An Independent Qualitative Process Evaluation of the National Fire Chiefs Council Strategic Response to Covid-19

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report presents the findings of an independent process evaluation of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) strategic response to the Covid-19 pandemic to understand what processes worked well, where improvements are needed, key challenges and how they were overcome. Thematic analysis of interviews conducted between May and September 2021 with key members of the NFCC, and representatives from the Home Office and Welsh Government highlight four themes.

- **Communication and Information Sharing**: Strategies adopted by the NFCC that facilitated effective information sharing included holding regular meetings, which were chaired effectively to ensure discussions remained concise and relevant, and having single points of contact. Whilst regional information relating to PPE stock and involvement in partnership activities was not initially available nationally, mechanisms were quickly introduced to capture this data centrally through a new NFCC Data Portal and the Procurement Hub. This was important for helping to demonstrate how effectively the service was responding to the pandemic.
- **Organisational Structure**: The NFCC was quick to implement a structure utilising their established governance structures to strategically coordinate the pandemic response, creating a range of roles to distribute responsibilities and workload. This worked well and was effective but the resilience of this structure could be further strengthened by formalising the central command support structure for the Officer designated as Fire Gold Command. Additionally, each key role should be formally supported so it is not overly reliant on one individual.
- **Experience:** People appointed to roles felt the knowledge and experience they had of responding to previous disasters and protracted emergencies was important for knowing what emergency plans to implement, how to maintain business continuity, and implement a support structure. However, these same people may not undertake these key roles in future events of national significance. So this learning should be captured formally within the National Coordination Advisory Framework (NCAF) and mutual aid arrangements
- **Negotiation of the Tripartite Agreement**: The NFCC was praised for their positive intentions in negotiating the tripartite agreement. However, negotiating amendments was noted as being lengthy, raising questions regarding whether the approach was agile enough for use in dynamic situations.

Drawing on the perspectives and experiences shared by members of the NFCC, and representatives from the Home Office and Welsh Government, the report provides recommendations for strengthening the response to future events of national significance.

BACKGROUND

To date, more than 5.17 million Covid-19 related deaths and 258 million infections have been recorded worldwide (World Health Organization, 2021). By the end of September 2021, the UK alone had recorded 9.97 million Covid-19 infections, resulting in 555,000 people being hospitalised and 160,800 fatalities (UK Health Security Agency, 2021). In March 2020, the UK declared a public health emergency, implementing a series of restrictions to reduce virus transmission, including non-essential businesses being forced to close, working from home where possible, maintaining two metre social distances, and wearing face masks in public places (Flynn et al., 2020). More than 2.2 million clinically vulnerable people were advised to shield, only leaving home for essential reasons such as medical treatment. Approximately 95% followed this advice, and 51% did not leave their home for several months during the peak of the pandemic (Gibbs, 2020). The implementation of these restrictions also significantly impacted the public sector, increasing demand for food and medical prescriptions to be delivered to those shielding (Moran et al, 2020), and generating a need for personal protective equipment (PPE) to be delivered and fitted for key workers (UK Government, 2020). Ambulance

services were placed under severe strain with 80% of 999 calls relating to suspected COVID-19 cases requiring ambulance deployment.

During this period, fire and rescue services (FRS) have taken on a range of activities outside of their usual remit to support communities and partner agencies with responding to the pandemic, including driving ambulances, setting up temporary mortuaries, delivering food, medical supplies and PPE, fitting facemasks for those in health and social care settings, mass testing, and delivering vaccinations (NFCC, 2021). The NFCC has also adopted a new role, stepping up to strategically coordinate the national FRS response to the pandemic. This has included setting up an NFCC Covid-19 Committee, negotiating a tripartite agreement with national employers and the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) to provide support to partners, acting as a single point of contact between FRSs and the Home Office, and sharing public health guidance and good practice across the sector.

Previous focus has been directed toward identifying what works in practice in relation to managing major incidents such as natural disasters and terrorist attacks (Alison et al., 2015; Waring et al., 2019). However, these emergencies typically last a period of hours or days and affect individual regions. The Covid-19 pandemic represents a unique emergency for several reasons, including the scale and protracted nature of the impact, which is still affecting the UK more than 22 months on. It has been unique for the FRS because of the scale of ongoing support the service is providing to partner agencies and communities, and the new role the NFCC has adopted in strategically coordinating this response.

Both the NFCC and FRSs are keen to ensure they learn from this unique experience. Accordingly, in July 2020, acting on behalf of the NFCC, Phil Garrigan[1] and Andy Bell[2] commissioned Dr Sara Waring and the University of Liverpool to conduct an independent evaluation of i) the FRS response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and ii) the NFCC strategic coordination of this response, with findings being published across four reports. The first two reports drew on interviews conducted with 47 CFOs, stakeholders, and partner agencies to understand what aspects of the initial six months of the FRS pandemic response worked well, challenges, and how these were being overcome. This third report in the series details the findings of a process evaluation of the NFCC strategic response to the pandemic over the first 16 months, highlighting what aspects worked well and why, and what improvements would be beneficial for strengthening responses to future events of national significance.

METHOD

Process evaluation attempts to examine how a program of activities has been implemented and whether this corresponds with how the program delivery was intended. It is important for understanding how outcomes were achieved, identifying good practice, challenges and how they were overcome (Griffin et al., 2014). We interviewed both key members of the NFCC and external stakeholders identified by the NFCC Covid-19 Committee Lead and Covid-19 Recovery Lead as having the experience needed to provide detailed feedback on the NFCC strategic response. Given that the UK response to Covid-19 was a multi-agency issue, it was important to draw on multiple perspectives and experiences in developing an understanding of what worked and why within this context. In total, we interviewed 12 participants from across the following roles:

- 8 key members of the NFCC from across a range of operational and non-operational roles, including Chair, Vice Chair, Head of Communications, and Chief of Staff
- 2 members of the Home Office
- 1 member of Welsh Government and 1 Welsh Government Advisor

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[1] CFO Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, NFCC COVID-19 Committee Lead

[2] AC London Fire Brigade, NFCC COVID-19 Recovery Lead

Semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams between May and September 2021. Interviews lasted between 40-60 minutes and questions focused on understanding what aspects of the NFCC strategic coordination of the FRS pandemic response worked well, what processes required improvement and why, challenges and how these were being overcome (see Appendix 1 for details of the interview questions asked). Interview questions were designed in consultation with the NFCC Covid-19 Committee Lead and Covid-19 Recovery Lead to ensure the process evaluation focused on issues of practical relevance to the NFCC. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using Thematic Analysis, a technique for identifying, analysing, and reporting common themes raised across participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

FINDINGS

Thematic Analysis of 12 interviews conducted with members of the NFCC, Home Office and Welsh Government identified four common themes of importance for understanding what aspects of the NFCC strategic response to the COVID-19 pandemic were effective, areas for improvement, and how challenges were being overcome: i) Communication and information sharing; ii) Organisational structure; iii) Experience; and iv) Negotiation of the tripartite agreement.

i)   Communication and Information Sharing
All interviewees commented on the importance of sharing information that is relevant and timely to those that needed it. Several communication strategies were identified as being beneficial for facilitating effective information sharing across the course of the pandemic.

In terms of communication with the Home Office, the NFCC served as a single point of contact that was noted as being beneficial for facilitating the speedy exchange of information regarding the national picture. The regular meetings held during the peak of the pandemic were noted as being important for providing updates on the national FRS response, impact on services, and steps being taken to mitigate negative impacts. In addition, Chief Officers and Home Office representatives were able to contact one another directly via telephone, which was important for providing quick updates when needed. These communications helped Home Office representatives to feel reassured that the FRS was responding effectively and stepping up to support partner agencies and communities. They also allowed NFCC members to remain up to date with Government concerns regarding the pandemic, infection rates, and UK restrictions. Both Home Office representatives and NFCC members discussed how flexible the scheduling of meetings were, shifting from daily to weekly to less frequently depending on how rapidly the public health situation was changing. Both parties commented on the value of these meetings remaining concise, with the Chair keeping discussions focused and relevant, and all parties keeping updates and questions brief and to the point.

> *"We had regular meetings with Home Office, and we provided them with regular updates around data. I probably met with the Home Office three times a week at the height of the pandemic, it might have even been daily at points in time. I met with the Minister weekly and updated him around the fire position and then with chief officers weekly to communicate a lot but the bits that I needed them to focus in on we disseminated through a Friday afternoon call…That worked really effectively, and I certainly utilised the Home Office as my conduit into other governmental departments."*

> *"I think there is assurance in terms of raising the right issues with us. That was mainly because of the regular gold calls with chiefs, which showed that they understood what was happening around the country, which provided assurance specifically into the Minster, being able to advise on what the impacts were and what action was being taken. This was very successful."*

However, whilst Home Office representatives praised the level and frequency of communications, they noted initial limits to the information centrally available regarding PPE stock levels across different

regions. This created uncertainty about whether each service had what they needed or whether actions were required to coordinate the distribution of stock. NFCC members also noted some initial delays in deciding to track data needed for demonstrating the contributions the service was making to respond to the pandemic. Initial focus had been directed to tracking metrics such as staff absences, but data was not captured in relation to the level of support the service was providing to partner agencies and communities. NFCC members felt the pandemic had been unique and unprecedented, presenting a steep learning curve regarding the range of data needed to demonstrate the effectiveness of the response. However, systems were quickly put in place to address these challenges and provide the information needed to give a national picture about the service response. For example, the NFCC Data Portal has been developed to provide a platform for collating data from across regions on a range of metrics such as level of support provided to partners, and PPE stock levels, which has been beneficial for informing decisions about PPE distribution.

> *"In hindsight, it would be better to set up informatics on a wider range of points. It raises all sorts of questions about things like how they managed their PPE stock as a sector because I couldn't tell who was running out of masks and who wasn't."*

> *"We collected a lot of staff absence data to start off with but were a bit late with getting data regarding what we're actually doing and who is doing it and how much are they doing. We did start collecting that a bit later so now I can say we have done over a quarter of a million vaccinations because the data is there at our fingertips. Getting the data collection and analysis right earlier would be useful."*

In terms of communication between the NFCC and CFOs, one strategy highlighted as being beneficial was the weekly Covid-19 meetings. Holding the Covid-19 meeting after the Gold meeting on Fridays enabled the NFCC to establish agenda items that avoided repeating what had already been covered, helping to keep discussions focused and concise. These weekly Covid-19 meetings provided a platform for CFOs to raise issues or questions in relation to current procedures or guidance, allowing the NFCC to utilise feedback to adjust their approach when needed. It also provided a platform for CFOs to regularly share best practice, raise concerns, highlight challenges, and discuss ideas about how these could be overcome, facilitating a greater sense of collegiality across the service.

> *"The NFCC had very regular meetings with chief officers, and I think as far as services and Chiefs have commented, they have not really brigaded as effective as this before. I guess the thing for me going forward is do they do only do that only in an emergency or is that something they want to reflect on doing anyway."*

> *"What we have seen over the last 18 months is the NFCC as a group becoming much more collegiate and a lot less reliant on our own thinking. People are much more comfortable sharing ideas, sharing procedures and trying to standardise to a certain extent the business-as-usual work, which has come from the way we operated gold and then the wider chiefs meeting."*

Comments also highlighted the value of the NFCC circulating guidance provided by Public Health England and other agencies regularly. The purpose of sharing this guidance was to advise services on issues they needed to be aware of relating to social distancing, wearing facemasks, and other public health measures. NFCC members felt the sharing of this guidance had been timely, with documents being frequently updated to ensure the correct and most up-to-date information was being circulated. However, it was also noted that guidance documents could be several pages long, with information differing between sources, which required resource investment from FRSs to identify what was new and to make sense of differences across sources. Interviewees suggested it would be useful in future to clarify why documents were being shared, how the information differed to previous documents, and what services should do with this information (for example, was it being provided just to inform or did it need to be acted on).

> *"Implementation of the covid-19 committee and the regular engagement provided the environment that allowed all services to feed in their local perceptions."*

"I think, moving forward, we need to look at developing a clear definition of what constitutes a strategic intention, what is guidance, what is a position statement, what is just advice and what is just information. I think a clear checkpoint of what they are would be useful and that would then help in terms of what is being sent out and in terms of what services need to look to adopt as opposed to this is just information."

Overall, comments from across all interviewees highlighted the importance of relationships and how this had facilitated the effectiveness of information sharing across all parties. Having pre-established relationships or single points of contact that allowed relationships to be developed made it easier to be transparent and honest, as well as making sure that information got to where it was needed in a timely manner. Having positive pre-existing relationships allowed individuals to be comfortable in raising questions about decisions being made or information being shared, which broke down potential barriers that can sometimes be seen when working in organisations with strong hierarchical structures.

"Embed the personal relationships before the crisis happens and focus on those personal relationships and create a sense of a single team between fire and rescues services and the home office. We were one team and that's what we got right."

"I don't work for a fire service because I'm employed by the NFCC. I have a very different relationship with chief fire officers than their staff do so I can have quite open and honest conversations with chiefs that their staff may feel they can't due to the command and control, structures that are often in place in fire services."

ii)   Organisational structure

Across interviewees, recognition was given to the uniqueness of the role that the NFCC had adopted to strategically coordinate the national response to the pandemic. Feedback highlights that the NFCC demonstrated strong governance and were able to quickly put a structure in place to support this strategic role, which played a significant part in how effectively the service responded.

A wide variety of roles were quickly introduced to support various aspects of the response. Amongst others, this included appointing a Chair and Vice Chair of the NFCC Covid Committee, a Chief of Staff and Communications, along with having a single point of contact to link with Public Health England (PHE). This ability to quickly set up a structure and appoint key roles that could coordinate activities had several benefits. For example, the link to PHE meant new public health guidance could be quickly accessed and dedicated support was provided to translating this for use within fire settings (most guidance issued by PHE focused on health and social care settings). Allocating a Communications Lead was important for having version control of documents and guidance circulation to ensure all services had access to the most up-to-date information, which was vital given the fast-changing nature of the public health situation. In effect, quickly setting up a structure meant that roles and responsibilities could be delegated to distribute workload.

"I would put the command structure in place which would facilitate it being managed effectively. There's a trigger point that indicates this is having huge implications now, so we need to put a governing structure in place. That's what we did within the first couple of weeks, it might've even been before that."

"Suitable structure so we already started to put in place lots of things, notably a scientific cell to support decision making on approaches taken by xxx so that was played into the NFCC."

Whilst many positive comments were raised about this structure, some interviewees also indicated times when greater clarity was needed regarding roles and responsibilities to reduce confusion, avoid duplication or gaps in work, and clarify who to report to for various duties or to share and request information internally. Both NFCC and Welsh Government representatives also highlighted that it would have been beneficial to ensure parties from all counties in the UK were included within the NFCC Covid Committee to consider differences in governance structure, public health restrictions, and

mechanisms for providing support to partner agencies. Interviewees noted that including representatives from all four counties would improve the service response to future events of national significance and increase the sharing of best practice across all devolved administrations.

> *"The only thing is that we didn't have anyone from Scotland or Northern Ireland around the gold group. Going forward I think when there's something that's UK wide, having somebody around the table from each country would be useful. To be fair, we had the Chief from South Wales who was also one of the vice chairs of the NFCC and did a really good job of representing the devolved administration but the rules in Wales and Scotland were very different. In hindsight, having those people around the table would be a useful addition to the group."*

Feedback from NFCC members also highlighted the need for further focus on resilience in the structure. A variety of roles were quickly assigned and many of these roles had informal structures in place that meant additional members were providing support. However, a few interviewees noted some roles being undertaken by a single person or being unsure about the structure in place for ensuring roles were supported and covered by more than one person. This could leave staff working longer days and juggling larger workloads. The pandemic represents a protracted emergency that continues to pose substantial impacts 22 months on. Building resilience into structures is important for being able to maintain continuity when people are away from work due to illness, annual leave, and rest days. Interviewees highlighted that for future events of national significance, similar structures could be adopted to coordinate the strategic response but having a formal support system for all key roles to clarify the arrangements in place to provide support and cover.

> *"There is a question about how resilient it was, we were focused on a couple of key individuals such as Gold and the NFCC chair. If either of those people had not been available, who was the clear replacement for them? It didn't really arise but in planning you want to have as resilient a structure as possible."*

> *"I think perhaps a bit more resilience. For example, in terms of the Comms set up, perhaps it should have been shared a little more widely, although it kind of made sense to have one person being that. We did other things like set up shared mailboxes so other people had access but there was quite limited in terms of organisational support."*

iii) Experience

All NFCC members interviewed commented on the importance of their professional experience for providing the knowledge and understanding needed to know how to set up a structure to support the strategic coordination of the pandemic, and the range of roles and activities that would need to be undertaken. Despite the uniqueness of the pandemic, most felt that their previous experience of responding to other disasters had helped to prepare them for responding to the pandemic, including knowing how to develop and implement emergency and business continuity plans. However, some of the interviewees noted that they would be retiring from the service within the next few years, and so may not necessarily be the ones undertaking the same roles in future events of national significance. They felt it was important to provide exposure and training for staff to ensure they have the skills and experience needed to undertake these roles in future.

> *"I have been involved in national response to emergencies and disasters for a long time, so I understood the command and communication structure we needed. I understood the emergency planning that would be required. I understood the business continuity plans that would be required. I had a lot of experience to base our decision making on."*

> *"Exposure to these types of events is important. Fortunately, events of this scale are once in a generation, but I was fortunate that I can handle myself operationally and had coordinated a fair number of responses, so I knew what I was doing. I knew what was required. Training and exercising finding yourself in that position, working hard at it are important. You can only get better the more you practise."*

iv)   Negotiation of the Tripartite Agreement

Both members of the NFCC and Home Office representatives commented on the tripartite agreement negotiated between the NFCC, National Employers and FBU for FRSs to undertake additional activities to support partners, whilst maintaining a high standard of staff health, safety, and welfare. Whilst both the NFCC and Home Office felt the intentions behind negotiating a TPA had been noble, in practice it had not been appropriate for the dynamic nature of the situation. There had been delays to negotiating amendments, which impacted the range of support provided and how quickly this was implemented. One example given related to the roll out of the vaccination programme, which was discussed but never agreed through the TPA. Comments suggested that had negotiations been quicker, support could have been provided across more regions and sooner, ultimately leading to more people being vaccinated quicker. However, due to delays with the negotiation process, FRSs ended up stepping away from the TPA to negotiate agreements locally to provide vaccination support. Regions that were actively involved in activities such as vaccination programmes had been reliant on local relationships between NHS providers and FRSs, and not having local FBU representatives blocking these activities.

> *"I think if we'd have gotten there earlier on, fire and rescues services would have given vaccinations faster and done more of the infrastructure development, which is what they are very good at frankly. The vaccine effort would have been strengthened and I could have made a stronger offer to the NHS in terms of providing support on a sectoral basis rather than a very local set of arrangements where if the local FBU were blocking it then it wasn't happening."*

SUMMARY

Overall, feedback provided by NFCC members, and representatives from the Home Office and Welsh Government highlighted several aspects of the NFCC strategic coordination of the FRS response to the pandemic that worked well. For example, the regularity of meetings was important for facilitating timely information sharing. The way in which meetings were chaired ensured discussions remained focused, avoided repetition, and did not last longer than was needed. They also provided a platform for the NFCC to receive feedback to make changes to their approach where needed. Both the strength of pre-existing relationships and having single points of contact within agencies that allowed relationships to grow were beneficial for developing trust and having the confidence to raise questions, challenge decisions, and facilitate information exchange. Comments also highlighted that some forms of data were not initially collected nationally relating to local PPE stock levels, and level of support provided to partner agencies, affecting ability to robustly demonstrate the effectiveness of the FRS response. However, mechanisms were quickly put in place to capture this data nationally through the introduction of the NFCC Data Portal and will exist for future events of national significance.

Another aspect of the NFCC strategic coordination that was identified as strengthening the response was how quickly they had been able to put a support structure in place, identifying the types of roles, plans and activities that would be needed. Prior experience was noted as being important for this and for helping individuals to know how to undertake their roles. However, the people undertaking these roles in future events of national significance may differ and it will be important to ensure that staff have the appropriate training and opportunities to develop the experience needed to undertake these roles. Greater focus is also needed to ensure there is a formal structure for demonstrating resilience and clarifying that all key roles are being undertaken and supported by two or more individuals. Additionally, it will be important to draw on the experiences of members of the NFCC to develop greater clarity regarding the responsibilities of each role to avoid duplication or gaps in work, and to explain how roles work together. Finally, as noted in the previous reports in this series, whilst interviewees feel the intentions behind the tripartite agreement were noble, questions were raised about whether a mechanism that requires lengthy negotiations for amendments provides the right approach for responding to dynamic situations.

The Covid-19 pandemic represents a unique situation in terms of the protracted nature and scale of the emergency, and the level of support the FRS has and continues to provide to partner agencies. Overall, feedback from across key members of the NFCC, and representatives from the Home Office and Welsh Government highlights the value of the NFCC undertaking this role for events of national significance.

<div style="text-align:center">**RECOMMENDATIONS**</div>

Feedback provided by key members of the NFCC and external stakeholders from the Home Office and Welsh Government supports the following recommendations that we proposed in the first and second reports in this evaluation series:

i) **Frame guidance that is shared by the NFCC.** The guidance shared by the NFCC was useful and timely, but documents were sometimes lengthy, and contained mixed messages from different sources. To avoid confusion and information overload, it would be useful to provide framing, including a summary of why guidance is being shared, what is new about the guidance in comparison to others previously shared, and which aspects are important to attend to.

ii) **Coordinating the Strategic Response.** The NFCC served an important new function in coordinating the strategic response to the pandemic, which included members undertaking new roles. It would be beneficial to draw on this experience to create a structure (with clarity regarding roles and responsibilities) that can be quickly implemented when strategically coordinating responses to future events of national significance, which could be adopted within the National Coordination Advisory Framework (NCAF). This will also be beneficial for helping to identify who to contact for different requirements and for minimising duplication of efforts.

iii) **Consider training requirements for NFCC roles.** NFCC members have gained valuable knowledge and experience from overseeing the strategic coordination of the fire and rescue service response to the pandemic. However, these same people may not be in place for future events of national significance. Accordingly, it would be useful to reflect on the knowledge and skills needed to undertake key roles and whether bespoke training is needed to support staff in undertaking such roles in future.

iv) **Consider how undertaking additional activities to support partner agencies is agreed.** If there is to be a national agreement which underpins activities undertaken during a pandemic or other nationally significant events, it should be kept to a set of principles or strategic objectives based on the needs of the LRF/SCG or similar. As a result, fire and rescue services will be more agile in their response and adhere to the principle of subsidiarity in which the aim is to ensure that decisions over temporary variations to roles are taken as closely as possible to those affected by them.

Feedback provided by key members of the NFCC and external stakeholders from the Home Office and Welsh Government supports the following additional recommendations for strengthening the response to future events of national significance:

v) **Build resilience into support structures**. The NFCC were able to quickly set up a structure to support the strategic response, which included appointing several key roles. However, some key roles were undertaken by one individual, or greater clarity was needed about the support structure. This can create issues for workload and maintaining continuity when staff are absent due to illness, rest days, or annual leave. This is particularly the case for protracted emergencies such as the pandemic, which continues to significantly impact the UK 22 months on. For future events of national significance, it would be beneficial to clarify the structure in place for ensuring key roles are undertaken by more than one person, and to consider implementing shadowing roles to help staff to gain experience, along with shift rotations to allow for breaks.

vi) **Include representatives from across all devolved administrations.** Across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, there are differences in governance structures and the response to the pandemic, including when and how public health restrictions are implemented. For future

events of national significance, it would be beneficial to ensure that the NFCC committee formed to strategically coordinate the response includes representatives from across all devolved administrations. This will facilitate sharing of best practice and ensure that approaches adopted take into consideration differences in governance.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Interview Questions for NFCC Members
1. What is your role within the NFCC? How does this role link to the national coordination of the COVID-19 response?
2. When were Gold coordination arrangements for COVID-19 introduced? Why were they introduced at this time?
3. What is the purpose of the Gold coordination arrangements? What do these arrangements consist of? To what extent are they unique?
4. To what extent do you think the Gold coordination arrangements have been effective?
5. To what extent did you consider changing key members of these arrangements?
6. What were the internal governance arrangements and lines of communication? To what extent were they effective?
7. The NFCC published guidance to support fire and rescue services, some of which was collated guidance from other parties such as PHE, HMG etc. To what extent was this approach successful?
8. To what extent do you think the guidance provided was fit for purpose?
9. To what extend do you think these Gold coordination arrangements should be incorporated into the existing National Coordination Advisory Framework?
10. Do you think there is anything that could be done differently to improve Gold coordination arrangements?

11. Based on the experience you have built up with Gold coordination during the pandemic, what advice would you have for the next person who undertakes your role in relation to another event of national significance?

Appendix B – Interview Questions for Home Office
1. What is your role within the Home Office? How does this role link to the national COVID-19 response?
2. What do you think the role of the NFCC is in relation to the COVID-19 response? How does the role of the NFCC link to your role?
3. What do you think the purpose of the NFCC Gold coordination arrangements were? To what extent do you think this purpose was appropriate? To what extent do you think this purpose was achieved?
4. To what extent did the NFCC Gold coordination arrangements support the provision of information to the Home Office?
5. To what extent did the NFCC Gold coordination arrangements provide assurance to the Home Office?
6. Can you describe how the communication channels between the NFCC and Home Office operated? To what extent was this effective?
7. Is there anything the NFCC could have done differently that would have been beneficial for the Home Office? Why would this be useful?
8. From a Home Office perspective to what extent were the NFCC gold coordination arrangements effective in supporting fire and rescue services? Is there anything else they could have done to improve this support?
9. Based on the experience you have gained in working with the NFCC during the pandemic, what advice would you have for the next person who undertakes your role in relation to another event of national significance? What should their key considerations be? Are there any things they 'must do'? What should they avoid? Why?

Appendix C – Interview Questions for Welsh Government
1. What is your role within the Welsh Government? How does this role link to the national COVID-19 response?
2. What do you think the role of the NFCC is in relation to the COVID-19 response? How does the role of the NFCC link to your role?
3. What do you think the purpose of the NFCC Gold coordination arrangements were? To what extent do you think this purpose was appropriate? To what extent do you think this purpose was achieved?
4. To what extent did the NFCC Gold coordination arrangements support the provision of information to the Welsh Government?
5. To what extent did the NFCC Gold coordination arrangements provide assurance to the Welsh Government?
6. Can you describe how the communication channels between the NFCC and Welsh Government operated? To what extent was this effective?
7. Is there anything the NFCC could have done differently that would have been beneficial for the Welsh Government? Why would this be useful?
8. From a Welsh Government perspective to what extent were the NFCC gold coordination arrangements effective in supporting fire and rescue services? Is there anything else they could have done to improve this support?
9. Based on the experience you have gained in working with the NFCC during the pandemic, what advice would you have for the next person who undertakes your role in relation to another event of national significance? What should their key considerations be? Are there any things they 'must do'? What should they avoid? Why?