one can reduce the risk of a similar  
2 tragedy occurring again, and on the steps that have been  
3 taken by the London Fire Brigade since the fire to  
4 prevent fires in residential tower blocks from having  
5 a similar outcome.

6 In order to consider how to reduce the risk of  
7 something happening again, it is likely to be helpful to  
8 have an understanding of the factors which caused it in  
9 the first place. I'm therefore going to refresh your  
10 memory and the jury's memory of some of the potential  
11 factors that we've heard about in evidence, ask you  
12 about some of them, and then, having done so, I'll ask  
13 you about the steps that have been taken by the  
14 London Fire Brigade to address those matters and seek  
15 your views on further steps that could be taken.

16 You have helpfully provided the coroner with  
17 a witness statement addressing many of these issues, and  
18 I'll just put that on the screen and ask you to identify  
19 it. It starts at page 722. Is that the first page of  
20 your statement dated 8 March 2013?

21 A. It is.

22 Q. By way of context to the discussion that we are going to  
23 have, you comment in your statement on the fact that  
24 there are 45,000 buildings or so in London with  
25 an occupied height of over 18 metres of which

1 approximately 10,000 are classed as being for  
2 residential use.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. You also comment that in the three years from  
5 January 2009 to December 2011, the London Fire Brigade  
6 attended approximately 2,600 primary fires in  
7 residential buildings with an occupied height over  
8 18 metres.

9 A. That's correct.

10 Q. Can you just help us with what is meant by a "primary  
11 fire"?

12 A. A primary fire is a fire in a dwelling, or a fire in  
13 a vehicle which is not a derelict vehicle. So it's the  
14 type of fire that occurred at Lakanal.

15 THE CORONER: Please, not too fast, Mr Dobson.

16 A. Sorry, madam.

17 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: You say in your statement that of those  
18 2,600 attendances, 92 per cent were resolved by the  
19 initial attendance, in other words the predetermined  
20 attendance.

21 A. That's correct.

22 Q. A further 5 per cent were resolved by four pumps, and  
23 3 per cent by six pumps or more?

24 A. That's correct.

25 Q. So if my maths is right, 78 or so of those fires

1 required six pumps or more, which is in the region of 25  
2 a year.

3 A. That's about correct.

4 Q. I turn, then, to run through with you some of the  
5 potential factors that we have heard about as part of  
6 the story of the fire development and spread at  
7 Lakanal House on 3 July 2009. Firstly, we've heard that  
8 the fire started in flat 65 on the 9th floor, and this  
9 court has heard evidence from David Crowder of BRE to  
10 the effect that that fire was a medium growth fire of  
11 the sort not unusual for a fire in a tower block.

12 A. I would agree with that.

13 Q. For the record, he said the same about the fire in  
14 flat 79.

15 A. I would agree with that too.

16 Q. We've heard that the fire spread from flat 65 to flat 79  
17 through the windows of flat 65. If you take up the jury  
18 bundle at tab 18. (Handed)

19 On page 1 you can see a photograph and a diagram of  
20 bedroom windows at Lakanal House and the composite  
21 panels with insulation core that were underneath them,  
22 and we have heard that those panels were required to be  
23 Class 0, which is a requirement relating to the surface  
24 spread of flame, but not relating to fire resistance.  
25 We have heard that those panels were not in fact

1 Class 0.

2 Mr Crowder has given evidence about what the effect  
3 might have been on the development of the fire if those  
4 panels had in fact been Class 0, and in broad terms, his  
5 evidence can perhaps be summarised in this way: that had  
6 they been Class 0, that might have delayed the fire from  
7 establishing itself within flat 79, but he did not  
8 quantify how long such delay would have been, because of  
9 the susceptibility of the glazing to break, as it  
10 eventually did, and the unpredictability of when that  
11 might have taken place, and also because of the  
12 susceptibility of the aluminium frames to deform,  
13 creating gaps through which fire could enter the  
14 bedroom.

15 Catherine Hickman was in that flat, flat 79, and the  
16 members of the jury had the benefit of the transcript of  
17 the telephone call that she made to brigade control when  
18 she called 999. They have also heard part of that tape  
19 played to them. That transcript is at tab 17 of the  
20 jury bundle. I don't think it's necessary for you to  
21 look at it, but simply from looking at the first page of  
22 it, one can pick up that she told the brigade control  
23 operator that there was a fire in the flat beneath her  
24 and that there was some smoke in her flat. As I'm sure  
25 you are aware, she remained in her flat on the line to

1 brigade control until she lost consciousness and then  
2 died.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. The evidence that we have heard is that brigade control  
5 operators did not receive refresher training on how to  
6 deal with fire survival guidance calls, which were  
7 themselves extremely rare; that callers were not  
8 routinely questioned about access to escape routes; and  
9 that there was a belief within those who worked in  
10 brigade control that callers would in fact always be  
11 rescued.

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. We have also heard evidence that there was smoke-logging  
14 within the corridors of Lakanal House from a very early  
15 stage in the incident.

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. We can perhaps refresh our memory of that by looking at  
18 the sequence of events at tab 12 of the jury bundle.  
19 One can see from the first page that the first 999 call  
20 was at 1618 hours. Catherine Hickman made her call at  
21 1621 hours. Then over onto the second page, at 16.23,  
22 the same time that the first appliances arrived,  
23 a caller rang and said that there was smoke coming out  
24 from flat 91 on the 13th floor, so four floors above  
25 where the fire had started. That perhaps just serves to

1 illustrate the fact that smoke spread quickly within the  
2 communal areas of Lakanal House.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. On that point, if I could ask you to have a look at the  
5 London Fire Brigade's fire safety report and this is in  
6 the advocates' bundles, sections 1 to 8, starting at  
7 page 1282. I'll put it up on the screen as well.

8 (Handed)

9 That's the front cover of the report, which you  
10 probably recognise.

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. If you turn in it to page 1290. Paragraph 6.3 talks  
13 about ventilation, and there's a photograph immediately  
14 underneath it of the ventilation grills at the end of  
15 the communal corridors of Lakanal House. Just pausing  
16 there: is it right that since the fire you have  
17 personally visited Lakanal House?

18 A. I have.

19 Q. Paragraph 6.3 says:

20 "Ventilation grills in corridors and lobbies are no  
21 longer recommended as a means for keeping these areas  
22 free of smoke."

23 Then, moving down to three lines from the bottom it  
24 says:

25 "However, due to the number of high rise residential

1 buildings that were constructed in London prior to 1990,  
2 corridor and lobby ventilation as found in Lakanal are  
3 a common feature of such buildings."

4 A. That's correct.

5 Q. We've heard evidence about how the Building Regulations  
6 work, I don't want to go into that in any detail with  
7 you, but in very broad terms, it is possible for the  
8 buildings to be in a state today which does not conform  
9 with current standards but is nonetheless lawful because  
10 the building complied with the relevant regulations at  
11 the time it was constructed.

12 A. That's correct.

13 Q. This feature that we are talking about and seeing in  
14 that photograph, the ventilation grills, may be  
15 an example of that.

16 A. That's correct.

17 Q. If we then return to the development of the fire and  
18 some relevant parts of the chronology, there came a time  
19 when the bridgehead was moved down from the 7th floor,  
20 and in fact moved all the way outside the building, and  
21 I think your view is that that was right and necessary  
22 because breathing apparatus should only be started up in  
23 clean air.

24 A. That is correct.

25 Q. We've also heard evidence -- and I'll show you the

1 photograph to put a time on it, this is tab 12,  
2 page 17 -- illustrated by that photograph that there  
3 came a time when fires started on floors below the floor  
4 on which the original fire started. So fires started at  
5 around 16.48 in flats 37 and 53 on the 5th and 7th  
6 floors respectively.

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Can I ask you about your views firstly on the extent, if  
9 at all, to which something like that has ever happened  
10 in your experience?

11 A. A circumstance such as that, where the fire breaks out  
12 later, beneath the bridgehead, is unique in my  
13 experience.

14 Q. In your statement, you say not only is it unique in your  
15 experience, it's unique in the brigade's experience, and  
16 to your knowledge, in the experience of any other  
17 brigade nationwide.

18 A. That is correct.

19 Q. I'm going to ask you a few more questions about that.  
20 Firstly this: would you agree with me that, even if the  
21 fires had not started on the 5th and 7th floors, the  
22 bridgehead would have had to be moved out of the  
23 building in any event because of the smoke-logging in  
24 the stairwell?

25 A. It's certainly possible. The incident commander would

1           have kept that under consideration because they would  
2           not wish to move the bridgehead if they possibly could,  
3           they'd want to keep it where it was, but if the  
4           smoke-logging continued to the extent which I understand  
5           it did at Lakanal House, then that would have been  
6           a consideration of the incident commander to move it  
7           outside again.

8   Q.   Would you, strictly speaking, agree with me that if  
9           there were no smoke in the stairwell but a fire on the  
10          5th floor, then the correct approach would be to locate  
11          the bridgehead on the 3rd floor?

12  A.   That would be correct.

13  Q.   Whereas if there were no fire on the 5th or 7th floors,  
14          but smoke-logging all the way up and down the stairwell,  
15          the bridgehead would have to go outside the building.

16  A.   Yes.

17  Q.   So when we think about the effect of the fires on the  
18          5th and 7th floors, we need to bear in mind that the  
19          effect that they had on the decision to move the  
20          bridgehead out of the building may be limited.

21  A.   I think that once the fires started on the 5th and 7th  
22          floors it gave the incident commander no choice as to  
23          move the bridgehead.  If it was just smoke-logging the  
24          incident commander probably would have moved the  
25          bridgehead, but they would have had more choice in what

1           they could do.

2   THE CORONER:   Such as what?

3   A.   Well, I mean, it depends on the extent of the  
4       smoke-logging, so as we've already heard and is  
5       absolutely correct, the procedure is to start up  
6       breathing apparatus in clean air and they'd always seek  
7       to do that.

8   THE CORONER:   You said there were other options, I wondered  
9       what the options were.

10  A.   Well, the other option could be to move the bridgehead  
11       lower down the building, or it depends.  Where the smoke  
12       is maybe not quite as dense, then a risk assessment  
13       would be carried out by the incident commander as to  
14       exactly where the bridgehead would be.  But if the  
15       smoke-logging was to become, as it did at Lakanal, very  
16       thick, then they would have no choice but to move  
17       outside the building.

18  MR MAXWELL-SCOTT:  Perhaps the point you're making is that  
19       smoke-logging is a question of degree --

20  A.   Mmm.

21  Q.   -- and it would be a judgment for the incident commander  
22       whether the smoke-logging was such that it was not  
23       appropriate to start up breathing apparatus in those  
24       conditions?

25  A.   That's correct.

1 Q. I will just press on you this point, because when  
2 Mr Walsh QC questioned Mr Brian Davey, he put this  
3 question to him, and he said that:

4 "Assuming that the evidence is correct that the  
5 stairwell was compromised by smoke all the way down its  
6 length, there was no option, was there, but to move the  
7 bridgehead out of the building, because you cannot start  
8 up BA crews in anything but clean air?"

9 Obviously, the phrase that Mr Walsh used there in  
10 his question related to a stairwell compromised by smoke  
11 all the way down its length. Using that phrase, would  
12 you agree with the premise behind that question?

13 A. Yes I would, yes.

14 Q. Of course, the fact that the flats on the 5th and 7th  
15 floor were on fire were important matters that needed to  
16 be addressed, is that right --

17 A. Yes, they were.

18 Q. -- and inevitably require a certain level of resource to  
19 put those fires out.

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. You comment on that in your witness statement. I'll  
22 just take you to this at paragraph 20 on page 729. What  
23 you say in paragraph 20 is:

24 "Whilst the brigade's first object is to save life,  
25 the importance of gaining a degree of control over the

1 developing fire whilst undertaking searches for  
2 occupants cannot be understated. Fire and the  
3 production of hot flammable gasses and noxious smoke  
4 will continue to grow exponentially where additional  
5 fuel is available. Fire and hot smoke may spread,  
6 creating irrespirable and potentially explosive  
7 environments in other areas of the building. Not  
8 achieving a degree of control over the fire and the  
9 explosive gasses that are produced has previously  
10 resulted in deaths amongst members of the public and  
11 firefighters. Therefore, as occurred at Lakanal, the  
12 initial crews' primary focus was to control the fire to  
13 enable the search and rescue operations to be commenced  
14 and carried out safely."

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. So in other words, the primary objective is to save  
17 life, but it would be wrong to think that the correct  
18 way to achieve that is to focus exclusively on search  
19 and rescue.

20 A. That's correct.

21 Q. Coming back to your evidence about the brigade having no  
22 experience of a fire starting on a floor lower than the  
23 one on which the original fire started, what I want to  
24 explore with you is the extent to which it would be  
25 right to regard what happened as completely unexpected,

1 as distinct from the fact that it hadn't happened  
2 previously in the brigade's experience.

3 If we look at that by looking firstly at GRA3.2,  
4 which starts at page 1493 in the advocates' bundles.  
5 (Handed)

6 That is the front cover of the Generic Risk  
7 Assessment, which I'm sure you're familiar with.

8 A. Mm-hmm.

9 Q. If we turn in it to internal page 6, which is  
10 page 1498 --

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. -- there's a section there on "Falling objects and  
13 burning debris" which says:

14 "Falling objects will be hazardous to personnel  
15 working at ground level. Debris can be ejected  
16 explosively from the building or in the case of glass  
17 and curtain walling can 'plane' and travel over  
18 a considerable distance."

19 Then this particular sentence:

20 "Burning debris may fall from the building;  
21 conceivably as a sequence of firefighting actions and  
22 can cause secondary fires."

23 I think you were in court yesterday when I asked  
24 Mr Holland about this and you will have heard his view  
25 that that sentence and that reference to secondary fires

1 was not limited to secondary fires that started outside  
2 the building, but should be taken to include the  
3 possibility of burning debris falling and starting  
4 a fire lower down, but within the same building. What's  
5 your view on that?

6 A. I think the key sentence in this paragraph is the first  
7 one, which is that:

8 "Falling objects will be hazardous to personnel  
9 working at ground level."

10 Where the reader's focus is taken, certainly the  
11 experience of the British -- British fire and rescue  
12 service is that that does happen. I've attended many  
13 fires where there's been hazardous at ground level  
14 because of falling debris and burning objects from the  
15 fire above.

16 I think certainly in the context of what happened at  
17 Lakanal -- the Lakanal fire, my understanding of this  
18 paragraph would change, but certainly I think the  
19 general interpretation of that paragraph by the fire and  
20 rescue service prior to Lakanal was that it was intended  
21 to focus on dangers at ground level to firefighters, and  
22 that indeed is something that's happened very regularly  
23 at fires.

24 Q. So you wouldn't wholly agree with Mr Holland?

25 A. No, I wouldn't, no.

1 Q. We've obtained data from the Met Office about the  
2 weather conditions on the day of the fire. I'm not sure  
3 whether you've seen that or not.

4 A. I haven't, no.

5 Q. It may be of assistance to refresh our memories by  
6 looking in the jury bundle at tab 24. If we take a look  
7 at that, we can see that the highest temperature  
8 recorded on the afternoon of 3 July 2009 at these  
9 weather stations in or around London was in the region  
10 of 25 degrees centigrade, so the sort of warm afternoon  
11 when one might expect many people to have their windows  
12 open --

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. -- but not a freakishly hot afternoon.

15 A. No.

16 Q. Again, you can see the figures for wind speed, with  
17 average wind speed in knots in the region of 10 knots,  
18 with gusts up to a maximum of just under 20 knots.  
19 Again, nothing freakish about that.

20 A. No.

21 Q. I think it is recognised that around tall buildings one  
22 can have unusual wind patterns, with wind speeds  
23 increasing higher up the building.

24 A. Yes, we commonly experience that.

25 Q. So the point that I put to you for you to comment on is

1           that, although this phenomenon of a fire starting on  
2           a lower floor than the original fire floor was outside  
3           the brigade's experience, if one stands back and looks  
4           at the facts of the afternoon of 3 July, and the  
5           appearance of Lakanal House, it's not wholly surprising  
6           that some burning debris that fell down in the way that  
7           is recognised to be a risk might get blown around by the  
8           wind and might go through one or more of the windows  
9           which occupants would be perhaps expected to leave open  
10          on a warm afternoon.

11        A. With hindsight, I have to accept that point, however  
12          what I would say is that these conditions on this day  
13          were not exceptional, it was a warm afternoon and there  
14          was a gusty wind, but it wasn't exceptional conditions,  
15          and we've fought fires in high rise buildings in London  
16          over many years on days when the conditions are almost  
17          the same or many ways even more extreme in terms of wind  
18          and heat and yet on no occasion before has about been  
19          experience of this phenomenon where fires start below  
20          the fire floor.

21        THE CORONER: But the fact that something hasn't happened  
22          before doesn't mean that it's not necessarily something  
23          which one couldn't foresee?

24        A. No, I agree.

25        MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: If I now move on in the story of what

1           happened on the afternoon of 3 July to focus on the fact  
2           that fire and smoke spread from flat 79 into the  
3           corridor on the 11th floor and into flat 81.

4    A.   Yes.

5    Q.   The best way perhaps to refresh our memory of this is to  
6           look at the diagram at tab 26 of the jury bundle.  This  
7           is a diagram prepared by Mr Crowder.  The diagram  
8           focuses on flat 81, where you can see bedroom 1 and  
9           bedroom 2, the front hall and the bathroom, the internal  
10          stairs and then the 11th floor corridor directly outside  
11          flat 81.

12   A.   Yes.

13   Q.   One can see where flat 79 is, although it's not drawn  
14          in.  What this diagram illustrates is the fire burnt  
15          through the boxing in under the internal stairs and  
16          spread into the bathroom of flat 81.  Just to complete  
17          the picture with some of the things that aren't  
18          illustrated on this diagram, we've heard evidence that  
19          the boxing in under the internal stairs in flat 79  
20          failed within three minutes or so of it being exposed to  
21          fire, something that one would have expected to be  
22          fire-resistant for 30 or 60 minutes.

23   A.   Yes.

24   Q.   That was the trigger for fire getting into the cavity  
25          above the suspended ceiling and in due course fire and

1 smoke entering flat 81 in the ways illustrated in this  
2 diagram --

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. -- with the exception, for the sake of completeness, of  
5 the fact that some smoke entered the bathroom of flat 81  
6 through the ventilation grill as a result of the fire in  
7 flat 53?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. It is I think worth reminding ourselves at this stage  
10 that these features of Lakanal House -- so the boxing in  
11 and the cavity above the suspended ceiling -- which the  
12 members of the jury may regard as at least as  
13 significant, or more significant, than works done in  
14 2006/2007, were all matters that have remained  
15 essentially unchanged since the 1980s.

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. If I then turn in the first part of my questions to  
18 remind you and the members of the jury of some themes  
19 that we've heard about in the evidence of firefighters.  
20 The first of those is that incident commanders developed  
21 very little awareness of the locations of flats 79 and  
22 81 before it became too late to do anything to save the  
23 occupants of those flats.

24 I mention in particular flat 79 because that was  
25 where Catherine Hickman was and she made a very prompt

1           999 call, the fourth such call, and the fact of it was  
2           promptly relayed to those at or on their way to the fire  
3           ground.

4    A.   Yes.

5    Q.   Just refreshing our memory of some of the evidence, the  
6           second incident commander told the court that he never  
7           identified where flat 79 or flat 81 were.  The third  
8           incident commander said that the only flat number he  
9           knew was flat 65 on the 9th floor.  The fourth incident  
10          commander correctly believed that flat 79 and 81 were on  
11          the 11th floor but was not more precise as to where they  
12          were on that floor.

13                 Then secondly, but related, the evidence we have  
14                 heard suggests that incident commanders had a limited  
15                 knowledge about the layout of Lakanal House.  If I might  
16                 illustrate that by reminding you and the jury of the  
17                 image that we showed many witnesses.  That's what  
18                 Lakanal House looks like from the west side, giving the  
19                 floor numbers but not the flat numbers, and that's what  
20                 it looks like with the correct flat numbers superimposed  
21                 over that image.

22                 I think it's fair to say that incident commanders  
23                 never built up at the relevant time a mental picture of  
24                 where flat numbers were that was anything like what one  
25                 sees in that diagram.

1           The second incident commander said he had no overall  
2           impression of where the flats were and he wasn't aware  
3           that the balconies were escape routes.

4           The third incident commander was also not aware that  
5           the balconies were escape routes, and he wasn't aware  
6           that the flats were maisonettes.

7           The fourth incident commander didn't build up  
8           a mental picture like that, and he wasn't aware that the  
9           flats extended the width of the building on the upper  
10          levels until after 7.00 pm in the evening.

11          At this stage, all I would ask is whether you would  
12          agree that that is a situation that calls for steps to  
13          be taken to try to prevent it happening again?

14   A.   I would agree.

15   Q.   Then four further short themes that we've heard about in  
16          evidence. Firstly, some, but not all, relevant  
17          information known about within brigade control was  
18          passed to the fire ground, but brigade control had very  
19          little awareness of how events were unfolding at the  
20          fire ground.

21          Secondly, there were problems with radio  
22          communications.

23          Thirdly, there were frequent changes of incident  
24          commander with the associated need to hand over  
25          information.

1           Fourthly, the aerial ladder platform arrived from  
2           Old Kent Road fire station very early on in the events,  
3           but was not deployed for some time.

4           They are all themes we've heard about in the  
5           evidence, and I've summarised them to you simply as  
6           that, as themes. Two of those themes -- the lack of  
7           knowledge of the layout of the building and the problems  
8           with radio communications -- featured fairly heavily in  
9           the answers we got to our final question to firefighters  
10          about the one additional thing that might have been most  
11          useful to them on the day.

12          Having gone through that exercise, I want to go back  
13          to the beginning and look at each much those potential  
14          factors and get your evidence on changes that have been  
15          made by the London Fire Brigade and discuss with you any  
16          other steps that could be taken.

17          The first one of those factors that I was going to  
18          ask you about was that the fire spread from flat 65 to  
19          flat 79, in other words a fire spreading from one  
20          compartment to another; is that right?

21    A.   That's correct.

22    Q.   It may be that you think that the risk of that occurring  
23          was something that was appropriately flagged up to  
24          firefighters at the time, but I'd be interested in your  
25          views on that.

1 A. Fire spread from one compartment to another, in the way  
2 in which the fire spread from flat 65 to flat 79, would  
3 not be uncommon to firefighters, because in high rise  
4 buildings if a fire is going to spread out of the  
5 compartment of origin, it's our experience that it would  
6 normally spread upwards.

7 I think the rate at which it spread upwards at this  
8 fire was a factor in the handling of the incident  
9 subsequently.

10 Q. I think it's absolutely right, as you have said, that at  
11 the time the upwards spread of fire from one compartment  
12 to another was a recognised risk --

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. -- and it was recognised in policy number 633 on high  
15 rise firefighting.

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. It's probably just as well to refresh our memory of  
18 that. It's in the jury bundle at tab 19. It starts on  
19 page 1518. If you turn on to page 1522, you can see  
20 a heading "Firefighting considerations". Then over the  
21 page at 1523, paragraph 5.4 -- this was the policy in  
22 place at the time of the Lakanal House fire -- says:

23 "Building design and fire safety measures."

24 It refers to the risk posed by the premises and the  
25 contents having the potential to significantly increase

1           should any of the measures designed into the building be  
2           compromised, such as the loss of compartmentation.

3    A.   Yes.

4    Q.   Then paragraph 5.5 below comments on the risk of  
5           vertical fire spread, most commonly externally, with  
6           fire breaking out of windows and spreading above.

7    A.   Yes.

8    Q.   You will have heard the evidence yesterday of Mr Holland  
9           in response to my questions about "stay put", and we did  
10          a word search last night of the documents that we have  
11          from the London Fire Brigade that pre-date the  
12          Lakanal House fire, and in short, "stay put" did not  
13          appear to be a phrase that was actually used in policy  
14          documents written by the London Fire Brigade before the  
15          fire. We only have a sample of them, but we assume the  
16          relevant ones.

17                Can you assist us with the extent to which that was  
18                a recognised concept or phrase before the Lakanal House  
19                fire in firefighting circles?

20   A.   I think the actual phrase "stay put" is one that is more  
21          commonly used in fire prevention circles rather than  
22          operationally. However, firefighters, operational  
23          firefighters at fire stations in London would be very  
24          familiar with the concept and would not expect people to  
25          be mass evacuating from a high rise building in the

1 event of a fire. They would expect the majority of the  
2 residents in the building to stay in their flats, so  
3 they would expect the behaviour, but not necessarily  
4 recognise the actual term that's used in that way.

5 Q. Would you agree with Mr Holland that incident commanders  
6 before this fire would have, or should have, been open  
7 to the possibility that the fire might spread and pose  
8 risks to persons in, for example, the flat immediately  
9 above where the fire started?

10 A. I would.

11 Q. Let me turn then to --

12 THE CORONER: Sorry, could I just add to that? What about  
13 flats immediately adjacent?

14 A. Firefighters would not expect the fire to commonly  
15 spread to flats that are adjacent, but if they were --  
16 when they get into the stage of the fire where they are  
17 thinking about other residents, the flats closest to the  
18 flat of origin would be the ones they would most  
19 commonly go to as a priority.

20 THE CORONER: Yes, Mr Holland referred not only to flats  
21 above but also to flats either side of the fire flat.

22 A. Yes, I would agree.

23 THE CORONER: So you would agree with him?

24 A. Yes.

25 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I'm going to move, then, to the question

1 of advice given to persons who called brigade control,  
2 and you commented on the advice that was given to  
3 Catherine Hickman and the practices in brigade control  
4 at the time. I think it's right that this is  
5 a potential factor where a completely new policy has  
6 been written by the London Fire Brigade to try to reduce  
7 the risk of a similar tragedy occurring in the future?

8 A. That's correct.

9 Q. That is policy number 790 on fire survival guidance  
10 calls; is that right?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. I think you have a copy of that with you?

13 A. I have, yes.

14 Q. It helpfully on the second page has a key point summary.  
15 Would you like to draw our attention to what you regard  
16 as the key points of this that are most relevant to our  
17 discussion?

18 A. I think the main points to recognise from this policy is  
19 that we are -- we are very keen, the London Fire  
20 Brigade, to learn the lessons from all incidents we  
21 attend, and we are very, very keen to learn the lessons  
22 from the fire that occurred at Lakanal on 3 July 2009.

23 We recognised from our debriefing investigation  
24 process that the passage of information between our  
25 control room and the incident ground and the use of that

1 information at the incident ground, could have been  
2 better, and therefore we've put the into place this very  
3 structured policy, and I think the key points on this  
4 are that it sets up a process for communication and  
5 recording of communication between the control room,  
6 where the controller is speaking to the person in the  
7 flat where the fire survival call is taking place to,  
8 and the incident ground, and also provides additional  
9 resources to the incident ground where fire survival  
10 calls are taking place.

11 So at any incident now where we have more than one  
12 fire survival guidance call or in the case of a high  
13 rise building --

14 THE CORONER: Sorry, could you just slow down, please.

15 First of all we need to absorb what you're saying and  
16 the transcribers need to deal with that. So you're just  
17 saying that you arranged for further resource?

18 A. Yes, further resources to be mobilised to the incident  
19 ground when the fire survival guidance calls are taking  
20 place. We mobilise an additional fire engine, a pump  
21 ladder, with a crew of a minimum of five, a station  
22 manager, which is a senior officer, and a command unit,  
23 and the purpose of these additional resources is to  
24 ensure that the fire survival guidance call information  
25 coming from brigade control can be properly recorded and

1 acted upon.

2 In addition to this, if the conditions on the  
3 incident ground and the incident commander there change,  
4 and the incident commander there has information which  
5 is not available to the control officer, the incident  
6 commander is able to communicate with control, and in  
7 discussion with them, change or amend the fire survival  
8 guidance being given to the resident who is in the flat  
9 or premises of origin.

10 The Inquest did hear evidence yesterday in the  
11 discussion with Mr Holland about the potential for  
12 incident commanders to speak directly to persons  
13 involved in fire survival guidance calls via a mobile  
14 phone in certain circumstances. It's my belief that the  
15 procedure we've put in place in this new policy covers  
16 that issue, or that event and, in my opinion, covers it  
17 in a better way than necessarily asking incident  
18 commanders to speak directly to residents or people  
19 involved in fire survival guidance calls.

20 The reason for that is that the incident commander,  
21 or other officer on the incident ground, have many  
22 responsibilities, and our control officers are trained  
23 to deal with these calls which are very, very stressful,  
24 and are trained to deal with persons who are involved in  
25 fire, obviously feel very threatened by the

1 circumstances they're in, and are likely to be in a very  
2 distressed condition. Our control officers are trained  
3 to do that, whereas incident commanders, currently, are  
4 not.

5 The additional command unit that is now mobilised to  
6 the incident ground when a fire survival guidance call  
7 has taken place has the facility on it of mobile phones.  
8 So if there is a circumstance where it was considered to  
9 be helpful, or appropriate, for someone on the incident  
10 ground to speak directly to the person involved in the  
11 fire survival guidance call, that could take place.

12 But, I have to say, in my judgment the process we've put  
13 in place in the London Fire Brigade since the Lakanal  
14 fire deals with that issue in a more structured and  
15 appropriate manner.

16 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: If we recap, then, some of the points  
17 that you made in that answer, just to be clear about  
18 them, to reinforce them where appropriate. When  
19 I summarised to you some of the evidence that we heard  
20 about the control room at the time, I referred to the  
21 fact that brigade control operators didn't receive  
22 refresher training on fire survival guidance calls.

23 I imagine they've now received a good deal of training.

24 A. I accept they did not receive refresher training at the  
25 time of this fire and we have now processes in place

1           where they do receive refresher training.

2   Q.   We commented on the fact that there was a culture, for  
3           want of a better word, of believing that callers would  
4           be rescued and not routinely questioning them about  
5           access to escape routes.  Are those matters that have  
6           been addressed by that training?

7   A.   They are.

8   Q.   Then just picking out some of the points from the  
9           policy, paragraph 2.2 on page 3 makes it clear that  
10          callers will be advised to leave their property if they  
11          start to become affected by not only fire but also heat  
12          or smoke.

13  A.   Yes.

14  Q.   Then, in terms of some of those points in the key point  
15          summary, there's a structured approach to trying to  
16          obtain particular pieces of information from the caller,  
17          is that right --

18  A.   That's correct.

19  Q.   -- and then passing it to the incident command pump, or  
20          the command unit, if there is one?

21  A.   That's correct, yes.

22  Q.   As you've said, even a single fire survival guidance  
23          call at a high rise building will trigger additional  
24          mobilisation --

25  A.   That's correct.

1 Q. -- of a pump ladder and a command unit and a station  
2 manager --

3 A. That's correct.

4 Q. -- and control must be kept informed of the actions  
5 taken to resolve each fire survival guidance call.

6 A. That's correct.

7 Q. In exceptional circumstances, the incident commander may  
8 consider, in effect, instructing brigade control to give  
9 certain advice.

10 A. That's correct.

11 Q. Unless there was anything else you wanted to say about  
12 that policy, I was going to move on to a different  
13 topic.

14 A. No, if I could -- if I may just explain paragraph 2.3,  
15 which you took to me to, that's also intended to ensure  
16 that this policy has utility at other types of incident,  
17 so there may well be other types of premises where  
18 people are trapped or unable to escape which may or may  
19 not involve fire, so it's not just for dwelling fires.

20 THE CORONER: Do you have any knowledge of the sort of  
21 training that is being introduced or has been  
22 introduced?

23 A. Yes, we -- the refresher training has been introduced  
24 for our control officers, as I've already said, and this  
25 fire survival calls policy is the subject of training at

1 fire stations too, and we've produced a training pack to  
2 go along with it.

3 THE CORONER: Do you know whether those who are involved in  
4 these calls are being trained to listen and analyse the  
5 information which they're given by a caller?

6 A. They certainly are trained to do that and they certainly  
7 have been made aware of how important it is to actually  
8 take the time to listen and collate exactly what  
9 information the caller's giving them.

10 THE CORONER: Thank you.

11 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: If I move on, then, to talk to you about  
12 the phenomenon of smoke-logging that we've heard about  
13 as a potential factor in the Lakanal House fire. Can  
14 I firstly ask you your views on sprinklers and their  
15 usefulness in dealing with smoke spread and fire spread.

16 A. My view is that sprinklers are a very effective  
17 mechanism for dealing with fire and smoke spread in  
18 buildings. Particularly sprinklers have the effect of  
19 attacking the fire in the very early stages and  
20 therefore preventing the fire development and the fire  
21 spread. So sprinklers are a very, very effective way of  
22 controlling fires in their initial stages and not  
23 allowing them to grow.

24 Q. Are you aware of a recent experiment of retro-fitting  
25 sprinklers into a high rise building near Sheffield,

1 I think --

2 A. Yes, I am.

3 Q. -- which indicated that the cost of doing so and the  
4 disruption associated with doing so was perhaps not as  
5 great as people might have thought?

6 A. Yes. Yes, I think there's been a long debate within the  
7 fire industry, not only the fire and rescue services but  
8 also suppliers and manufacturers and installers of  
9 sprinkler systems about the cost, effectiveness and the  
10 difficulties of retro-fitting sprinklers into existing  
11 premises.

12 My understanding is that the technology has moved on  
13 significantly and the building to which you're referring  
14 is a very, very good example that sprinklers can now be  
15 fitted within domestic premises on a retro-fitted basis,  
16 at a fraction of the costs that people previously  
17 thought they would be, and with none of the -- or very  
18 few of the disadvantages that people had previously  
19 expected them to have. So I do think that sprinklers  
20 are a very, very effective way of protecting domestic  
21 premises.

22 Q. If we think about what we've heard about at  
23 Lakanal House, and I'm thinking particularly about the  
24 fact that the boxing in failed within three minutes or  
25 so. If -- and it's obviously an if -- somebody before

1 the fire had discovered the boxing in and taken the view  
2 that it did not provide the requisite fire resistance,  
3 they would have had to do something about that, wouldn't  
4 they?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. That would inevitably have cost a certain amount of  
7 money.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Would it be your view that housing providers faced with  
10 the need to spend money to carry out necessary fire  
11 prevention works to a building should at the very least  
12 consider spending that money on retro-fitting  
13 sprinklers?

14 A. I definitely agree with that.

15 Q. Is it right that ordinarily when you run fire hoses from  
16 a dry riser outlet in say, a lobby area through fire  
17 doors and into corridors, inevitably the door will be  
18 left, to some extent, ajar because the hose runs through  
19 the opening?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. If it were possible to have a fire door designed with,  
22 in effect, a cat flap in it that you would run the hose  
23 through, with the result that the door could be  
24 completely shut but the hose still running through it,  
25 therefore potentially reducing smoke-logging, would that

1           be something worth considering?

2    A.  It would certainly be something worth considering.  I've  
3       heard about designs such as this previously and, in fact  
4       as I understand it, in the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade  
5       there is a system in place where they use a very similar  
6       sort of approach.  I don't know about the results of  
7       that, I've seen no information in terms of how effective  
8       that is or how practical it is from a firefighting  
9       perspective.

10                But we do need to remember that hoses, and it  
11       becomes rather technical -- and I apologise for that --  
12       the hoses have to be joined together and we use  
13       a process called couplings to do that.  Most couplings  
14       are wider than the hose itself and have mechanisms on  
15       them for us to actually disconnect the hose.  Also when  
16       we pull hoses through buildings, when it's charged,  
17       that's quite a difficult thing to do, and if we had  
18       a system such as this, we'd need to test them to make  
19       sure that we were not going to get hoses trapped in  
20       those -- in the holes provided.

21                So they'd need to be big enough, because obviously  
22       the bigger they are, the more smoke would be able to  
23       come through and also we need to make sure that it  
24       doesn't impair firefighters ability to drag hose along  
25       corridors into buildings because firefighters will fight

1 fires as they go along through the corridor and they  
2 need to make sure the hose is as easy to handle in  
3 progressing that way as it possibly can be. But it's  
4 certainly something that's worthy of consideration.

5 Q. If I move on, then, to the fact that, as we discussed  
6 earlier, at about the same time on the afternoon of  
7 3 July 2009 the bridgehead was moved down from the 7th  
8 floor, fires started in flats on the 5th and 7th floors  
9 and, in due course, the bridgehead was moved out of the  
10 building, something that was not within the experience  
11 of the brigade at the time. Is it right that the high  
12 rise firefighting policy 633 was revised after this  
13 incident --

14 A. That's correct.

15 Q. -- and that the current version does address some of  
16 those issues?

17 A. Well, the current version makes it much clearer to  
18 incident commanders that this may be something they need  
19 to consider in their incident plan, if the bridgehead  
20 was to be breached. But there is -- there isn't any new  
21 procedure which would avoid the bridgehead being moved,  
22 because as the Inquest has already heard, we need to  
23 make sure that breathing apparatus is started up as far  
24 as possible in clean air, and the only way to ensure  
25 that is to go lower down the building, because obviously

1 the smoke and the heat travels upwards. We need to make  
2 sure we have processes in place which is safe for  
3 firefighters start up their breathing apparatus sets,  
4 and we need to seek clean air to do that.

5 Q. Would it be fair to say -- and we'll look at the new  
6 policy briefly in a moment -- that it addresses those  
7 issues primarily by drawing attention to the possibility  
8 of fire spread down a building and of more unusual  
9 layouts such as scissor style staircases.

10 A. It does. It also gives -- provides incident commanders  
11 with advice in terms of if the -- if there is a need to  
12 move the bridgehead, in terms of the way in which that  
13 should be done safely. So the information such as  
14 making sure that we communicate with all breathing  
15 apparatus crews that have already been committed from  
16 the bridgehead -- because once we move the bridgehead,  
17 we're extending their travel distance to get back to  
18 a safe area.

19 So they need to know that the bridgehead's moved,  
20 and also communicate with incident commanders, sector  
21 commanders, and other people on the incident ground, and  
22 also to ensure that the incident commander considers the  
23 need for additional -- to request additional resources  
24 at the incident ground because the bridgehead has had to  
25 be moved.

1 Q. Do you have a copy of the current version of 633 with  
2 you?

3 A. I do.

4 Q. Can I just go through a few paragraphs in it with you?  
5 Firstly, on the second page of it, under "Hazards",  
6 there's reference to objects falling from a height,  
7 communication and radio difficulties, rapid and  
8 unpredictable fire spread up, down and laterally in the  
9 building, and logistical and physical changes associated  
10 with responding to upper floors.

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Then if you look on page 4, paragraph 2.6 says at the  
13 end of it that there may be communication blind spots  
14 within high rise buildings. That's referring to radio  
15 communication blind spots.

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Then paragraph 2.8 ends by saying:  
18 "Maisonette style single dwellings may be  
19 encountered where access may be up or down the staircase  
20 from the front door to rooms below or above and scissor  
21 style staircases."

22 A. Correct.

23 Q. Then if you turn on the next page to paragraph 2.15,  
24 that says:  
25 "Fire spread may occur in a upward, downward and/or

1 horizontal direction. Fire spread from one compartment  
2 to another may be more rapid and less predictable than  
3 other building types due to the effects of wind."

4 Then paragraph 2.17 says:

5 "Burning material falling from upper floors or  
6 propelled by the wind can also spread fires by igniting  
7 combustible materials through open windows, on balconies  
8 and around the base of the building."

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. That, in effect, is spreading the knowledge about the  
11 phenomenon that occurred in the Lakanal House fire?

12 A. That's correct.

13 Q. Whilst we are looking at this document, if you look at  
14 page 8 of it, towards the top, paragraph 6.2 says:

15 "The siting of appliances that form the  
16 predetermined attendance should take into account the  
17 potential need for access of aerials [in other words  
18 aerial ladder platforms] and other specialist  
19 appliances."

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Towards the bottom of that page at 6.5:

22 "The incident commander should also giving  
23 consideration to the following points ... (c) the need  
24 to lay out jets to control fires from falling debris and  
25 to deploy ground monitors to prevent external fire

1 spread."

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. That is dealing again with this phenomenon that we've

4 discussed of burning debris falling and possibly

5 starting fires lower down the building?

6 A. It is.

7 Q. Then I think the passage that you were referring to

8 about moving a bridgehead is at the top of page 11; is

9 that right?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Then on page 12, paragraph 7.37, there's reference to

12 the possibility of multiple fire survival guidance

13 calls, which the incident commander should prioritise.

14 Then at page 15 there's appendix 1 on pre-planning. The

15 list of matters which personnel should ensure they are

16 familiar with during 72D visits has been added to and

17 now refers to plans to show flat and maisonette numbers

18 by floor and in relation to each other; is that right?

19 A. That's correct.

20 Q. I think that another policy that is being trialled

21 relates to forward information boards. Can you tell us

22 briefly about that, particularly in relation to high

23 rise incidents?

24 A. Yes. One of the factors we recognise from the Lakanal

25 fire is that information in relation to flat locations

1 and in relation to floors -- floor numbers -- was  
2 available, but wasn't necessarily early identified, or  
3 identified by the crews on scene.

4 We've been discussing -- we are currently discussing  
5 with three boroughs in London the potential to run  
6 a pilot at high rise premises within their borough,  
7 where we provide an information board on the outside of  
8 the building, which would provide relevant information  
9 to crews attending in relation to a range of things they  
10 need to know about the building.

11 This is at a relatively early stage, but we're keen  
12 to progress it as a pilot within those three London  
13 boroughs, bearing in mind of course, I think as the  
14 Inquest has already heard, we have no ability to require  
15 the provision of such information at any building within  
16 London other than at London Underground stations, so we  
17 are going to trial this, but it would have been on a --  
18 currently it would need to be on a voluntary basis by  
19 the building owners or responsible persons.

20 Q. If I move on then to some of the themes from the  
21 firefighting evidence that I reminded you of earlier,  
22 and the fact that incident commanders had limited  
23 knowledge about the layout of Lakanal House generally,  
24 and the locations of flats 79 and 81 specifically, and  
25 am I right in saying that there's a new London Fire

1 Brigade policy on information gathering that ties in  
2 with the new mobile data terminals that we heard about  
3 yesterday?

4 A. That's correct.

5 Q. Madam, this might be a time to take a break before we  
6 took at this policy. It's a matter for you.

7 THE CORONER: No, that seems like a good idea. Yes, we'll  
8 take a ten minute break, so, members of the jury, could  
9 you back here, please, for 11.40. You are we welcome to  
10 leave your papers on the desk.

11 Mr Dobson, could you be back for 11.40, and because  
12 you're part way through giving your evidence you must  
13 not talk to anyone about it. Thank you very much.

14 (11.27 am)

15 (A short break)

16 (11.42 am)

17 THE CORONER: Thank you. Yes, Mr Maxwell-Scott.

18 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Mr Dobson, I was going to move on and  
19 then ask you about the new London Fire Brigade policy  
20 number 800 on information gathering and contingency  
21 plans which, as I understand it, ties in with the new  
22 mobile data terminals.

23 A. That's correct.

24 Q. You have a copy of that policy with you, I think?

25 A. I have, yes.

1 Q. It's quite a detailed policy, so perhaps if I pick out  
2 and try to summarise the key elements and you can tell  
3 me if I'm getting it right and if there's anything I've  
4 missed. There are four stages to the process which  
5 potentially leads to information being recorded on  
6 a mobile data terminal; is that right?

7 A. That's correct.

8 Q. I'm looking here at page 2 of the policy. The first  
9 stage is to decide whether the site needs to be visited  
10 at all.

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Then if one decides that a visit is needed, somebody  
13 goes along and carries out an assessment using  
14 a standard form premises risk assessment.

15 A. That's correct.

16 Q. We have an example of one of those in appendix 1,  
17 starting at page 10.

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. That form has, in effect, a scoring system associated  
20 with it.

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. If the score achieved is 150 or higher, does that then  
23 lead to the recording of information using the ORD?

24 A. That's right, yes.

25 Q. If information is recorded in that way, would it then

1           also be recorded on the mobile data terminal?

2    A.   It will.

3    THE CORONER:   Just so that the jury understand, the ORD

4           means what?

5    A.   Operational risk database.

6    THE CORONER:   Thank you.

7    MR MAXWELL-SCOTT:   Is the score achieved and the extent to

8           which it is above 150 then used as a guide by the local

9           station manager to decide how frequently in future that

10          premises should be visited?

11   A.   That's correct.

12   Q.   Then if you look at page 8 of the new policy,

13          paragraph 9.4, it says:

14                 "Following the initial visit, every opportunity is

15                 to be taken, particularly by watch managers of other

16                 watches, to ensure all watches share visits and

17                 information and make use of the tactical plan for

18                 training sessions.  This should assist all station

19                 personnel to familiarise themselves with the various

20                 hazards on their station's ground."

21   A.   That's correct.

22   Q.   That would be designed to address, no doubt, one of the

23          themes that we have heard about in evidence, that if one

24          watch visited a premises and didn't find anything

25          particularly unusual, that wouldn't be communicated to

1 other watches.

2 A. That's right.

3 THE CORONER: How in practice is this information sharing  
4 going to work?

5 A. We have -- a record of the visits taken place is on the  
6 station diary, that other watches have access to. Where  
7 the visit has taken place the station manager will be  
8 aware of that as well and it will be shared with other  
9 watches by a range of systems they have on the station.  
10 One is basically a handing-over book between the  
11 officers in charge of the watches, and then watches  
12 should be briefed on role call if there are new visits,  
13 or new risks identified on a station's ground.

14 So it should be quite a structured process from the  
15 station of passing that information on and then the  
16 watch manager will arrange for their watch to visit a  
17 premises.

18 THE CORONER: So when a crew is called, what information is  
19 going to be passed to them as they're leaving the  
20 station?

21 A. Well, if it's a premises which has been recorded on the  
22 operational risk database, and therefore has a MDT  
23 entry, that information is available to the crew via the  
24 computer screen on the front of the fire appliance in  
25 relation to all of the information recorded for that

1 building. For high rise premises, particularly, what we  
2 now require is that any high rise premise which is  
3 assessed by the premises risk assessment process to be  
4 scored above 150 and therefore requires an entry on the  
5 mobile data terminal, we also require there to be a line  
6 drawing of that premises, indicating the floor layout  
7 and flat numbers.

8 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: So, summarising some of the key points,  
9 if the building in question doesn't score sufficiently  
10 highly to get a score above 150, then it won't be on the  
11 mobile data terminal and this new policy isn't really  
12 going to add anything to the previous arrangement; is  
13 that fair?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. But we know that Marie Curie House now and Castlemead,  
16 which is also nearby, are on the mobile data terminals.

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. So it would be reasonable to assume that Lakanal House  
19 would make it onto the mobile data terminals as well.

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Once you're on the mobile data terminal, then the  
22 information on it is available not just to appliances  
23 from the local fire station, but to any appliances  
24 within the brigade; is that right?

25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. But of course the information on the mobile data  
2 terminal may vary in detail and will only be as useful  
3 as what is recorded and only as good as the quality of  
4 the visit that led to that information being recorded.

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. You will no doubt be aware of Mr Davey's recommendation,  
7 based on the evidence of practices back in 2009, that  
8 the London Fire Brigade should review all opportunities  
9 that exist to gather building related information, and  
10 some of his evidence about how to do a 72D visit.  
11 Clearly these mobile data terminals address those  
12 recommendations.

13 A. Mmm.

14 Q. One of the things that he suggested was that crews  
15 carrying out a 72D visit have access to what the  
16 previous crew who did so had found and recorded. Will  
17 that, in effect, be the case with the mobile data  
18 terminal?

19 A. No, not necessarily, because if the -- if the premises  
20 doesn't score above 150, then there will be no further  
21 record other than attendance at the visit to -- to  
22 record that the premises has been visited, so other  
23 crews won't necessarily be aware of the information that  
24 came out of that visit. But I would accept Mr Davey's  
25 recommendation that it's something that we should look

1 at in addition, and if I may, madam, in a while, I'd  
2 like to give a sort of explanation as to how we've got  
3 where we are in terms of a little bit of history about  
4 mobile data terminals and the policy we have.

5 Q. Certainly.

6 A. Shall I do it now?

7 Q. Yes.

8 A. At the time of the Lakanal fire, we had a process in  
9 place whereby if a crew -- if a station decided that  
10 particular premise on their station ground represented  
11 a risk that was either unusual or unusual for the type  
12 of premises they were -- that it was existing in, they  
13 would form a paper record and keep that on the front of  
14 the fire engine, and this was known as the operational  
15 information folder.

16 Clearly, because of the paper records, there had  
17 been quite a strict judgment about what formed a risk  
18 that would be recorded in this way and what wouldn't,  
19 and usually, high rise buildings would not have got onto  
20 the level at which we would have recorded them in that  
21 way.

22 We accepted that a paper based system was not the  
23 ideal system and in 2010 mobile data terminals were  
24 introduced to the brigade as part of a national project  
25 led at the time by our government department. As

1 a result of receiving the mobile data terminals onto  
2 fire engines, we went through a process of instructing  
3 every fire station to identify what they considered to  
4 be the top 20 risks on their station's ground and then  
5 transfer the information about that risk into a format  
6 that could be entered onto the mobile data terminal.

7 Now, we took that approach initially to populate the  
8 mobile data terminals with risk information as quickly  
9 as possible, but also in a reasonably consistent way.

10 Subsequent to that, in early 2012, the Department  
11 for Communities and Local Government issued a document  
12 in relation to guidance around operational risk  
13 gathering and information. This is the document that  
14 Mr Holland referred to yesterday during his evidence.  
15 We took that guidance into account and it's on the basis  
16 of taking that guidance into account, and our -- our  
17 desire to ensure that we have a structured process for  
18 gathering risk information for crews, that we produced  
19 our policy 800 and that is the result -- that is the  
20 latest iteration of that process.

21 We are continuing to go through that process of  
22 entering information onto the mobile data terminals, and  
23 therefore, at the current time, the information  
24 gathering process is neither complete nor completely  
25 consistent at the moment, and that is a process for

1 management overview and review, to ensure that not only  
2 have we got the correct information recorded, but also  
3 it's recorded in a consistent way, because one of the  
4 things that I am very keen on is that the information  
5 that's recorded on the mobile data terminal is of use to  
6 incident commanders rather than distracting them from  
7 their many responsibilities and many objectives they  
8 must have when they attend incidents.

9 What I'm very keen to ensure is that they don't just  
10 put information on there for information's sake, it's  
11 got to be information which is of use to them, will  
12 assist them in managing an incident at a particular  
13 premises and is not information that will distract them  
14 from their normal priority duties. I hope that helps.

15 Q. Yes, thank you.

16 THE CORONER: So is the format of these MDTs going to be  
17 consistent across the country?

18 A. Well, it's certainly consistent in London. The format  
19 that's been recommended by DCLG, I think as Mr Holland  
20 said yesterday, should result in consistency. I can't  
21 comment on other brigades, madam, I'm afraid.

22 THE CORONER: No, I understand. If you have cross border  
23 incidents, then the one thing that everybody needs is  
24 a format which is familiar, so that you go immediately  
25 to the piece of information you know you are looking

1 for.

2 A. I absolutely agree, and I can -- I can, though, confirm  
3 that we are -- we have had, and we continue to have,  
4 discussions with the brigades that we border to make  
5 sure that information sharing is in a consistent way.  
6 So at least I can speak for the six brigades that we  
7 border with and should be consistent with very shortly.

8 THE CORONER: Thank you.

9 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: I think your policy does have a specific  
10 section that refers to cross border site risks.

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Just coming back to what happens when people carry out  
13 72D visits now, if they are going to a building that  
14 does currently have an entry on the mobile data  
15 terminal, would they be expected to look at that entry  
16 before and after they carry out the visit?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. You made the point about not wanting to put too much  
19 information on the mobile data terminal for the sake of  
20 doing so. The policy on high rise firefighting lists  
21 a long list of matters which ought to be looked at on  
22 a 72D visit. In effect, are you saying that you would  
23 not expect the findings on each of those matters to be  
24 put on the mobile data terminal as a matter of routine?

25 A. No, I wouldn't expect every piece of information to be

1 recorded, I would expect the incident commander to --  
2 sorry, the officer carrying out the visit to record the  
3 information which he or she considers to be important  
4 and helpful to incident commanders attending that  
5 building. So there are parts of that information that  
6 I would expect to always be recorded, but not all of it.

7 Q. Just to touch on one or two features we've heard about,  
8 what, if anything, would you expect to be recorded about  
9 flat numbering systems?

10 A. Well, as I've said, in relation to high rise buildings,  
11 if -- first of all, if a premises scores above 150, and  
12 we have the mobile data terminal entry, we are  
13 already -- we already require crews there to do a line  
14 drawing which would indicate floor layouts and numbering  
15 systems. If, however, a premises might not otherwise  
16 score above 150, but the numbering system was so unusual  
17 or so complex that the crew felt it was worthy of note,  
18 then that may be an issue which raises the score above  
19 150 or instigates them to actually require there to be  
20 an entry on the mobile data system in any case.

21 Q. What about recording any information about how an aerial  
22 ladder platform would be used or whether there were any  
23 particular access difficulties?

24 A. I would expect some information to be recorded if it was  
25 necessary. Of course, access for aerial ladder

1 platforms is provided at some premises and not others.  
2 Where it is provided, I would expect the mobile data  
3 terminal to record any problems with that access, so if  
4 there were any obstructions that were obvious.

5 I would not only expect the crew that carries out  
6 the 72D to report those when they get back to the  
7 station to try to address them, but I'd also expect them  
8 to record that on the mobile data terminals so that  
9 attending crews in the meantime are aware there may be  
10 an obstruction.

11 For other premises where hard standing is not  
12 provided for aerial appliances, then I would not expect  
13 that to be recorded, because one of the issues is that  
14 where hard standing is not provided, then we cannot be  
15 sure of the capability of the ground to withstand the  
16 weight of the aerial appliance, which are very  
17 significant appliances.

18 So where the hard standing is provided, I would  
19 expect it to be recorded if there were problems, but  
20 probably not in other cases.

21 THE CORONER: It's important for someone to know whether  
22 there is actually access for an ALP, whether restricted  
23 or otherwise --

24 A. Yes.

25 THE CORONER: -- so either yes we can have one or no we

1 can't. So where would we find that information?

2 A. That information would be available either from our fire  
3 safety department, if they need to or, in most cases,  
4 it's obvious when you arrive at the premises whether or  
5 not a hard stand has actually been provided. If there  
6 are normal pavements and landscaping right the way up to  
7 the premises, then usually that would indicate that  
8 there isn't a hard standing, but crews should be able to  
9 recognise a hard standing when it's provided.

10 THE CORONER: Thank you.

11 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: If I then move away from that policy,  
12 unless there was something else you specifically wanted  
13 to draw our attention to in it.

14 A. No.

15 Q. I want to ask you about premises information boxes. The  
16 members of the jury will have heard something about  
17 them. They are secure boxes, as I understand it, placed  
18 at the premises by the owner, but which can be opened by  
19 the London Fire Brigade, and contain plans or other  
20 potentially useful information about the building; is  
21 that right?

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. There's no legal requirement for owners to put them in  
24 place.

25 A. No.

1 Q. At the time of the Lakanal House fire, they were rare in  
2 London and, in general, particularly rare in high rise  
3 residential tower blocks.

4 A. That's correct.

5 Q. Since the Lakanal House fire, they have become more  
6 common --

7 A. In some places, yes.

8 Q. -- and some tower blocks now have them.

9 A. Some do, yes.

10 Q. The third incident commander, in his answer to my final  
11 question, said that he thought a premises information  
12 box was the one single additional thing which would have  
13 been most helpful to him, and as I'm sure you're aware,  
14 Mr Davey also made one of his five recommendations that  
15 further consideration was given to the use of premises  
16 information boxes. What would you say to the coroner  
17 about how potentially useful they can be?

18 A. I think premises information boxes at buildings can be  
19 a very, very helpful facility for a firefighter when  
20 attending a fire in a building. We have no -- as the  
21 Inquest has heard -- we have no ability to require these  
22 boxes on premises at the moment other than at certain  
23 premises. If I may just give a short example, at London  
24 Underground stations, for example, I'm sure you will  
25 have seen the premises information boxes that are

1           actually labelled "London Fire Brigade" outside the  
2           stations, and they are a requirement at such places by  
3           legislation, at London Underground stations, and they  
4           are extremely -- in fact invaluable to us to deal with  
5           incidents at London Underground premises.

6           On those premises where premises information boxes  
7           are provided on buildings, particularly high rise  
8           buildings, once again they are very, very important and  
9           very -- and almost invaluable. But it is important that  
10          the building occupier not only agrees to put a premises  
11          information box in place but also to provide the  
12          information in a format which is usable to fire crews,  
13          and also agrees to undertake to keep the information up  
14          to date and notify the station if the information's  
15          changed.

16          By way of an example, I think I say that in my  
17          evidence, that it would not be helpful for fire crews to  
18          have access to very detailed architect plans, for  
19          example, in a premises information box, because, you  
20          know, in the middle of the night, when it's raining,  
21          conditions are very difficult, that's not going to be  
22          a very helpful plan. So we need plans that agreed with  
23          you, that are intuitive and contain the information that  
24          fire crews really would find valuable when attending  
25          that incident. But in that case, they are very, very

1           valuable things for us to have.

2   THE CORONER:  Is there experience of using such premises  
3           information boxes already in this area in relation to  
4           high rise residential blocks?

5   A.  I believe there is, madam, yes.

6   MR MAXWELL-SCOTT:  You make the point in your statement that  
7           in certain circumstances, having inaccurate information  
8           could be more detrimental than having no information at  
9           all.

10  A.  Yes.

11  Q.  If I could try to understand a little bit more about  
12           premises information boxes and how they work in  
13           practice, if you can assist us.  But firstly when  
14           an owner of a building decides to put one in, is that  
15           something that they must or, as a matter of routine,  
16           will tell the London Fire Brigade about?

17  A.  Well, there's no requirement for them to tell us about  
18           it, because there's no requirement for it to be there in  
19           the first place, but best practice, and on most  
20           occasions, they will work with us to identify and agree  
21           the information that would be useful to fire crews when  
22           attending the incident.  Now, the premises information  
23           boxes may be provided by persons responsible for the  
24           buildings for a range of other purposes, but if they are  
25           going to speak with us, the London Fire Brigade, to --

1           then we would ensure that the information in there at  
2           least is valuable and useful to us as well as to the  
3           other purposes they wish to put the box to.

4   THE CORONER:   How would arriving crews know that there was  
5           a box?

6   A.   Because, first of all, it should be prominently  
7           displayed on the building, it should be in the position  
8           agreed with us that it's prominent to incident  
9           commanders, and they should also be aware by their  
10          visits, their 72D visit.

11   MR MAXWELL-SCOTT:   So ordinarily would there be liaison and  
12          agreement between the London Fire Brigade and the owner  
13          of the building about what was put in the box when first  
14          installed?

15   A.   Yes.

16   Q.   So that would be checked by the London Fire Brigade to  
17          ensure that it was both accurate and what you needed at  
18          that time?

19   A.   Where there is a premises information box in place, we  
20          would make arrangements with the owner to review that  
21          information periodically to ensure that it's current and  
22          still correct.

23   Q.   Are you able to assist at all with how expensive they  
24          are?

25   A.   I'm afraid I'm not, no, I've no figures to help.

1 Q. I think premises information plates, which you mentioned  
2 earlier, are an alternative which is being considered  
3 for some London boroughs; is that right?

4 A. They're an alternative that we're working with three  
5 London boroughs at the moment, discussing whether -- the  
6 possibility of running a pilot, but I wouldn't see  
7 them -- if that pilot were to run and were to be  
8 successful, I would hope they wouldn't be confined just  
9 to those three boroughs, I would hope that other  
10 boroughs with see the benefit and agree to join with us  
11 in placing them on their buildings.

12 THE CORONER: One can see it might be helpful in an ideal  
13 world to have both, wouldn't it, because there's going  
14 to be different information contained in the box from  
15 that displayed on the outside of a building?

16 A. Indeed, madam.

17 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Moving on, one of the themes that  
18 I identified earlier was communication between those at  
19 the fire ground and brigade control, and this is  
20 addressed, is it not, by the new policy on fire survival  
21 guidance calls that we talked about already.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Mr Davey made a recommendation which relates to this  
24 area, where he said that he thought that the  
25 London Fire Brigade should review the training given to

1 operational crews about brigade control practices and  
2 procedures, and what he was getting at there was that  
3 very few firefighters were familiar with the term "Fire  
4 survival guidance call" or the implications that it  
5 carried. Can you assist us with what's been done to  
6 address that?

7 A. I would accept that recommendation, and I believe that  
8 the new policy that we have on fire survival guidance  
9 calls and the training which I mentioned earlier for not  
10 only staff in the control room but also operational  
11 staff at fire stations will cover that recommendation.

12 Q. Thank you. We mentioned problems with radio  
13 communications as theme. As I said, it was one that  
14 a number of firefighters referred to as the one thing  
15 that, had it been better, would have made the most  
16 difference on the day, and Mr Davey made  
17 a recommendation in relation to this.

18 Mr Holland told us yesterday about the range of  
19 possible channels that can be used in an incident,  
20 and I think I'm right in saying that that full range of  
21 different channels wasn't used at the Lakanal House  
22 fire. What are your views on how best to overcome radio  
23 communications problems which, as I understand it, can  
24 have two causes: one is communication blind spots in  
25 a high rise building or a steel frame building, and the

1 other is sheer volume of information?

2 A. Taking those two aspects really, it's not --  
3 firefighters in London are not uncommon with  
4 communications difficulty related to the building  
5 environment in which we work. So radio signals -- from  
6 the report that we've commissioned, or many reports,  
7 particularly one that we commissioned following  
8 Lakanal House, once again identified and confirmed the  
9 signals worked best when they're in clear line of sight  
10 of each other's radios.

11 In high rise buildings which are constructed from  
12 steel construction and steel and concrete, there are  
13 many factors which will -- what do something which we  
14 call shield the signal from getting to the radio or the  
15 one that it's intended to get to, and these things are  
16 not uncommon to firefighters.

17 In the London Fire Brigade we are, I think, unusual  
18 in relation to other brigades that, in order to try and  
19 overcome some of these problems, we issue every  
20 firefighter with a personal issue radio so that we can  
21 try to make sure that important messages to get through.  
22 I don't believe that other brigades do the same, but we  
23 certainly do issue a personal radio to every  
24 firefighter.

25 We operate a strict radio discipline, we encourage

1 staff -- train staff to operate strict radio discipline  
2 in order to try to reduce the amount of traffic --  
3 so-called traffic on the radio system, and the system of  
4 different radio channels, as explained by Mr Holland  
5 yesterday, is also something we incorporate in the  
6 London Fire Brigade.

7 Now, at the Lakanal incident, as I understand it,  
8 the incident commanders did not make the decision to  
9 institute the incident command channel, they kept all of  
10 the general incident ground communications on channel 1.  
11 My understanding, from the incident commanders for doing  
12 that, was that they did not feel that the general  
13 incident command traffic on that channel was such that  
14 they needed to move to the command channel.

15 Turning though to the breathing apparatus  
16 communications, where I understand most of the problems  
17 were identified by staff -- by the firefighters giving  
18 evidence, we do only operate one channel for breathing  
19 apparatus, and there are a number -- there's a reason  
20 for that, and the most important is that when staff are  
21 working inside a building in very hot, humid conditions,  
22 with very limited visibility, we don't really want them  
23 to be changing radio channels on very small dials and  
24 equipment in there, because there's a potential they'll  
25 get it wrong. So we try to keep to one radio channel

1 for breathing apparatus, but what we also try to do is  
2 to ensure that radio discipline is observed very  
3 strictly, so that it reduces the traffic so that  
4 people's messages can get through.

5 So in terms of addressing this problem for the  
6 future, and it is -- at many incident debriefs that  
7 we've attended over the years, incident ground  
8 communication is very often raised in terms of an issue,  
9 and that does relate to the shielding of the buildings  
10 and sometimes the traffic. If the shielding of the  
11 building is a problem, then there are other facilities  
12 available to incident commanders to seek to overcome  
13 that.

14 As I recall, I think Mr Holland referred yesterday  
15 to leaky feeders, which is basically a cable, or  
16 an aerial, that we run out off the drum like  
17 an extension lead, through a building, or through  
18 an area, and that will pick up the signal and transmit  
19 it back to the base station. They are predominantly in  
20 place for long tunnels and for things like use on  
21 London Underground, where the communication issues  
22 between radios is even -- the communication difficulties  
23 between radios is much greater than it usually is above  
24 ground, and it would not be the incident commander's  
25 first choice to use leaky feeders in a scenario such as

1           Lakanal, because they would -- firstly, they would  
2           divert attention from other priority tasks to lay the  
3           cable out, but more importantly, they would institute --  
4           it would represent a further hazard in the stairwell  
5           where they have to lay the cable up, so it would not be  
6           the incident commander's preference, but it would be  
7           a piece of equipment that would be available to them.

8    Q.    So what extent can you check and predict whether radio  
9           communications might be a problem in a fire when  
10          carrying out a 72D visit?

11   A.    It is possible to test radio signals, so we can try to  
12          transmit messages from within the building to outside  
13          and from within the building from one radio to another.  
14          It's an unreliable process, though, because not only  
15          does the exact position of the radio play a big -- have  
16          a big part to play in terms of the shielding, so just  
17          standing in the lobby of a -- on the 11th floor and  
18          transmitting to outside does not mean that on every  
19          position on the 11th floor you can still receive  
20          a signal.

21                The other thing is that the atmospherics on the day  
22                play a big part as well in the transmission of the  
23                signals. So on one particular day in the year, when the  
24                atmospherics are a particular way, the signals might  
25                carry very well, and a few days later, when the

1           atmospherics have changed, it may well be that from the  
2           same place in the building that signal is not  
3           receivable, and that is unfortunately one of the  
4           difficulties that we always -- have always experienced  
5           in terms of incident ground communications.

6           As I said earlier, we've introduced a range of  
7           means, new radios, more powerful radios, radios issued  
8           to every firefighter as well, so we are trying to  
9           improve that all the time but some of the physics in  
10          relation to the shielding and atmospherics are very  
11          difficult to overcome.

12        Q. Just looking at the list of matters which personnel  
13          should ensure they are familiar with during a 72D visit,  
14          under the current high rise firefighting policy, and  
15          towards the end of that list, potential communication  
16          problems is one of them.

17        A. Yes.

18        Q. Does it follow from that, that if a significant  
19          potential communication problem is identified, it should  
20          be noted on the mobile data terminal?

21        A. If it's a significant one and it would be outside of  
22          what the -- what they would normally expect to  
23          experience, then yes.

24        Q. Then moving to the final short theme I was going to ask  
25          you about, this was about the frequent changes of

1 incident commander and the associated need to hand over  
2 information.

3 I think that one can see that there are inevitably  
4 advantages in having more senior officers take command  
5 because of their seniority and experience, but there are  
6 associated disadvantages with having to hand over from  
7 one incident commander to another, potentially as many  
8 as five times, as happened in this incident. What would  
9 your comment be about the best way of dealing with the  
10 advantages and disadvantages of that?

11 A. I think to some extent, as Mr Holland explained  
12 yesterday, the reason we operate in this way is that  
13 incident commanders are trained to assess the  
14 requirement for resources at the incident based upon the  
15 risks they identify at that incident, and make  
16 a judgment of how many pumps they need, and from how  
17 many pumps they need you can relate to how many  
18 firefighters they will get. So they know that if they  
19 make pumps a certain number, they will get a minimum of  
20 additional firefighters as well as those fire engines.

21 Once -- as an incident escalates, we seek to ensure  
22 that incident commanders take account of how the  
23 incident may develop and ask for the requisite number of  
24 appliances and then we'll mobilise an officer of the  
25 correct grade to take command of that incident, but we

1 are obviously reliant on the judgment that the incident  
2 commander makes when they request additional resources.

3 With hindsight, the incident at Lakanal did end up  
4 to be a 18 pump fire, and with hindsight, it's  
5 relatively easy to say that we could have asked for more  
6 resources at the initial stages, but as I've said  
7 previously, each of the incident commanders would have  
8 assessed the situation based upon their experience of  
9 what has happened to them in such incidents before and  
10 may have requested the resources they felt appropriate.

11 As the incident develops, and different  
12 circumstances came into play, as we discussed this  
13 morning, the incident commander's made a judgment to  
14 increase those resources. It is important that we have  
15 officers commanding incidents that have the relevant  
16 training and experience, and therefore the changeover of  
17 incident commander is necessary, although we do seek to  
18 try to minimise the amount of changeovers so that we can  
19 make sure that the information flows.

20 In order to ensure that information does get passed,  
21 and there is no interruption in terms of incident  
22 command, the national incident command system, as laid  
23 out in the fire services manual number 2, "Incident  
24 Command", describes reasonable spans of control for  
25 officers. So what we try to do is to ensure that

1 resources are -- additional resources are requested that  
2 are necessary to deal with the incident and that  
3 an incident commander of the appropriate level is  
4 mobilised so that everyone on the incident ground has  
5 a span of control which is commensurate with their  
6 training, experience and development.

7 THE CORONER: One of the things you said there was to seek  
8 to minimise the number of changes. How do you do that?

9 A. By asking the incident commanders to make up in terms of  
10 resources, the level at which they consider the fire is  
11 going to get to. They can only do that on the basis of  
12 the information they've got available to them.

13 An incident commander, as Mr Holland said yesterday, any  
14 incident commander, crew manager, or anyone at any level  
15 can ask for resources they need at an incident, however  
16 many that are -- however many they are.

17 So we try to encourage incident commanders to  
18 request the level of resources they think is ultimately  
19 going to be necessary, but we always rely upon the  
20 information they've got at the time when they make that  
21 judgment, and with hindsight -- as I said, with  
22 hindsight it's relatively easy to say "They should have  
23 done this, they should have done that", but with the  
24 information available at the time, that's what they  
25 asked for.

1 THE CORONER: I suppose it will depend on the information  
2 they've got and their ability to look ahead at possible  
3 risks and analyse and make decisions based on that --

4 A. Yes, absolutely.

5 THE CORONER: -- a proper risk assessment and  
6 decision-making process?

7 A. Yes.

8 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Mr Davey made a recommendation in this  
9 field, where he said that he thought that the  
10 London Fire Brigade should review the training provided  
11 to firefighters and potential incident commanders about  
12 the sending of "make pumps" messages, and what he meant  
13 by that was that people were saying "make pumps six" or  
14 "make pumps eight" without it necessarily being clear  
15 why they had done that or what specific tasks they had  
16 in mind for the additional firefighters when they  
17 arrived.

18 It's a slightly different but related point to the  
19 one that we're talking about, but what I wanted to ask  
20 you about was whether the level of incident commander  
21 needs to and should be quite so tightly interconnected  
22 with the level of appliances. Is it not possible to  
23 imagine a situation where it might be very helpful to  
24 have a group manager, with their seniority and  
25 experience, as incident commander, but where it's not

1           necessary to have the number of pumps, I think perhaps  
2           12, associated with that, and where in fact it might be  
3           somewhat wasteful to summon 12 pumps to the scene,  
4           taking attention away from other incidents, simply  
5           because that's the only way of getting a group manager  
6           there? I would just invite you to comment on that.

7    A. I agree. We have a very structured process in place  
8           where the number of pumps dictates the level of incident  
9           commander. However, the discretion does always exist  
10          with the monitoring officer, who will be of a rank above  
11          the incident commander at the incident, to take command  
12          of the incident, and also we have officers that will be  
13          monitoring the process -- the progress of the incident  
14          remotely via radio or via information coming from  
15          brigade control.

16                 There is evidence in certain circumstances where  
17                 an officer of a higher level has decided to mobilise  
18                 themselves to incidents and take command because of the  
19                 complexity or the scale or the nature of what's being  
20                 dealt with. So we don't always stick absolutely  
21                 slavishly to the process in terms of pumps and incident  
22                 commanders being related. On some occasions, officers  
23                 do exercise discretion and decide to mobilise an officer  
24                 of higher rank earlier in that process.

25    Q. We certainly heard evidence about people being paged in

1           their offices about an incident at a time when they're  
2           not yet the monitoring officer --

3    A.   Yes.

4    Q.   -- and then becoming monitoring officer and in due  
5           course incident commander.  Are you in effect saying  
6           that as soon as they're paged, then they have some  
7           responsibility to consider whether it might be desirable  
8           for them to go to the scene?

9    A.   Indeed, and they have the discretion to attend the scene  
10          if they believe it's necessary.

11   Q.   Sometimes they do?

12   A.   Sometimes they do.

13   Q.   You've explained that that is in their discretion.  Does  
14          the incident commander at the scene have any discretion  
15          to separate out the making pumps side of the request  
16          from the "I would like a senior officer as incident  
17          commander" side of the request?

18   A.   The -- the incident commander, at whatever level they  
19          are, will always be discussing with the monitoring  
20          officer the dynamics of the incident and the plan for  
21          the incident.  If the incident commander feels that it  
22          needs a higher level of supervision or is in any way  
23          becoming overwhelmed by an incident, then it's  
24          commensurate on the monitoring officer to either take  
25          command proactively, or if the officer were to ask that

1 officer to take command, then they would do so.

2 Q. Thank you very much, Mr Dobson, those are my questions.

3 I'm sure there will be questions from others.

4 A. Thank you very much.

5 THE CORONER: Mr Edwards?

6 Questions by MR EDWARDS

7 MR EDWARDS: Thank you, I'm Mr Edwards on behalf of the  
8 families, acting with Mr Hendy.

9 I'm going to start by asking you about some of the  
10 assumptions which the Fire Brigade made in July 2009,  
11 and it appears still do make, about the compartmentation  
12 of buildings. It might help you if I turn you to  
13 paragraph 21 of your statement, which I believe is at  
14 page 729. If I could ask that that's brought up. What  
15 paragraph 21 says is:

16 "The expectation is that a fire would remain in the  
17 compartment of origin providing that the fire is fought  
18 in a timely fashion. However, if the fire spreads to  
19 other areas of the building more quickly than expected,  
20 it not only adds to the urgency of extinguishing the new  
21 seats of fire but also delays the progress of  
22 undertaking searches."

23 What's your understanding of the position in  
24 July 2009 as to what firefighters should expect about  
25 how long a fire would remain in a compartment?

1 A. Firefighters in July 2009, and today, would expect under  
2 normal circumstances a fire in a high rise residential  
3 dwelling to remain within the compartment of origin for  
4 sufficient time for them to actually get to that floor  
5 of origin and make an attack on that fire. They  
6 might -- they would expect, though, in some  
7 circumstances the fire to come outside the building, as  
8 we described, and move up the building, but they would  
9 not expect the fire or smoke to enter into the common  
10 areas of the building, ie the means of escape, before  
11 they get there and actually have the opportunity to  
12 attack the fire.

13 Q. I'll put it bluntly: is there a specific period of time,  
14 half an hour, one hour, that firefighters would have  
15 expected in 3 July 2009?

16 A. If you ask each individual firefighter, then they  
17 probably would not know a time, but they would expect it  
18 to be within a time where they could get to the premises  
19 and make an attack on the fire before it breaches out of  
20 the compartment.

21 What I'm saying is I don't think firefighters would  
22 say 30 minutes or an hour, they wouldn't understand the  
23 Building Regulations in that detail, but their  
24 expectation practically is that the fire would remain  
25 within the compartment of origin for sufficient time for

1           them to arrive at the incident, set up safe systems of  
2           work, and make an attack on the fire.

3    Q.   Presumably that requires them at least having some idea  
4           of when the fire started. They are not going to know  
5           how long it's been burning for whether the time is  
6           sufficient unless they know when it started.

7    A.   Yes, the expectation would be that they've received  
8           timely notification of the fire and they would seek to  
9           attend the fire as quickly as possible and, as I say,  
10          then their expectation would be then be that that fire  
11          would remain in the compartment of origin until they've  
12          arrived, set up their safe systems of work, and made  
13          an attack on the fire.

14   Q.   It seems there's quite a lot of assumptions in that.  
15          They're assuming that they've received timely notice of  
16          the fire, they're assuming that they'll be able to fight  
17          it in a timely fashion but they don't actually have  
18          a period of time, and they're assuming the fire won't  
19          spread more quickly than they were expecting, but again  
20          they're not actually expecting a specific period of  
21          time.

22   A.   Yes.

23   Q.   Is that something that's going to place, does still  
24          place, firefighters in difficulties when knowing what to  
25          expect when fighting fires in a high rise, all those

1 assumptions they have to make with a number of unknowns?

2 A. Well, the assumptions are something that they -- they  
3 don't consciously think about when they're attending  
4 a fire, because their experience and their training  
5 leads them to believe that the fire will remain where it  
6 is, and they have a range of things to think about when  
7 they're attending fires, so they will be thinking about  
8 other hazards that might be present at the premises, are  
9 persons involved in the fire, where are their water  
10 supplies, how they're going to set up their initial  
11 actions, all of which will have been the case in  
12 relation to the first attendances at Lakanal.

13 Q. You were asked about evacuation and you explained the  
14 difficulties, and certainly other witnesses have as  
15 well, that there would be in evacuating a building such  
16 as Lakanal House entirely. Is any guidance given to  
17 firefighters about targeted evacuation, so the flats  
18 immediately above a fire, flats diagonally above a fire,  
19 or the flats next to a fire?

20 A. As Mr Holland said yesterday, in the case where  
21 evacuation is needed, then firefighters would go to the  
22 premises above the fire first of all, and also the --  
23 the premises adjacent to the fire, they would be the  
24 ones -- the premises closest to, but particularly above  
25 and adjacent.

1 Q. How are they to know whether evacuation is needed?

2 A. It's judgment by the incident commander in terms of how  
3 the fire is developing, and also information from  
4 brigade control in relation to calls that are being  
5 received for fire survival guidance.

6 Q. Do you think there's scope for giving guidance on  
7 targeted evacuation, so advising firefighters when they  
8 attend a scene, "Look in the flat immediately above the  
9 fire and try to evacuate it, look in the flat next to  
10 a fire, evacuate it, look in the flats diagonally above  
11 a fire, try to evacuate them.

12 A. I think that already exists in terms of firefighters, as  
13 I said, would go to those places because they understand  
14 that's the place where the fire is most likely to spread  
15 to or where smoke is most likely to spread to, so they  
16 would go to the places nearest to the fire anyway.  
17 Whether there's additional guidance required around that  
18 I would need to think about, but at the moment I don't  
19 think there's any evidence that is needed.

20 Q. Well, that didn't happen in the Lakanal House fire,  
21 certainly for the flats above and diagonally above the  
22 fire.

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Is it your understanding that guidance was in place at  
25 the time of the fire?

1 A. Yes, and I -- you know, and clearly I -- I wish we got  
2 firefighters to flat 79, particularly, above the fire  
3 more quickly than we did, but -- but whilst that was in  
4 progress, and the incident commander -- or the  
5 bridgehead commander had requested additional resources  
6 after firefighting commenced, as we know, the fires  
7 broke out below the bridgehead which then placed the  
8 incident commanders and the officer in charge of the  
9 bridgehead in a very difficult position and outside of  
10 something which was within -- it was outside of their  
11 experience.

12 Q. I understand that, but isn't there scope for training  
13 firefighters or providing further guidance that says  
14 when you arrive at the scene of a fire in a high rise,  
15 your number one priority is to firefight the fire, but  
16 your number two is to then immediately check above the  
17 fire to see if there is anyone in danger?

18 A. Well, I believe that is the case already.

19 Q. I'm going to ask you a little bit about pre-planning  
20 now, and we've heard a fair amount of evidence about  
21 MDTs or mobile data terminals which exist now. Just so  
22 I can understand these, are we effectively talking about  
23 something that looks a little bit like an iPad?

24 A. It's a 12-inch computer screen, yes.

25 Q. Yes, it's a touch screen?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Is it fixed to the appliance so no-one can carry it  
3 around?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. I don't know whether you have the document that  
6 Mr Holland was looking at yesterday. It's headed "LFB  
7 ORD" and we have some what looks like types of screen  
8 captures from --

9 THE CORONER: Do we have a spare copy we could show? Thank  
10 you. (Handed)

11 MR EDWARDS: Is this something you've seen before?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. We see on the second page there is a tactical plan,  
14 operational and contingency plan, and the like, for  
15 Marie Curie, which we've heard is the sister block to  
16 Lakanal House. We can see then, if you move a couple of  
17 pages on, a similar plan for Castlemead House. We've  
18 heard evidence that Castlemead is similar to  
19 Lakanal House, although it's not a sister block, I think  
20 the differences being it has brick cladding, and  
21 I understand it's a level of maisonettes higher, so it's  
22 a 16 storey block instead of 14 storey block.

23 On the last page of that document -- I'm afraid it's  
24 terribly small in the way it's printed out -- the bottom  
25 plan there, are you able to make that out?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. It's a plan of Castlemead House, and we have some text  
3 on the left-hand column. I should say, presumably there  
4 is all larger on the MDTs?

5 A. On the MDTs there is a facility to zoom in so they can  
6 make it larger.

7 Q. We can just about see the text on the left, numberings,  
8 it says "1st floor, 1 to 14; 3rd floor, 15 to 28",  
9 et cetera. Then to the right of that you can see a plan  
10 of what would in Lakanal House be the odd-numbered  
11 floors with corridor access in the middle, and  
12 underneath that a plan of the even floors with the  
13 escape balconies.

14 In this document, there doesn't seem to be any such  
15 plan for Marie Curie, but one is held for Castlemead.  
16 Presumably it would be useful if such a plan, also  
17 giving the floor numbers were held for Marie Curie and  
18 Lakanal House?

19 A. Yeah, I think as I explained earlier, we're in a process  
20 of improving the information we give to our operational  
21 crews, and I explained the chronology of that, and it's  
22 a developing process, so I would -- I would expect, in  
23 time, all of our plans to be similar to the one that  
24 you've shown me of Castlemead and obviously the one for  
25 Marie Curie needs to be improved.

1 Q. You also spoke about premises information boxes and  
2 separately the premises information boards or plates  
3 which your Fire Brigade is currently undergoing a pilot  
4 scheme to install. Is the information in those premises  
5 information boxes and on the premises information plates  
6 also going to be held in the MDTs?

7 A. The intention would be that the fact that there is  
8 a premises information box, and what its location is,  
9 will be held on the MDT, but it wouldn't necessarily  
10 replicate the information on the MDT which is in that  
11 plans box, because that plans box is there then that  
12 would be what we want people to go to, and we'd show it  
13 on the MDT so we direct them directly to that.

14 Q. Would it be helpful to hold it on the MDT? I'm just  
15 thinking possibly the boxes might be vandalised, they  
16 might turn out to be empty, or particularly the boards  
17 or plates, someone might have graffiti-ed them, someone  
18 might have removed them, they might be covered up with  
19 scaffolding or something like that; would it be useful  
20 to have that information in the MDTs?

21 A. Well, it depends, it's a judgment in terms of what is  
22 useful -- as I said earlier, what is useful to incident  
23 commanders en route to an incident. If the expectation  
24 is there's going to be a premises information box at the  
25 premises because we've made that by agreement with the

1 premises -- the person responsible for that, we would  
2 expect them to maintain that box. If, via information  
3 either from the person responsible for dealing, or via  
4 72D visits, or via attendance at incidents, we identify  
5 that the premises information box has been vandalised or  
6 if it is not available for other reason, then I would  
7 expect an entry to be made immediately on the MDT,  
8 replicating the information which was in it.

9 But as I said earlier, we've got to form a judgment  
10 in terms of the amount of information to be put on the  
11 MDT for incident commanders because we don't want to  
12 disrupt them from their priority task.

13 THE CORONER: Because if it's too cluttered then it loses  
14 its use?

15 A. Yeah.

16 MR EDWARDS: I'm not quite sure I follow that. Why is there  
17 a problem of the MDT having too much information? Can't  
18 this information just be prioritised? Enter an address,  
19 page 1, that's the important information, but then you  
20 flick through the MDT, page 10 is perhaps less  
21 (Inaudible) detail.

22 A. Well, I think we have to put that in the context of the  
23 situation in which incident commanders and firefighters  
24 find themselves. So incident commanders will attend the  
25 incidents at any time of the day, could be in the middle

1 of the night, they have are a range of information  
2 they'd be thinking about in terms of initial arrival  
3 tactics at incident, and if you provide them with too  
4 much information which they don't find useful, that  
5 distracts them from their priority tasks, and usually  
6 they have a very short period of time to assimilate all  
7 of this information.

8 So we're not talking about them sitting in a office  
9 somewhere they can actually go through that and  
10 assimilate the information in a slow way. They are on  
11 the front of a fire engine usually whilst travelling at  
12 high speed trying to get to an incident with a range of  
13 other things on their mind. So you have to be mindful  
14 of the pressure they're under and their ability  
15 therefore to assimilate information that's been put  
16 before them and therefore we need to make sure that  
17 information has been prioritised in a way which is  
18 useful it to them.

19 Having a premises information box is slightly  
20 different, because having arrived at an incident where  
21 a premises information box is in -- is in place and they  
22 know to expect that, they will then designate an officer  
23 or a firefighter or somebody to go to that premises  
24 information box, get the information out of it, and then  
25 they're able to look at that information in a more

1 coherent way.

2 Q. Do you know whether it's possible to prioritise the  
3 information on the MDTs?

4 A. Well, the information on the MDT is prioritised for the  
5 reasons I've mentioned. So there's lots of information  
6 that could be put on an MDT about a building and what we  
7 do is to prioritise that information so we do only put  
8 the information which is necessary on it. We don't --  
9 we don't put everything on there about the building. So  
10 it's already prioritised.

11 Q. Mr Holland was asked yesterday about the potential at  
12 least for brigade control having access to some of the  
13 information on MDTs, and particularly sketch plans and  
14 the like. Is that something you're able to help the  
15 Inquest with?

16 A. Yes, I accept that it would be in certain circumstances  
17 helpful for brigade control officers to have access to  
18 the MDT information, and we're currently in the process  
19 of making sure that is available.

20 Q. You've said how unusual it was in your experience for  
21 a fire to move down, but we've already looked -- I'm not  
22 going to put it up again -- at the guidance in place,  
23 3.2, which said burning debris may fall down. I think  
24 your evidence was that that might relate to a ground  
25 fire rather than a fire --

1 THE CORONER: Can you just get to your question, please,  
2 Mr Edwards?

3 MR EDWARDS: Certainly. Is there scope for guidance as to  
4 what might happen in warm and windy days, more likely  
5 for a fire to move down, likely for a fire to blow into  
6 an open window?

7 THE CORONER: I think had been Mr Dobson's already given us  
8 his evidence as to how that happened, so I think we can  
9 move on.

10 MR EDWARDS: You also were asked about smoke-logging and  
11 moving the bridgeheads, and again it's unusual for  
12 a bridgehead to move. Is there any guidance being  
13 issued about what should happen to firefighting  
14 activities and what should happen to search and rescue  
15 activities while a bridgehead is being moved?

16 A. Yeah, I think that's covered in our new operational  
17 policy 633, and the paragraphs in there, where we  
18 explain the need to notify BA crews who are already  
19 working that the bridgehead has moved, to that I can  
20 that into account in their travel distance coming  
21 back out again and also have search and rescue crews as  
22 well. So I think we have covered that in relation to  
23 development of the new policy.

24 Q. In respect of handover between one incident commander  
25 and another, I understand the evidence you've given,

1           they're trying to reduce the number of handovers, but in  
2           a situation where there has been a relatively large  
3           number of handovers in an relatively small period of  
4           time, I think you understand what happened is that one  
5           incident commander was handed over to another incident  
6           commander, and then Mr Howling, who was incident  
7           commander 2, effectively left the scene and then his  
8           information wasn't available to incident commander 4.

9           Is there scope for guidance where there have been  
10          multiple handovers in a short period of time to say make  
11          sure you keep the last incident commander and the last  
12          incident commander but one on the scene?

13        A. There is already guidance in terms of handovers and the  
14          way a handover of incident commanders should be carried  
15          out and that guidance does advise incident commanders  
16          already to try to keep it within the command team --  
17          previous incident commanders, but we do need to leave  
18          that up to the judgment of the incident commander, to  
19          an extent, how many incident commanders they need with  
20          them following their takeover, so it's very common, as  
21          I understand did happen at Lakanal, where initially, the  
22          incident commander kept the previous incident with them,  
23          but I wouldn't expect them to keep a string of incident  
24          commanders with them after that because after a period  
25          of time, the information that the previous incident

1 commanders have got becomes less relevant and to some  
2 extent out of date.

3 So the process -- they are giving as much  
4 information as they possibly can that is relevant to the  
5 incident, they keep that previous incident commander  
6 with them for as long as they believe to be necessary,  
7 but currently we do not expect them to keep previous  
8 incident commanders, but the guidance does already exist  
9 along those lines.

10 Q. Moving to a separate topic, aerial appliances, and again  
11 it might help if we have your witness statement up at  
12 page 735 -- in fact page 736, paragraph 46 onwards.  
13 What you've said is that -- sorry, I need to go back to,  
14 forgive me, paragraph 45 before I'm there, which is at  
15 the bottom of page 735.

16 You said aerial appliances aren't normally used for  
17 external firefighting and you give the difficulties of  
18 that. We understand the difficulties of jets entering  
19 the building and injuring occupants, and then about four  
20 lines into paragraph 45, you said a jet or a covering  
21 spray, and there is a danger that they are used for  
22 preventing hot gasses and other products of combustion  
23 from venting the building and making the conditions  
24 inside more difficult. Then if I could move on to the  
25 next page, please, paragraph 46:

1            "Aerial appliances are not necessarily in the  
2            predetermined attendance for high rise premises."

3            But an aerial appliance was in the predetermined  
4            attendance for Lakanal House.

5            A. (The witness nodded)

6            Q. Then paragraph 47, you say essentially:

7            "Reliance upon compliance with statutory  
8            requirements in building design, construction  
9            [et cetera] ... means that fires within such premises  
10           are intended to be fought from within."

11           Then paragraph 48, three lines in:

12           "The use of an aerial appliance was not considered  
13           as being appropriate until the fires broke out on the  
14           5th and 7th floors and the bridgehead had to be moved."

15           I'm trying to understand the circumstances in which,  
16           had the fire not spread down, the aerial appliance which  
17           did attend Lakanal House on the day of the fire it was  
18           anticipated that might have been used.

19           THE CORONER: Well, I'm not expecting Mr Dobson to comment  
20           on a matter of detail of that sort, we're looking ahead  
21           at the future on this, Mr Edwards.

22           MR EDWARDS: Well, madam, the only reason I'm asking is the  
23           matter was raised in Mr Dobson's statement. Perhaps  
24           I can put the question more generally. It seems aerial  
25           appliances aren't normally going to be used to fight

1 fires in high rise buildings. Certainly in some  
2 buildings they're on the predetermined attendance list.  
3 If they're not normally going to be used, what's the  
4 purpose of having them there?

5 A. There's a range of different reasons why a borough  
6 commander may agree with a station manager that we need  
7 an aerial appliance on attendance for a particular  
8 location. For high rise buildings, these reasons could  
9 be that the -- either the -- they may have information  
10 that the dry rising main is not available, and therefore  
11 they would use the aerial ladder to get water up to the  
12 fire floor, use it as a dry rising main. Unfortunately  
13 in some areas of London -- and unfortunately this is  
14 area is one of those -- we do experience vandalism of  
15 the fixed installations, so sometimes we arrive at fires  
16 and things like outlets on dry rising mains on  
17 particular floors are missing and in that case it is  
18 really useful to have an aerial appliance will to help  
19 us get water to the fire floor.

20 Additionally, on some occasions things like fire  
21 lifts are not available and the aerial appliance can be  
22 used to help to us transport equipment from the ground  
23 to the fire floor without the need for firefighters to  
24 carry it up the staircases. So there's a range of  
25 different operational reasons why an incident -- why

1 a borough commander may agree to have an aerial  
2 appliance on attendance, but it will not normally be, in  
3 a high rise building, for the purposes of fighting  
4 a fire in the initial stages.

5 Q. Okay. In respect of radio traffic, we understand that  
6 an incident command channel wasn't used at Lakanal House  
7 itself when that might have been an option. You've  
8 given two reasons why they were having difficulties,  
9 one's physical layout of the building -- there are  
10 always going to be difficulties with that -- but the  
11 other is the sheer volume of traffic. Presumably the  
12 sheer volume of traffic is partly related to the number  
13 of firefighters who had to attend a fire?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. I appreciate this may not always be the case, but I'm  
16 imagining the more firefighters who have to attend  
17 a fire, the more serious that fire is likely to be; is  
18 that true?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. So the situation the Fire Brigade find themselves in at  
21 the moment is the more serious a fire, the greater the  
22 number of firefighters, the greater the amount of radio  
23 traffic. That presumably means the more likely it is  
24 that there will be communication difficulties caused by  
25 lots of people trying to transmit at once?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. I can understand sometimes different channels might be  
3 used to deal with that difficulty, but that is  
4 presumably going to present its own difficulties,  
5 because if you're using different channels you're not  
6 going to pick things up on the channels you're not using  
7 and you might miss things; is that right?

8 A. Well, it shouldn't, because the process that we use is  
9 that if the incident commander decides to move to the  
10 incident command channel, and this is all separate to  
11 the breathing apparatus channel, if the incident  
12 commander decides to move to a separate channel for  
13 incident command, first of all a message is sent round  
14 all radio users that that is a decision that is being  
15 taken. The ones that are required to move to the  
16 separate channel for command are all told and that  
17 message is repeated and we ask them to confirm that  
18 message back to the command unit, and then officers on  
19 the command unit are designated to monitor the traffic  
20 on both channels, so we shouldn't lose important  
21 messages because that is being monitored by the command  
22 unit -- both channels are being monitored.

23 Q. You talk about crews being trained in radio discipline.  
24 Is there some scope at a very large fire for issuing  
25 some sort of priority command, urgent radio traffic

1           only, just to avoid the radio waves being clogged up?

2    A. Well, we wouldn't -- well, we would -- if people -- if  
3           there was an urgent message to be transmitted, then we  
4           would expect people to use the term "priority" to break  
5           into other calls if they possibly can, and very rarely,  
6           I would think, you know, there is the possibility there  
7           for incident commanders to restrict traffic on  
8           a particular channel to "priority" only, but that would  
9           be a very rare occurrence, because the system we've got  
10          to actually split the traffic up onto different  
11          channels, and then the radio discipline that we usually  
12          apply is, in my experience, usually sufficient to  
13          control it.

14   Q. There's a potential there for 50 firefighters all trying  
15          to transmit at once when some of those messages are  
16          going to be more important than others. There may be  
17          messages like "There are still people trapped we haven't  
18          been able to rescue", or "The fire has spread", which  
19          are obviously at the top end of importance, as opposed  
20          to messages such as "I've arrived on a new command unit,  
21          where should I park it", which presumably would be at  
22          the bottom end of the importance list. I appreciate I'm  
23          speaking hypothetically.

24                Do you not see in those circumstances scope for  
25          simply saying, right, so many people on site, we need

1 a command, urgent messages only on the common channel,  
2 or one of the channels?

3 A. No, I don't think that works, to be honest, because  
4 everyone on an incident ground should be working to  
5 a line manager and that line manager would have access  
6 to someone who has the command channel and expect it to  
7 use that to transmit that message.

8 Q. You also were asked about training on fire survival  
9 guidance, you said both crews on the ground and brigade  
10 control were receiving this. Are they receiving  
11 training as to what the other is going to be doing, so  
12 are crews on the ground now being trained about what  
13 brigade control will be saying and what brigade control  
14 will be assuming, things like that --

15 A. Yes, yes.

16 Q. -- and vice versa?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. You've given evidence in your statement at paragraph 60,  
19 which is page 739, about access through locked doors.  
20 We've had the situation at Lakanal House where there  
21 were some doors opened by drop keys, some doors which  
22 could be forced, but there's another type of door, and  
23 if I could ask Mr Maxwell-Scott to bring up the  
24 photograph of the escape balcony door, please.

25 If that could possibly be enlarged slightly, what we

1 are looking at is a door that firefighters were not able  
2 to force, and I don't know if you can make out, it  
3 appears, certainly now, at least, that door is fitted  
4 with a lock which has a key which is not a drop key, can  
5 you make that out?

6 A. I can, yes.

7 Q. We don't know if that was the same at the time of the  
8 fire, but it may be safe to assume it was. Is there  
9 anything being done to deal with that situation, doors  
10 which can't be forced, one one's made of metal, to which  
11 there is a key but not a drop key?

12 A. Yeah. During 72D visits and at incidents, firefighters  
13 will identify access difficulties to premises.  
14 Unfortunately, on many premises in London now, there's  
15 a range of different keys used for different parts of  
16 the building and also there's no consistency between  
17 individual buildings or across building owners, and it's  
18 simply not possible for us to keep copies of every --  
19 every single key that we may need to use.

20 We do -- however, when we identify doors that it  
21 would be more difficult for us to get in, I would expect  
22 the local crews or the station manager to be discussing  
23 that with the building owner to try to overcome that so  
24 in the circumstances of an incident either the crew has  
25 access to the key or they are able to force an entry

1 through it.

2 Q. Finally, you were asked about sprinklers and you  
3 referred to a project in Sheffield for retro-fitting  
4 sprinklers. Are you able to assist on how much that  
5 project cost per flat, or is that something you don't  
6 know?

7 A. I'm afraid I don't know the cost.

8 Q. Thank you.

9 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Dowden?

10 Questions by MR DOWDEN

11 MR DOWDEN: Yes, good afternoon, my name's Dowden,  
12 I represent Mr Francisquini.

13 We've heard that firefighters on the day had  
14 difficulties with building up a picture of the building,  
15 and there was difficulty in relaying the information  
16 which was coming from the fire survival guidance calls.

17 Could I ask you to have a look at a photograph of  
18 the west elevation of Lakanal House. What we can see  
19 there is a photograph taken on 4 July. It shows the  
20 entrance to the lift lobby, and concentrating on the  
21 entrance at the bottom, we can see a red door, which  
22 appears to be the security door to a riser or a hydrant.

23 A. Mm-hmm.

24 Q. If we can zoom in, slightly further, above that red door  
25 at the top, is that the drop key box?

1 A. I can't make it out, I'm afraid.

2 Q. I've had it confirmed that it is.

3 A. Okay.

4 Q. You can see that below that there is another box, and  
5 perhaps we might need that enlarging slightly further.  
6 We can just about make out the buttons on that now.  
7 That's the entrance code block to the flats. You'd have  
8 to key in the number of the flat if you wanted to get  
9 access to the lift area.

10 A. (The witness nodded)

11 Q. I can see you're nodding to that. You'd call up the  
12 flat you wanted to visit via that keypad.

13 We haven't heard any evidence about this, it doesn't  
14 appear to have been considered on the day, but it would  
15 have been an option, wouldn't it, for firefighters to  
16 have, once they'd ascertained the numbers of flats that  
17 were in difficulty, to have gone there and keyed in, for  
18 example, flat 79 or flat 81, and spoken directly to the  
19 occupant of that flat?

20 THE CORONER: Mr Dowden, none of this was put to the  
21 firefighters actually attending the incident. There was  
22 an opportunity to have done that over the last nine  
23 weeks.

24 MR DOWDEN: Madam, it's only something which has just become  
25 apparent. We're looking to the future here, and what

1 I was going to suggest --

2 THE CORONER: Well, I'm not expecting Mr Dobson to comment  
3 on what happened on the day. We've just not had any  
4 evidence on it at all. I'm happy for him to comment as  
5 for the future if that's of any help.

6 MR DOWDEN: It would be of use in the future, perhaps, when  
7 somebody was on a fire survival call, if it wasn't  
8 possible any other way to have a three way conversation,  
9 for somebody to use an intercom system to dial that flat  
10 and speak to the person who's on the phone to brigade  
11 control.

12 A. My initial reaction to that was I would not advise that,  
13 for the following reasons: firstly, if we were to do  
14 that, we would distract the caller from the telephone  
15 call they're on -- the fire survival guidance call  
16 they're undertaking with the control officer. Secondly,  
17 we don't know -- we wouldn't know from that where the  
18 point at which -- in the flat where the caller picked up  
19 that call and responds to it, so we might, if we did  
20 that, we might actually move them to a place of greater  
21 danger within their flat, and secondly, we can't always  
22 be sure that these systems are going to work.

23 So if we've got a caller on the phone undertaking  
24 a fire survival guidance call with our control officers,  
25 I think the procedure and the policy which was described

1 earlier on in my evidence and the way we put in place  
2 there for communication, would be much a more -- a much  
3 safer, more consistent and secure means than using entry  
4 phones.

5 Q. It's still an option though, isn't it?

6 A. It's not an option I would recommend to firefighters,  
7 no.

8 Q. The other type of information which could be gleaned, if  
9 such a call was to be made, is the layout of the  
10 building and the location of the flat, be that the floor  
11 it's on or where exactly it is in location to the  
12 stairwell of the premises.

13 A. Well, I don't think that would be a more appropriate  
14 means to get that information than the fire survival  
15 guidance call that's already taking place with control,  
16 because, as I said, to ask someone to actually answer  
17 a call on the intercom system would require them  
18 probably to move from where they are and we don't know  
19 when we dial up the number on there whether or not we're  
20 moving into a place of greater danger, so as I say that  
21 wouldn't be something I would recommend firefighters to  
22 do.

23 Q. Thank you.

24 THE CORONER: Thank you, Mr Dowden. I think we'll have  
25 a break now for lunch.

1           Members of the jury, please be back for 2.05.

2           Mr Dobson, please be back for 2.05, and again

3           please, because you're part way through your evidence

4           you mustn't talk to anyone. Thank you.

5   MR WALSH: Madam, I don't know whether it would assist --

6   THE CORONER: Sorry, members of the jury.

7   MR WALSH: I'm so sorry. We just had a discussion along the

8           back row and --

9   THE CORONER: A useful discussion in terms of timing?

10   MR WALSH: A useful discussion in terms of timing.

11   THE CORONER: In that case, members of the jury, please, if

12           you hang on a few minutes, you may have a clearer

13           afternoon.

14   MR WALSH: I have to say that I'm going last and I don't see

15           me being any longer than five, ten minutes at the

16           absolute outside.

17   THE CORONER: Do you mean ten minutes, Mr Walsh?

18   MR WALSH: I promise I will be no longer than ten minutes

19           and will indeed stop if I get to ten minutes.

20   THE CORONER: Yes, I'm happy to suggest to the jury that

21           they remain in here until about 1.15/1.20. Is that

22           going to be okay with everybody on the basis that then

23           you'd probably be free to go for the afternoon; is that

24           acceptable?

25   THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: We have three questions, but again



1 A. (The witness nodded)

2 Q. Your evidence earlier this morning -- I apologise, can  
3 you hear me? I realise that sometimes it comes and  
4 goes.

5 A. No, I can, thank you.

6 Q. You can. Your evidence earlier this morning was that as  
7 a result of the policy, the 790 policy issued in  
8 February 2012, the incident commander is now able to  
9 communicate with the control officer and amend the fire  
10 survival guidance calls in respect of that information;  
11 is that correct?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. There's two parts to my question. The first is that  
14 therefore the incident commander is still very much  
15 reliant on the skill of the brigade control officer  
16 obtaining the information from the caller; that would be  
17 correct, wouldn't it?

18 A. Yes, it would, yes.

19 Q. That takes me to my second question, really, and that's  
20 in respect of the training given to control officers.  
21 Is there a method in which to -- or rather, I should put  
22 it like this: is there a system in place in which to  
23 test the adequacy of that training received by the  
24 control officers at present?

25 A. Yes, there is.

1 Q. There is. What form does that take?

2 A. By supervision by their watch managers -- their  
3 managers. So all control officers now go through  
4 an initial period of training as per the guidance, but  
5 also undertake refresher training and they are under  
6 constant assessment by their line managers.

7 Q. So they leave refresher training, and how often is that  
8 refresher training?

9 A. I honestly can't answer that, I'm afraid.

10 Q. If I could ask you in respect of the assessment, what  
11 does that encompass?

12 A. Well, it encompasses the -- their manager listening to  
13 them take calls, to ensure their calls are taken  
14 competently, provide them with feedback on their  
15 performance and identify any further development needs  
16 they may have and coming up with a structured action  
17 plan to address those development needs.

18 THE CORONER: Ms Al Tai, I don't think it's any part of my  
19 duty to micromanage this sort of issue.

20 MS AL TAI: I understand, madam, I just thought as the  
21 matter had been raised and it was of relevance in  
22 respect of future learning that it warranted further  
23 investigation as it's quite a pertinent matter in this  
24 Inquest.

25 Thank you, Mr Dobson.

1 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Matthews?

2 Questions by MR MATTHEWS

3 MR MATTHEWS: Mr Dobson, I ask questions on behalf of the  
4 London Borough of Southwark, and I only want to ask you  
5 about one matter, just to assist the coroner in terms of  
6 recommendations for the future. It's about an area that  
7 we heard about from other witnesses other than you, but  
8 it's right that you may recall that you, on behalf of  
9 the London Fire Brigade, were one of a number of people  
10 who wrote to the Minister of the Department for  
11 Communities and Local Government about concerns of the  
12 lack of guidance for responsible people under the Fire  
13 Safety Order as to who is a competent fire risk  
14 assessor.

15 A. (The witness nodded)

16 Q. I see you're nodding. What I hadn't appreciated when  
17 I asked questions of the earlier witnesses, and you may  
18 not have appreciated, is that during the course of this  
19 Inquest, we now do have some published guidance. If  
20 I could ask just that the first page of that is put up  
21 on the screen. That's it.

22 It's issued, we can see, version 1, published on  
23 1 February this year by the Fire Risk Assessment  
24 Competency Council, and it's entitled "A guide to  
25 choosing a competent fire risk assessor".

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. That's all I ask, forgive me for using you as the  
3 vehicle to do so.

4 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Matthews, could you arrange me  
5 for to have a photocopy of that please?

6 MR MATTHEWS: Yes.

7 THE CORONER: Thank you. Mr Compton?

8 MR COMPTON: No questions.

9 THE CORONER: Thank you. One moment, Mr Walsh.

10 MR WALSH: I'm so sorry.

11 THE CORONER: Mr Leonard, no? Behind you? Thank you.  
12 Mr Walsh?

13 Questions by MR WALSH

14 MR WALSH: I do apologise to those behind me. Commissioner,  
15 just literally one or two matters. The first I want to  
16 ask you about is policy number 820, which I think you  
17 were taken to briefly earlier, but I don't think  
18 actually that we found out what 820 was. This is a new  
19 policy, one of those policies which has come into force  
20 following considerations after the Lakanal fire, and it  
21 concerns forward information boards.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Just very briefly, the new policy provides for a FIB,  
24 a forward information board, as a portable board, and  
25 an item of equipment that can be used to record key

1 pieces of information on the incident ground.

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. It's supposed to be used in high rise incidents.

4 A. I would expect it to be, yes.

5 Q. It can have the ability to have the incident plan on

6 it --

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. -- casualty information --

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. -- incident information and details about fire survival

11 guidance calls, on a mobile board that can be brought to

12 and from the bridgehead.

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. All right, thank you. Then finally can I just take you

15 back to the beginning of your statement, paragraphs 4

16 and 5, which Mr Maxwell-Scott took you to at the

17 beginning of your evidence. In those two paragraphs --

18 I won't read them again -- you're making the point that,

19 bearing in mind the amount of high rise buildings that

20 there are in London of a residential nature, and bearing

21 in mind the number of fires which have taken place over

22 the last two or three years, it looks as though the

23 planning for fires of this kind at the predetermined

24 attendance is achieving its end in 92 per cent of cases.

25 A. Indeed.

1 Q. In the remainder, we see from paragraph 5, 5 per cent  
2 were resolved by four pumps maximum, and three per cent  
3 by six pumps or more. The reason I take you back to  
4 that is I want to ask you, in the context of the way in  
5 which high rise fires and the dealing with them and  
6 fighting them is planned, bearing in mind the  
7 assumptions of building design, compartmentation and so  
8 on, which we have all talked about, is it your view, one  
9 way or the other, that it is very much still appropriate  
10 to plan for firefighting and rescue according to  
11 building design and legislation as it stands today?

12 A. It is, and I'd like to go slightly further and say  
13 I can't -- I can't imagine any other way of doing so,  
14 because if we start to plan -- if we're required to plan  
15 for incidents in a way in which we expect the regulation  
16 and the requirements to not be present, then there is no  
17 basis on which to start pre-planning our operations.

18 Q. All right. Now, on 3 July 2009 there were obviously  
19 a series of events which occurred during the course of  
20 that fire. We heard Mr Holland yesterday mentioned the  
21 domino effect. By that, he means that where a series of  
22 events, though perhaps not unique in themselves, can,  
23 where they occur in series, have a profound effect upon  
24 the fighting of the fire.

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Is that what you say happened on 3 July, or was there  
2 one particular event?

3 A. I believe there were a number of factors on 3 July 2009  
4 which made this fire so difficult to deal with. I think  
5 the smoke logging that we spoke about earlier was  
6 certainly one of those. I think the most significant  
7 issue was the fact that fire broke out beneath the fire  
8 and the bridgehead had to be moved, I think for me that  
9 was the most significant effect.

10 But actually, all the fires, as I said to  
11 Mr Maxwell-Scott -- I agreed with Mr Maxwell-Scott, the  
12 actual fires themselves were of moderate to medium  
13 intensities. There was nothing special the fires, it  
14 was the way the fires moved around the building.

15 Q. All right. Now with that in mind, bearing in mind the  
16 future and the prevention of fires of this kind and the  
17 risk to life in the future, do you feel, as  
18 an authority, that full efforts have been made to learn  
19 the lessons and to address them in the form of the  
20 policies that we've heard about today?

21 A. I do, and we're always keen to learn new lessons and  
22 improve our performance, but I do believe London Fire  
23 Brigade has taken on board the lessons from the fire,  
24 notwithstanding what may come out from the coroner  
25 following the Inquest. But I do believe London Fire

1 Brigade has taken full account and learnt as many  
2 lessons as we possibly can.

3 Q. Is there anything else you would like to add?

4 A. If I may, madam, there's one item I didn't get taken to  
5 during my evidence, which is that of breathing apparatus  
6 and standard duration breathing apparatus and extended  
7 duration breathing apparatus, and I know you heard some  
8 evidence of the last few days about that, and I just  
9 wonder if I could make one comment really, which is that  
10 on all the fires and the incidents that occur in high  
11 rise buildings, that both Mr Maxwell-Scott and Mr Walsh  
12 have taken me to this morning, they will have all been  
13 dealt with standard duration breathing apparatus,  
14 I can't think of another example of a high rise fire in  
15 London where extended duration breathing apparatus has  
16 been used, and certainly in no other parts of the  
17 country.

18 Extended duration breathing apparatus is there to  
19 extend the travel distance for firefighters from the  
20 point of entry to the point of operations, so the  
21 trigger for using EDBA at this fire was the fact that  
22 the bridgehead got moved outside of the building and  
23 then firefighters had to travel a long way to get to the  
24 fire.

25 So that was the trigger for it, not that there was

1 search and rescue taking place, not that it's on the  
2 PDA, although we do sometimes mobilise fire rescue  
3 units, but it was the fact that the bridgehead got moved  
4 outside the building and increased the travel distance  
5 significantly that our firefighters had to travel that  
6 needed the EDDBA.

7 THE CORONER: Thank you.

8 A. Finally, just in closing if I may, madam, I would very  
9 much like to express my condolences and my sympathy to  
10 the families and the loved ones of the victims of this  
11 fire, it was a tragic incident. I have been personally  
12 very keen to lead the London Fire Brigade through the  
13 lessons learned from this incident to make sure we learn  
14 as many of those lessons as we possibly can and to make  
15 sure they're implemented and trained and in place within  
16 the London Fire Brigade to prevent these circumstances  
17 happening again.

18 Also I'd like to say that all the firefighters that  
19 attended the incident, madam, I hope yourself and the  
20 jury will agree from the evidence they've given, all the  
21 firefighters that attended the incident gave their very  
22 best efforts to do the very best they could to save  
23 people in that premise. Some of the firefighters that  
24 attended this incident indeed carry with them a burden  
25 from that that they will probably carry for the rest of

1 their lives in terms of the tragic nature of the  
2 incident which they attended, but I would just like to  
3 place on record my condolences if I may, please.

4 THE CORONER: Thank you. I'm sure that's appreciated, thank  
5 you.

6 Members of the jury, do you have some questions?

7 Questions from THE JURY

8 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you. Mr Dobson, we've heard  
9 that many of the Lakanal residents were unaware of their  
10 escape routes that were available to them around the  
11 building. Have any steps been taken, whether in new  
12 policies or new training, to address this perhaps by  
13 raising the profile of home safety visits?

14 A. We're really keen to carry out home fire safety visits  
15 to as many premises in London as we possibly can.  
16 Unfortunately, there's no requirement upon individual  
17 residents to have a home fire safety visit, so we're  
18 very reliant on promoting them to people and then people  
19 taking up that opportunity, and whenever we do carry out  
20 a home fire safety visit, part of that visit is to  
21 highlight to people means of -- you know, ways of  
22 preventing fire in the first place, but also the need to  
23 have a fire plan should there be a fire in their  
24 dwelling, and at that point we would explain to them  
25 from our observation the means that are available to

1           them.

2           In terms of the escape routes that were available in  
3 premises such as Lakanal, because we can't guarantee  
4 that we're going to carry out a home fire safety visit  
5 in every flat, we can't ensure that we've (Inaudible) --  
6 we've given that message, and it remains the  
7 responsibility of the person responsible for the  
8 building, or undertakes the tenancy agreements, to make  
9 sure that people are aware of the circumstances in the  
10 building and the means of escape that are available to  
11 them, but we supplement that by doing as many home fire  
12 safety visits as we possibly can, and during those  
13 visits, highlighting what to do in the event of a fire.

14 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you.

15           Earlier in this Inquest, some fire officers had  
16 suggested the need to have more resources made available  
17 to them at the Lakanal fire, but we've heard that some  
18 firefighters -- there was delays in deploying them  
19 properly into the building or onto other tasks. How  
20 would you avoid -- how would you suggest the situation  
21 of firefighters waiting half an hour to be deployed in  
22 the future?

23 A. Okay. I think there's a perception in some cases where  
24 firefighters, when they arrive at incidents, are there  
25 for a range of purposes, and sometimes incident

1 commanders will request additional resources to make  
2 sure they've got backup for those firefighters that are  
3 already deployed, so in some cases firefighters will  
4 turn up and will be asked to rig in BA, but stand in  
5 a waiting area waiting to be deployed so we have  
6 sufficient resources, because what the incident  
7 commander will be very keen to avoid is a situation  
8 where the incident escalates and firefighters have been  
9 committed and they've got no resources in which to  
10 supplement what -- the attack that's been taking place.

11 Firefighters on occasion, their perception is that  
12 they're standing around waiting and nothing's going on,  
13 whereas actually the incident commander has a plan in  
14 their mind about how they're going to use those  
15 firefighters. From what -- from what I've seen, I don't  
16 believe there was any lack of resource at this fire, the  
17 incident commanders requested additional resources as  
18 they saw fit, and those resources were provided.

19 In fact, on the initial pre-determined attendance,  
20 as we know, the control room instigated their procedure  
21 and mobilised an additional appliance, because there  
22 wasn't a correct level of watch manager of attendance on  
23 the PDA, so I think it's a difficult issue for us to  
24 deal with, but obviously once again it comes down to  
25 communication, and firefighters on the incident ground

1 understanding what's going on in the wider circumstances  
2 of the incident, and why they've not been deployed  
3 immediately, why it is they've not been deployed.

4 THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY: Thank you very much. That's all  
5 we have.

6 THE CORONER: Lovely, thank you.

7 Mr Dobson, thank you very much for coming and thank  
8 you very much for the help which you've given us, I've  
9 certainly found it very useful, thank you very much.  
10 You're welcome to go. Thank you.

11 A. Thank you.

12 (The witness withdrew)

13 THE CORONER: Yes. Well, members of the jury, I think that  
14 that is the end of the evidence we're going to hear.  
15 There was one suggestion before you came in this morning  
16 that there may be some more need more evidence on  
17 a topic, but it seems to me it's highly unlikely to be  
18 the case, so I think that we have reached the end of the  
19 evidence.

20 I outlined a few days ago the plan that we have for  
21 next week. In fact, we've made a change to that plan.  
22 The current suggestion that we will ask you to return to  
23 Wednesday, not Thursday, but on Wednesday, 20 March, to  
24 have a 10 o'clock start and I shall begin my summing-up  
25 to you on that day. I shall give you then not only

1 a summing-up on the facts but also directions which will  
2 deal with verdicts and completion of the inquisition  
3 form and so on. So all of that will be explained to you  
4 on Wednesday.

5 If I could ask you please not to return before  
6 Wednesday, but simply to stay away. I ask you not to  
7 come in and have any meetings until after we've given  
8 you your summing-up and directions.

9 Just remember that you have to decide the facts on  
10 the evidence that you have seen and heard in court and  
11 not on anything that you might have seen or heard or  
12 might see or hear outside court, and I'll ask you please  
13 to bear that carefully in mind. It would be wrong for  
14 you to try to seek to receive any further information or  
15 evidence.

16 Please remember you must not talk to anyone about  
17 these inquests or allow anyone to talk to you about  
18 them, except other members of the jury, and then only  
19 when you are together and deliberating in your jury  
20 room.

21 So please, when you leave this building now -- and  
22 you'll be free to go and then come back on Wednesday --  
23 please just try to put these matters to one side in your  
24 mind until you return to court and retire to your jury  
25 room and begin your deliberations, all right?

1 I look forward to seeing you on Wednesday, thank you  
2 very much.

3 (In the absence of the Jury)

4 Housekeeping

5 THE CORONER: Yes, can we just take five minutes before we  
6 finish just to see whether we have a clear understanding  
7 of where we're going over the weekend and next week.

8 Mr Maxwell-Scott could you just help everyone by  
9 just reminding everybody of the proposal and the  
10 timetables.

11 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes. Mr Atkins and I will circulate  
12 a draft document, guidance document, for the jury, and  
13 we'll circulate that by 11.00 am on Monday morning --

14 THE CORONER: That would be very helpful, thank you.

15 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: -- giving properly interested persons the  
16 opportunity to make any written representations, I think  
17 we said, by 10.00 am on Tuesday morning. If there are  
18 to be any submissions, then we've said that they would  
19 be at 1.30 on Tuesday afternoon, and what I suggest is  
20 that when people make their written representations, if  
21 they indicate one way or the other whether they are  
22 asking for there to be an opportunity for them to expand  
23 upon them orally or not.

24 THE CORONER: Yes, that would help.

25 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: If nobody wants to make oral submissions,

1           then there will be no need.

2           The other matter, of course, is Mr Hendy's legal  
3           submission.

4   THE CORONER:   Yes.

5   MR MAXWELL-SCOTT:  That is a matter, as I've said, that the  
6           Department of Communities and Local Government have been  
7           asked to seek Mr Martin's assistance on, and it's not  
8           something that we can demand that it does, but we've  
9           asked that it happen and I expect that it will, and as  
10          soon as we get any response we will circulate that.

11          I suspect that we may need to play by ear and  
12          communicate by email on Monday as to where we're going  
13          on that issue, whether there needs to be oral  
14          submissions on Tuesday afternoon, and we haven't at the  
15          moment set any deadline for replying to Mr Hendy's  
16          submission, and that is a matter for you to do now.

17   THE CORONER:  Yes, I'm anxious about this, and I understand  
18          entirely the concern which Mr Compton raised first thing  
19          this morning.  This is a potentially a substantial and  
20          significant point which has been raised really quite  
21          late in the day.  If it does have the significance which  
22          Mr Hendy and Mr Edwards suggest, then it's only right  
23          that people have sufficient time to respond to it and to  
24          deal with it and we're leaving very little time in the  
25          timetable for that to happen.

1           As matters stand at the moment we're saying we'll  
2           wait and see whether Mr Martin is able to assist, and if  
3           he is, whether that assistance provides an answer which  
4           gives us a clearer way forward, but there are quite  
5           a lot of assumptions in that, and if that doesn't turn  
6           out to be the case, then we have a real issue to deal  
7           with. So it's very much unknown at the moment.

8           It seems to me that if it turns out that this is  
9           an issue which we do need to look at closely, then  
10          probably we should end up by having to ask the jury to  
11          come in later for their summing-up and to give everybody  
12          at least a day in which to try to deal with this  
13          particular issue. If there's any dissent from that let  
14          me know, but that seems to me that must be the  
15          inevitable consequence. I just hope that it's something  
16          that we can resolve in a straightforward fashion.

17       MR EDWARDS: Madam, just on a purely administrative note,  
18          there is a memory stick circulating the room behind me,  
19          in case any advocates have missed it, which has some but  
20          not all of the bylaws referred to in those submissions  
21          on, which I hope you will be able to copy. I'm afraid  
22          they are too large to send by email. We hope to have  
23          the 1952 bylaws circulated by email later on this  
24          afternoon.

25          If it's simply a matter of advocates saying various

1 regulations have been repealed or there's something to  
2 which our attention can be directed before Mr Martin  
3 replies, of course we would be very grateful for any  
4 assistance we can receive from other advocates.

5 THE CORONER: Well, if you take the view, Mr Edwards, that  
6 further revisiting is going to be helpful, then I hope  
7 that you tell everybody immediately. I'm not sure  
8 whether the circulation of the memory stick is going to  
9 be of much consolation to anybody at this point. All  
10 right.

11 Yes, are there any other points to raise?

12 MR COMPTON: Simply to say, madam, we will do all we can to  
13 avoid any legal argument by the way of assistance on  
14 this particular point.

15 THE CORONER: All right. Good. I think the only other  
16 point, Mr Maxwell-Scott, was the question of a time  
17 limit for circulation of submissions on rule 43 matters.

18 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: That is correct.

19 THE CORONER: Yes, which originally we'd put at, I think,  
20 was it Thursday afternoon?

21 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes.

22 THE CORONER: Is it practicable to bring it forward to close  
23 of business on Wednesday, assuming we get the jury in on  
24 Wednesday, or is that pushing it? Mr Matthews' face  
25 tells me it's pushing it.

1 MR MATTHEWS: I think we all agree that's pushing it, simply  
2 because of the uncertainty on the other issue.

3 THE CORONER: Yes, all right, is that's understood. So  
4 close of business on Thursday, at the moment does that  
5 look possible?

6 MR MATTHEWS: Yes, and if the other issue evaporates then  
7 maybe we'll get them in earlier as well.

8 THE CORONER: Well, I appreciate if we're giving the  
9 summing-up on Wednesday then you're going to be engaged  
10 in court anyway, so maybe that's unrealistic. Let's  
11 leave it at Thursday.

12 Good, all right, anything else? Thank you very  
13 much.

14 (1.31 pm)

15 (A short break)

16 (1.34 pm)

17 THE CORONER: Who is missing?

18 MR LEONARD: Ms Canby isn't here but her solicitor is here.

19 THE CORONER: Mr Matthews are any of the advocates missing  
20 who ought to be here?

21 MR MATTHEWS: No.

22 THE CORONER: All right. In that case we hadn't actually  
23 quite finished all the business that we had to deal with  
24 today.

25 MR MAXWELL-SCOTT: Yes, madam, the one point that we have

1 omitted to deal with is in relation to whether or not  
2 this is a Middleton Inquest, and my understanding is  
3 that it has now been agreed between the relevant  
4 properly interested persons, having heard all the  
5 evidence that we've heard in court, that this is now  
6 a Middleton Inquest.

7 THE CORONER: Thank you. Is there any dissent on that? All  
8 right. Well, it seems to me that that must be right,  
9 following the guidance in Middleton, I'm sure that must  
10 be the right way forward, and I so decide that that's  
11 how we shall deal with it. If anyone wants detailed  
12 reasons, then please let me know and I'll provide them  
13 in writing.

14 All right. You don't have to tell me now, but if  
15 you decide in due course that this would be helpful, not  
16 too late, but I'll provide those if you want.

17 All right, is there anything else that we need to  
18 deal with? Thank you very much.

19 (1.36 pm)

20 (The Court adjourned until Tuesday, 19 March 2013)

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