Crisis Management to Controlled Recovery: The Emergency Planning Response to the Bombing of Manchester City Centre

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Fuelled by terrorist attacks on urban areas, emergency planning responses to man-made disasters is a growing area of critical debate within the field of urban management. The response of a major British city — Manchester — to the 1996 bombing of its commercial core, is examined in this paper. It focuses on the transformation of the emergency planning response from dealing with the immediate crisis during the first week, to a stage of controlled recovery that still continues. The response to the devastation caused by the bomb was co-ordinated by the city council, which developed a range of short- and long-term initiatives, but the re-opening of the city centre could not have happened so quickly had the council not worked in collaboration with other key organisations and agencies. Working partnerships were crucial to the immediate response and subsequent recovery, with such capacity for organisational learning built upon existing co-operative arrangements within the city, which had developed over the previous decade.

Keywords: Manchester, bombs, emergency response, disaster planning.

Introduction

Over the past few decades cities around the world have had to come to terms with urban terrorism, with the most recent large-scale attacks and loss of life in Oklahoma City, Tokyo, Dar es Salaam and Nairobi serving as continuing reminders of the potential danger posed by terrorist organisations. In the United Kingdom the ‘Irish question’ has long provided a political challenge, with threats from organised groups persisting both within Northern Ireland and on the mainland. Numerous incidents in recent years — London, Birmingham, Warrington, Manchester — have resulted in specific government advice for urban managers and service providers in an attempt to
provide a co-ordinated response to emergencies (Home Office, 1994, 1992). Media attention has tended to focus on security issues in London, but in June 1996 the largest bomb ever detonated on mainland Britain during peace-time was set in Manchester. A 1,500 kilogramme fertiliser bomb, several times the size of that which devastated London’s docklands (Canary Wharf) and the City of London (Bishopsgate), wreaked havoc in the city centre. Following the devastation the city has pursued a major programme of renewal, aiming to create not only a reinvigorated city centre, but also a more competitive and sustainable commercial core.

The work presented here is part of a wider research study being undertaken on the renewing and rebuilding of Manchester city centre (Leverhulme Trust, 1998). It is specifically based on a series of interviews with key individuals involved. It looks at the immediate aftermath of the bombing, with attention focused both on the co-ordinated response to the devastation caused, and on the instruments that were put in place to provide a recovery programme to rehabilitate the city centre (Russell, 1998). This included the emergency services, the local authority, major land and property owners and other local agencies, and involved a series of structured interviews. The lessons learnt from the Manchester experience will be of value to those involved in developing mitigation measures for security planning and for developing strategic responses to urban emergencies.

Emergency planning

The national context

In the UK, disaster response is organised at the local level, where knowledge of available resources is most complete and a co-ordinated response is possible. Initially emerging from a post-war concern with civil defence, the reorganisation of local government in 1974 has resulted in emergency planning becoming the remit of the new local authorities. The collapse of eastern Europe in the late 1980s, and the resulting peace dividend led central government to change the emphasis in 1993 to peace-time emergency planning, designed to cope with civil disasters. Within urban areas, responsibility for this was given to metropolitan districts, but with some central government contribution to the costs involved, thus reinforcing the view that ‘emergency management truly is an interactive venture within the intergovernmental policy system’ (Cigler, 1987: 12). Different central government departments are nominated to take the lead in different types of emergency. In the case of terrorist incidents the police take the lead, with central government co-ordination led by the Home Office in conjunction with other government departments, depending on the nature of the incident.

The Manchester context

The city of Manchester, with a population of 440,000, lies at the heart of a conurbation of 2.6 million that is currently preoccupied with the problems of urban restructuring in an attempt to create a modern, competitive city (Williams, 1996). The urban fabric contains much tangible evidence of the city’s industrial past, with the core dominated by an extensive and dense Victorian quarter, and with a central commercial district
strongly influenced by the comprehensive redevelopment programmes of the 1960s. This has done little to enhance the qualities of the urban realm, but has facilitated considerable diversity (see Figure 1).

After a reorganisation of local government, Greater Manchester was run by a county council and 10 metropolitan district councils during 1974–86, with emergency planning taken over by the Greater Manchester County Council on behalf of the metropolitan districts. In 1986, the abolition of metropolitan-wide authorities necessitated the transfer of responsibility to the Greater Manchester Fire and Civil Defence Authority, specifically created by the metropolitan districts. In 1993, responsibility for civil disasters was delegated to metropolitan districts, four of the 10 councils in Greater Manchester then chose to take on the emergency planning functions for themselves, while the other six entered into an agency arrangement with the metropolitan-wide body. Manchester City Council was one of the four councils to take direct responsibility, believing that they possessed the knowledge, resources and organisational capacity to cope with any particular emergency. Establishing an Emergency Planning Unit and appointing an Emergency Planning Officer directly accountable to the authority’s Chief Executive, they set about putting procedures in place to call in key personnel on a cascade principle, and developed a set of plans to deal with emergencies by location (specific shopping centres, leisure and cultural facilities, the airport).

![Figure 1](Manchester city centre – sub areas)
Impact of the bomb

On Saturday 15 June 1996 Manchester’s emergency planning structures were put to the test when the local television station received a coded telephone warning at 9.41 a.m. The police were alerted and immediately implemented the emergency procedure, refined after the 1992 Bishopsgate bombing in London. The suspect vehicle, found just after 10 a.m., was parked close to a major junction in the heart of the city’s administrative and commercial core.

Figure 2  The city’s administrative and commercial core
commercial core. An inner and outer cordon were drawn (see Figure 2), and the police immediately began to evacuate the 80,000 people estimated to be within it. The inner cordon surrounding the immediate vicinity of the explosion was set at 400–500 metres from the bomb. The outer cordon, which encircled the city centre following major highways, aimed to prevent more people entering the city while at the same time allowing people to leave.

The Ministry of Defence bomb disposal team arrived at 11 a.m., a quarter of an hour before the blast — but without enough time to defuse the device. The force of the explosion was felt up to eight kilometres away, with windows over half a kilometre radius smashed as the shock waves funnelled down streets. This created the main element of personal injury as people rushed away from the blast. The immediate emergency response once the aftershock had cleared was an ordered process. Many ‘walking wounded’ were moved in private and police vehicles and public transport, and the more seriously injured were looked after by emergency personnel. Ambulances were seriously delayed by the sheer amount of debris and broken glass.

**Negative effects**

Amazingly, no one was killed, although around 220 people were injured by glass lacerations and other effects of the blast. The damage to property was considerable, however, with a total of 1,200 properties affected. Around a dozen major buildings of either functional and/or historic significance suffered serious structural damage, half of which required demolition. Damage to property resulted in the displacement of 672 businesses; 49,000 square metres of retail space and 57,000m$^2$ of office space were immediately decommissioned; and residents from 50 flats above the main shopping centre needed to be moved. In addition, many other elements of the city’s infrastructure were affected with fears about utility fractures, major roads damaged, the city’s largest bus terminal closed permanently, two multi-storey car parks shut temporarily (for two weeks) and key streets closed (many for 18 months). In addition, the city’s central indoor market was closed for months as was a section of the main shopping centre (Manchester Millennium Ltd., 1996).

The indirect losses of the blast — those second-order consequences that emerged later — are more difficult to assess fully. In terms of intangible emotional impact on the local community, for example, many people experienced shock and trauma afterwards: there were cases of cardiac arrest and long periods away from work. The tangible indirect losses were also considerable. A business survey on the economic costs found that trade in the city centre was down 10 per cent as long as six months after the bomb, with a significant number of lost jobs. Small businesses unable to absorb the cost of lost trading were particularly vulnerable (Gordon, 1997). In addition, there were major costs to the local authority including lost business rates, car-park revenues and market-trading licence fees. Insurance loss cover was estimated to be £100 million for the direct physical damage, but far higher when loss of business was factored in; the eventual rebuilding programme was estimated to cost over £500 million.

**Positive effects**

While there were substantial losses sustained by the city centre in the immediate aftermath, overall the bomb did provide an opportunity to rebuild an improved city
core, together with a more competitive and liveable city centre. This view was widely expressed by writers at the time (Diefendorf, 1990; Gavin and Maluf, 1996). In the case of Manchester it enabled the modernisation of the urban fabric on a scale that would have been impossible within the existing built-up area, enabling contemporary concerns to be incorporated into the rebuilding process. Changing a city is not only restrained by the inherited physical structures of the past, but also an associated legacy of political, economic and cultural norms. Disasters provide an impetus for change, resulting in a reassessment of cultural norms and political will. Although commercially successful, much of Manchester’s comprehensive redevelopment experience of the 1960s was perceived as deficient in terms of design (particularly in its external appearance and permeability), and the bomb offered the city the chance for a fresh start (Williams, 1996).

**Emergency response**

A partnership was formed between the city council, the emergency services and the major private landowners and occupiers to deal with the devastation caused by the bomb. The partnership benefited from the similarity of interests that had evolved when seeing through the major regeneration efforts of the early 1990s (Cochrane, 1996; Peck and Tickell, 1995). The immediate problem for businesses and the general public was one of access, with shop windows blown out and missing shop fronts. The priority was to get the affected area back in business, restore and retain public confidence in the city centre and consider how to manage the recovery positively. This process began within 48 hours of the blast, and the city council became the focus of attention and the catalyst for a range of initiatives both short and long term to bring this about. From the initial emergency, the city council’s response developed in a number of areas, focusing particularly on a re-occupancy strategy and business recovery, communication over cordon control and management and media relations.

**Re-occupancy strategy**

In accordance with Home Office guidance, an inner cordon was maintained around the area affected by the blast, initially enclosing an area of 25 hectares of the commercial core. It served a multi-purpose role in that it protected people from physical danger, helped preserve criminal evidence at the disaster scene, and as a management ‘tool’ was central to the city council’s re-occupancy strategy, allowing the controlled release of land over time and space. The cordon was marked out with temporary barriers, and while in place ‘the police will ensure the security of premises within it. Once it is lifted, the responsibility reverts to the occupiers’ (Home Office, 1994: 33). The police and city council were keen for owners to resume responsibility for their property as quickly as possible, and this involved reducing the area of land cordoned off as buildings were made safe. This involved three important stages:

- the handover of control from the police to the local authority;
- the maintenance of controls by the local authority with the powers available to it; and
- progressive re-opening to the public (see Figure 3).
The re-opening of areas within the cordon depended on the assessment of damage to buildings and highways; on making the area safe for the general public; clearing debris; and setting up traffic diversions. The removal of hazards from buildings and structures was led by the local authority’s architecture department, which had a pre-determined plan originally drafted to respond to damage caused by freak weather conditions. This defined a process for dealing with widespread damage, and had been modified by lessons learnt from the Bishopsgate bomb. Surveyors possessed extensive experience, knowledge and skills for dealing with dangerous buildings, even if the scale and the overall urgency to respond quickly presented the main challenge. The plan was immediately activated, enabling the necessary local authority staff to mobilise. The authority kept records on dangerous buildings and carried out inspections; it provided staff with essential phone numbers; and it gave them a pre-determined method of deciding priorities. It anticipated the problem of people wanting to get back into their buildings, and included notices warning building owners and occupants of the dangers and what precautions they should take.

By Sunday morning, an emergency response task force comprising the city council and police had held its first meeting, with this ‘partnership’ proving central to the success of a rapid response in a situation that had numbed participants. It was decided that the area within the inner cordon (which now became the outer cordon) should be sub-divided into six more-manageable areas based on street patterns, with the only physical barrier essentially being represented on the outside (see Figure 3). Within this cordon, there was damage throughout, but the most severely damaged area was the epicentre of the blast (zone six).

The response to the devastation in zones one to five was relatively uniform. First, building inspectors from the city council (a team of around 20 surveyors) went through defining the extent of the damage and liaising with owners. Their task was to follow the pre-determined plan, to assess the extent of the damage in the cordoned zone, giving priority to those buildings which were on main routes, but also to identify those buildings too badly damaged to be made safe quickly. The task on Sunday was to isolate such buildings with hoardings and barricades, with the owner’s own contractors brought in where possible, so that the whole area was not prevented from re-opening. The role of the City Architect’s Department was particularly intense during this first week. There was no time for full structural surveys; it was a question of identifying those buildings that were likely to prove most dangerous, based on the experience and skill of the surveyors. Zone six, however, was designated a ‘crime scene’; the only people allowed into this ‘sterile area’, apart from the emergency services, were forensic specialists and the city council’s principal building surveyor who was responsible for this zone.

Two days after the blast, zones one to five were released from the cordon. Owners were given four to six hours of access, taking contractors in with them, to make their buildings safe. Once buildings were structurally secure, these areas were released from the cordon, which was correspondingly reduced in size. By Monday evening, the physical outer cordon was reduced to zone six, the area most severely damaged in the blast. This area was initially divided into 10 sub-zones, based on an amalgam of parcels along property lines, the extent of damage to areas and physical constraints. The aim was to work towards dividing the bomb-damaged area up strictly along ownership lines. On Tuesday 18 June, parts of specific zones were released, and it was hoped that substantial parts of the remainder would be released the following day. There were problems, however, with more severe damage to specific buildings,
Figure 3  Cordon management and the release of land over time and space
continuing glass shedding and air-conditioning problems in some of the areas. Overall the process proved extremely complex.

Between Thursday 20 and Saturday 22 June, the aim was to hand over the remaining cordoned-off area to the owners. Because the procedures were in place, and owners knew what was expected to secure their buildings, the time required for the handover was reduced. By the end of Thursday just three areas remained under cordon regulations, and the police began to remove staff as sites were secured. Major firms such as the retailer Marks and Spencer were already employing their own security personnel on site, while other major interests were also well advanced with their disaster recovery strategies (Graham, 1998). By the Saturday, major site owners took full responsibility, and only a small police presence remained.

When the police finally relaxed the cordon, building owners began the process of erecting three kilometres of security fencing around what was becoming one of the largest building sites in Europe. The area was then sub-divided along ownership lines, involving the collaboration of P&O (Arndale Shopping Centre, A1), Marks and Spencer (A2) and Royal Insurance (A3) in relation to their buildings, as well as Frogmore Estates (building B) and Prudential Portfolio Managers (building C). Altogether, within a week of the blast, the bomb-damaged area was reduced to five building sites — a considerable achievement given the initial size of the area cordoned off. These have provided the basis of the first phase of the rebuilding programme, a stage to be fully completed by November 1999.

Communication

Estimates suggest that between 5,000 and 10,000 people descended on the town hall on the day following the blast, all with their own individual problems and agendas (retrieval of stock, concern over premises and financial security, retrieval of personal possessions — including the 700 vehicles in the cordoned-off area). The immediate answer to their concerns was negative: there was no provision made in the emergency plan for responding to the large numbers of people who came to the town hall for help. To control the situation, it was decided that meetings for each of the areas within the cordon should be held in committee rooms in the town hall, numbered to correspond with a specific zone. These became the central means of communication with the general public and those directly affected by the bomb.

Meetings were held continuously throughout the first week after the blast, with meetings providing people with a summary of progress, an outline of future plans and answers to questions that arose. Emergency planning meetings between the city council and emergency services were held daily at 8 a.m. for the first week, and the results of these meetings were communicated to the committee rooms; concerned people were told which areas would be opened up and how they could enter. A series of large maps showed the six key areas, with smaller maps that identified sub-areas and buildings, which people could take away. One worker commented, ‘we got through around 25,000 maps in the first week’ (Davey, 1996).

Business recovery

In the immediate response stage it was critically important to relocate businesses displaced by the bomb and to get them trading again as quickly as possible. The city
council’s Valuers Department was instrumental in obtaining information from local commercial agents and compiled a database of available retail property in and around the city centre with the close co-operation of private agencies. The bulk of the work in relation to business relocation, however, was undertaken by the designated business recovery officer who subsequently became part of a team handling small business response. By the end of the first week, most of the larger businesses, with both the resources and the emergency planning frameworks in place, were well advanced with their business recovery strategies (Graham, 1998).

A number of other measures were carried out to support business during this initial period, including an agreement secured with the main banks that they would not foreclose on any business affected by the blast without liaising with the city council to ensure that everything possible had been done to help them. It was important not only for those small businesses directly affected, but also to give the banks confidence that a systematic approach was already being taken to business recovery. Furthermore, a one-stop business advice and information service was established with the co-operation of local business development agencies (Training and Enterprise Council and Business Link), and involving the short-term secondment of representatives from the major banks, building societies and insurance companies.

**Media relations**

A media and public relations strategy was formulated within three days of the explosion. The city council took the lead through its own public relations office, working with established local agencies such as Marketing Manchester, the City Centre Partnership and major landowners and traders to develop and implement a concerted campaign. The aim was to maintain a high international and national profile during the initial period to restore confidence among city centre users; to encourage shoppers, tourists and business users to return to the city centre; to support traders in relocating; and to provide a framework for promoting the city’s views on development of a strategic recovery and renewal strategy.

**Rehabilitation**

Of central importance to the rehabilitation of areas after a disaster is the mobilisation of resources, and the development of institutional capacity to respond creatively (Healey, 1998). For successful rehabilitation, it is important that a coalition of local interests and established networks are willing to work together to prepare and oversee a strategy. In Manchester, in recent years, there has been ample evidence of public–private partnerships working, and institutional capacity building to achieve ambitious schemes. The city has become a role model for such coalition building and ‘more successful than most in playing the “partnership game”’ (Peck and Tickell, 1995: 79). The Olympic and Commonwealth games bids represented just two high-profile examples, as did the City Pride initiative (Cochrane, 1996; Manchester City Council, 1997). Formal and informal networks were already in place and city leaders were able to mobilise the knowledge and relationships that existed and build upon them to achieve their objective of rebuilding.
A partnership was established to rehabilitate the city; to reconstruct the urban fabric; and to facilitate the re-starting of the economic and socio-cultural systems of the city's core. The aim was not simply to reinstate the urban fabric of the past, but rather to reinvigorate and revitalise the whole city centre. Thinking through the structures necessary to deliver a recovery programme began during the first week after the blast, and were in place within the first month. Three recovery vehicles were:

- an Emergency Appeal Fund to support the businesses and individuals most directly affected by the bomb;
- an Urban Design Competition to facilitate a master-planning response; and
- a task force to co-ordinate the entire rebuilding process.

An examination of the rebuilding of Manchester is not within the remit of this paper but is the focus of a separate study (Leverhulme Trust, 1998; Williams, 1999). Outlined below is an overview of the instruments put in place in the immediate aftermath of the blast to facilitate recovery over the longer term.

**Lord Mayor's Appeal Fund**

This fund spearheaded the city council’s initiative to get businesses trading again, and was established in response to donations and help, which were offered spontaneously immediately after the blast. The fund’s creation was officially announced by the city council on Wednesday 19 June — only four days after the bomb. Essentially an emergency appeal for victims, the fund was designed to ‘raise and distribute funds to those experiencing hardship, with a principal objective of assisting small businesses to re-establish’. It was to collect and disburse £2.5 million during the 18 months of its existence, operated by a team of seconded financial and business-services representatives. They interviewed people at all 672 businesses directly affected, provided emotional support and helped them draw up recovery and relocation plans, and administered a series of short-term loans and grants. Next, a business support programme was put in place for longer term support.

**International Urban Design Competition**

The opportunities afforded by the bombing were soon realised and, following encouragement by the then-deputy prime minister, an International Urban Design Competition was announced on 17 July 1996. From the outset, it was decided that submissions to the competition should develop an urban framework that would provide momentum for positive change in the core as well as the surrounding area. The time scale for the competition was tight, particularly given its launch over the summer period, with the final decision on the competition winner to be judged in November 1996, barely 16 weeks later.

Submissions were evaluated on the basis of:

- the creation of a compelling urban design vision;
- imaginative interpretation of the design and development aspirations of the city;
- demonstration of clear deliverability;
- focus for private investment and justification for public expenditure.
This was followed by the development of the initial masterplan and associated supplementary planning guidance (December 1996), and a series of annual implementation plans aiming to translate the agreed strategy into redevelopment programmes and projects (Williams, 1999).

**The Manchester Millennium Task Force**

The enormity of the rebuilding process was quickly appreciated, and heightened by the scale of devastation caused. Carrying out comprehensive redevelopment in the heart of the city centre, while maintaining a functioning commercial core represented a significant challenge, and it was decided that a specialist task force should be set up to focus on the renewal programme. The organisation, a hybrid public/private company, was fully operational within a month of the bombing. Its mission was to promote the rehabilitation of the city centre and the speediest possible reduction in the scale of the exclusion zone; to relocate the many businesses which had been displaced by the bomb; and to bring forward a strategy for rebuilding the city centre over the following three years.

A small dedicated team of public and private sector secondees was assembled, most of whom had worked together in the past; these existing relationships and past experiences were deemed crucial for operational effectiveness. It was headed by the local authority’s deputy chief executive, and the task force board consisted of representatives from the private sector, the local authority and from central government. The task force will operate until spring 2000, when the rebuilding programme should be substantially complete, thereafter the city council will manage the final elements. The task force role has evolved to deal with the complexity of the masterplan implementation, aiming to co-ordinate the preparation of the recovery programme, to keep it under review and oversee its effective delivery; to assume responsibility for the creation of a regeneration framework for the core area, and to secure the necessary public and private resources; and to account for the public sector resources to support the implementation of the recovery programme.

**Evaluating the response**

On the positive side a number of factors were identified by those involved in responding to the devastation caused by the bombing as being helpful to the response process.

**Pre-determined strategies and training**

Underpinning the success of the initial response was the city council’s emergency planning process, which depended heavily on leading members of key departments coming together on a cascade principle set out by the existing emergency plan (engineers and building surveyors, operational and building services staff, city catering facilities, the press office). The emergency control centre in the town hall was operational within half an hour of the explosion. It operated 24 hours a day in the initial stages, then 18 hours a day:
The speed and efficiency of the City Council’s response was due in no small part to it having a dedicated emergency control centre. This is equipped with 26 operating positions, 48 dedicated telephone extensions, the ability to work on three telephone systems, plus the provision of four radio networks and the necessary equipment to support this size of operation (Davey, 1996: 4).

On the day of the incident a helpline and a counselling line were set up, and this yielded hundreds of offers of help and money.

If there had been no pre-determined strategies in place for dealing with dangerous buildings, it would have been impossible so rapidly to open up the greater part of the area affected by the blast. A number of modifications to the pre-determined plan were necessary, mainly due to the scale of the disaster. Because the ‘working area’ was so large, it was important to inform the emergency services exactly where surveyors and others working in the cordon were at any one time. There was always the danger of debris falling from ledges and canopies, and it was important that people could be effectively told to evacuate the area in such an event. An audible warning system needed to be put in place because of the deafening noise of security alarms, many of which continued to ring for several days. Furthermore, in order to limit the possibility of looting, all photographs released were vetted through the City Architect’s Department. Despite the modifications that were made, experience following the bomb demonstrated the value of the pre-determined plan, and it was felt the local authority had been successful in achieving its brief. The plan gave officers a way forward, and while some circumstances could not have been anticipated given the scale of the impact, it was felt that the work could not realistically have been completed any quicker.

All parties involved in the disaster response acknowledged the benefit of training and where improvements could be made in future. Police staff at all levels had been on courses and had the confidence to act without waiting for direction, which was of paramount importance. The city council had taken part in a nationally organised exercise with the emergency services of neighbouring authorities in autumn 1995, and this was felt to be hugely beneficial in familiarising the appropriate people with the control room and the systems which had to be put in place. This exercise had used many of the departments involved after the bomb, which was also an advantage. However, the ‘dry-run’ had not included the City Architect’s Department, whose role in the emergency response was crucial. A lot of ‘best practice’ has been identified, however, as a result of the bomb, and the senior police officers and emergency planning officers involved are active on regular training courses across the country.

**Euro ’96 and evacuation**

On the weekend of the explosion, Manchester was hosting the European Football Championships (Euro ’96), with Russia and Germany scheduled to play the day after the blast. The structures, processes and additional levels of manpower set in place for Euro ’96 proved valuable in facilitating the response to the bomb. Arrangements already existed, for example, for local authority officers to meet the police every day, and emergency accommodation that had been reserved at student residences within the city was subsequently used for those made homeless by the blast.
While the emergency response to the bomb blast in Manchester is generally considered to have been successful, with no loss of life and with a city centre that continued to function efficiently if sub-optimally, a number of lessons were learnt from the emergency planning response to the devastation caused.

Immediately before the explosion there were potential problems in evacuating the area, with some members of the public failing to take the situation seriously or respond quickly, assuming it to be a false alarm. Given the scale and impermeability of the area, there were problems in communicating effectively. While police toured the area in vehicles and used a helicopter to inform people to evacuate the city centre, and individual stores responded well to their emergency planning procedures, a few people were still in the area very close to the bomb when it went off, and some of these were badly injured. There were also problems in maintaining the inner cordon once it had been established. Even when people knew there was a bomb, they still wanted to pursue their own particular agendas. While a proposed CCTV scheme was in the process of being planned for the commercial core, it was not yet in place at the time of the bomb, and this hindered police checking evacuation procedures at street level. Consequently, building a loudspeaker system into the camera system to facilitate communication is being considered and a review undertaken of safe distances in setting up cordons in the light of injuries from flying glass.

**Communication and cordon access**

The city council’s emergency planning team, who had been contacted by the police, were still travelling into the city when the bomb exploded. In retrospect they believed there should have been better liaison at the outset with the police, ambulance and fire services to help ensure a fully integrated response. Resource constraints, however, encourage collaboration and there is evidence of the local authority emergency planning function being incorporated more fully into traditional emergency services.

Ensuring access for those people who needed to get through the cordons, while keeping out any who did not require access, was a problem on the day of the blast, and after. On the day of the bomb, people with emergency planning functions, as well as building surveyors travelling into the city centre, had difficulty in getting through the roadblocks of the outer cordon. To overcome this problem a number of people with emergency planning functions have now been issued with police passes to get through roadblocks.

In the days following the bomb, there was a problem of getting appropriate access for surveyors, owner’s agents and contractors into the inner cordon, while preventing access by members of the public. This was resolved by nobody being allowed into the area without permission by the appropriate senior officer in the City Architect’s Department, who co-ordinated the system of passes. This system allowed some control over the *non bona fide* contractors in the city (who gathered like locusts, particularly glaziers) who threatened to block the core with their vehicles. There were isolated examples of contractors managing to break through the cordon before being arrested, and a limited amount of looting took place despite the police presence and the real physical danger to those involved.

Nevertheless, overall the way in which the exclusion zone was controlled and subsequently opened up, having allowed access to key holders and contractors to
secure buildings, with the city council undertaking this work where necessary, was critical and was generally successful in preventing further injury, physical danger or looting.

**The scale of the disaster**

The major constraint to an effective emergency response was the scale of the disaster, with the pre-determined plan not envisaging the extent of the physical damage or the response by those most directly affected: ‘We never anticipated that 5–10,000 people would come to the town hall . . . or the 15,000 calls received in the first week.’ There was conflict in the immediate aftermath of the bomb between the need to implement the pre-determined plan in order to be able to re-open the city centre as soon as possible and the pressure to respond to urgent requests from individuals who needed access to buildings. As a result of the scale and impact of the blast, it was not possible to plan in detail for more than a day at a time. In addition, there was considerable scope for disagreement given the number of organisations involved. In such a situation where small businesses in particular were traumatised with little or no insurance cover and with all their resources tied up in unsold stock, appealing for calm in meetings with owners was not necessarily the most effective system of communication.

**Lack of structures for recovery**

The effect of a large bomb in the retail and commercial centre of a major city demonstrated the need to incorporate the recovery of the area into the emergency-planning framework. Everything that happened in the first hours after the blast was the result of what was generally felt to be very effective emergency procedures. It quickly became clear, however, that the existing plan was too limited, serving the city well in terms of communication, in its capacity to support, co-ordinate and liaise between the police and other statutory services, and in responding to some of the immediate needs of members of the public, but it was not geared up to facilitate the recovery process. Nevertheless, even though the recovery process began as an emergency response, it had become a formal commitment within the first fortnight, and was rapidly followed by the establishment of specific instruments to deliver the renewal programme.

**Conclusion**

This paper has focused on the immediate aftermath of the bomb, with attention being focused on the response of main players to the initial emergency, and the key instruments put in place for the city’s subsequent rehabilitation. The case of Manchester illustrates that rather than representing separate stages, the response and recovery phases were overlapping and intertwined. The process of establishing structures to facilitate the long-term recovery of the city centre was initiated while the response to immediate problems thrown up by the devastation continued. Similarly, some aspects of the post-disaster response continued for many months, with the city’s building surveyors, for example, still having some involvement until Easter 1997, and the search for alternative business premises continuing intensively for six months.
It is clear that the city council played a pivotal role in developing a range of initiatives both short and long term to ensure the rapid restoration of the city centre, with important lessons being learnt about how crucial it is for local authorities to have direct control over a range of services. The efficiency of the response demonstrates the need for core staffing in handling emergencies — to be able to get the highways department in to close roads, and to be able to use the city’s own operational and building service staff to secure premises where owners had failed to do so. City architects and building control people were absolutely central to the process of dealing with dangerous buildings, and the plans they put in place proved invaluable in getting the city core back in business. Had this function been privatised the process of re-opening the city would have been extremely difficult.

Furthermore, the speed and co-ordination of the recovery process in the first days after the blast demonstrated Manchester City Council’s decision to retain its own emergency planning unit to have been a wise one. While the police, fire and ambulance services were the first to deal with the emergency, it is inevitably the local authority that provides the continuity and in-house expertise for recovery, a task which in the case of Manchester will take over five years to complete. Moreover, the recovery, and subsequent regeneration process has demonstrated the importance of local authorities in an overall strategic framework setting and co-ordinating role.

A successful initial emergency response, and subsequent rehabilitation, was only achieved, however, through collaborative working between key players. Despite the major physical damage and disruption caused, there were no further injuries following the blast, there was virtually no looting of damaged properties, the bulk of the city centre re-opened within days of the blast, and most small businesses survived despite having lost their premises — and in many cases — their stock. Partnership working that built upon previous and ongoing experience within the city, proved invaluable, both in relation to emergency planning and the subsequent renewal process, with the whole process contributing towards making Manchester a more competitive and liveable city for the millennium.

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References


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