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Fire & Rescue Service**

**Protecting Our Community**

# Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service Primark Incident 28 August 2018



**Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer  
Aidan Jennings**



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‘A huge fire has broken out at a Primark store in Belfast, with shoppers evacuated from the historic building after smelling smoke. The building has been completely engulfed by flames and witnesses have said they can 'hear the structure collapsing into itself.'

Flames were initially seen coming from the top of the 233 year-old Bank Buildings after the blaze started at around 11am and the fire service has since confirmed that there are ‘structural concerns’.

Up to 100 firefighters and 14 Fire Appliances are battling the blaze, with dramatic footage showing smoke pouring out of the roof.’

**Belfast Live 28 August 2018**



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- At 11:00:48 hrs on 28 August 2018, NIFRS received the first call to Primark, Bank Buildings.
- The pre-determined attendance of two pumps and an officer were mobilised within 25 seconds, with the first appliances in attendance approximately 3 minutes later.





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- At 11:14:57 hrs the first assistance message was sent to RCC with a request to make pumps 8 for manpower and water.
- At 11:17:01hrs an Informative message was sent to RCC – “Well developed fire – currently establishing a bridgehead, all persons evacuated from the building”.
- At 11:22:23 hrs the incident log records that the 8 pump make up along with an Aerial Ladder Platform was in attendance.
- At 11:31:44 hrs at FRSHQ I was paged and informed of a make pumps 8 at Bank Buildings, Belfast.



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- At the height of operations on that afternoon 14 pumping appliances, 3 aerial ladder platforms, 2 CSU's, 2 HVP's, NIFRS SRT and NIAS HART were deployed to support the operational response.
- A total of 302 firefighters attended the incident over the next 3 days with 63 appliances mobilised between 28 August and 1 September 2018.
- There were 2 accidents to personnel on the fireground.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-northern-ireland-45336131/drone-footage-of-belfast-primark-blaze>



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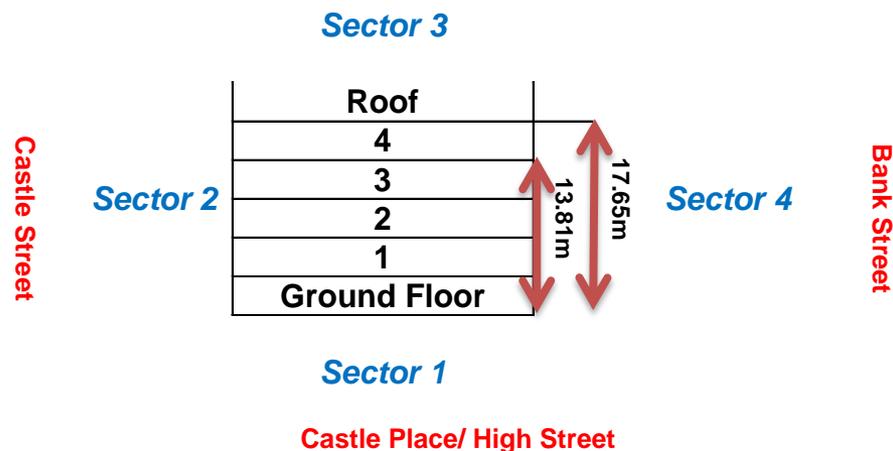
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## Primark Bank Buildings and Commonwealth House





## Firefighting sectors and building elevation



**Figure 1: Outline of Primark, Bank Building, Firefighting Sectors and Street locations**



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Firefighting operations brought a number of specific challenges including;

- a well developed fire spreading quickly across the roof and between floors.
- the availability of sufficient water supplies to support the scale of operations.
- structural integrity of the building and potential for collapse.
- as a construction site, presence of building materials, undetermined number and location of gas cylinders, builders skips, scaffolding, tower crane.



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- the creation of flashover conditions.
- high fire loading.
- the persons reported update.
- large open spaces.
- members of the public
- prevention of fire spread to adjacent buildings, most specifically the Anderson McAuley and Tesco Metro premises.





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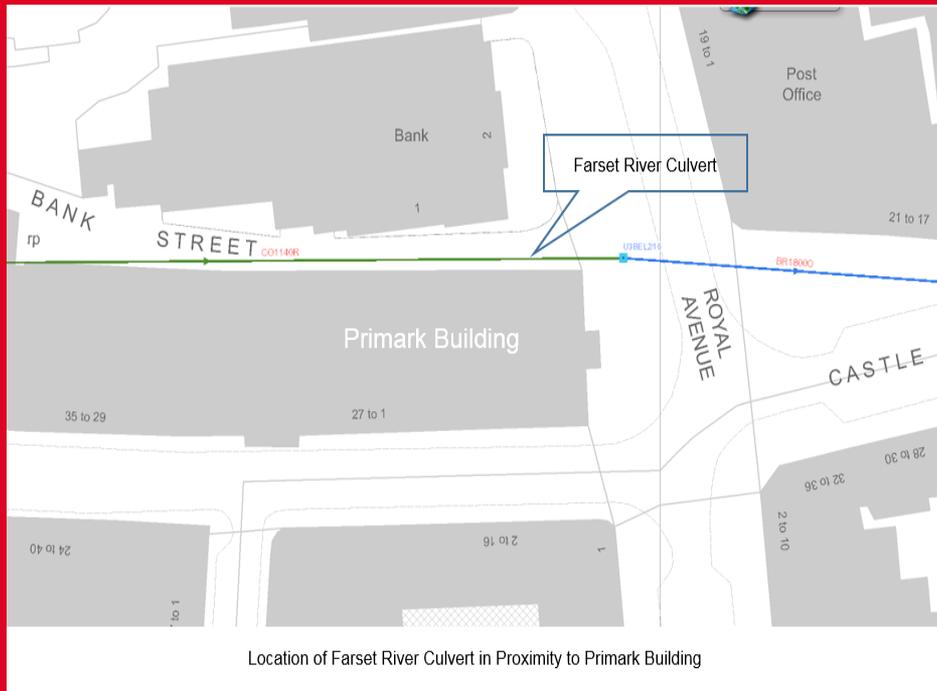
- Each of these challenges had a direct impact on firefighter safety and on a number of occasions firefighters were withdrawn from internal firefighting operations on Tuesday afternoon to prevent injury or loss of life.
- To maintain Firefighter safety, safety officers were established at each sector. Firefighting operations became concentrated within the protected staircases at Castle Street and Bank Street.
- A full accountability system was established at each sector.
- Safety Officers and Sector Commanders were briefed with a focus on fire development and structural integrity of the building.



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At the height of operations on 28 August 2018 up to 25,000 litres per minute of water was being used in firefighting operations



Location of Farsset River Culvert in Proximity to Primark Building

## Water Supplies

- Mains fire hydrants supply.
- River Farset.
- River Lagan.
- High Volume Pumps



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## High Volume Pumping

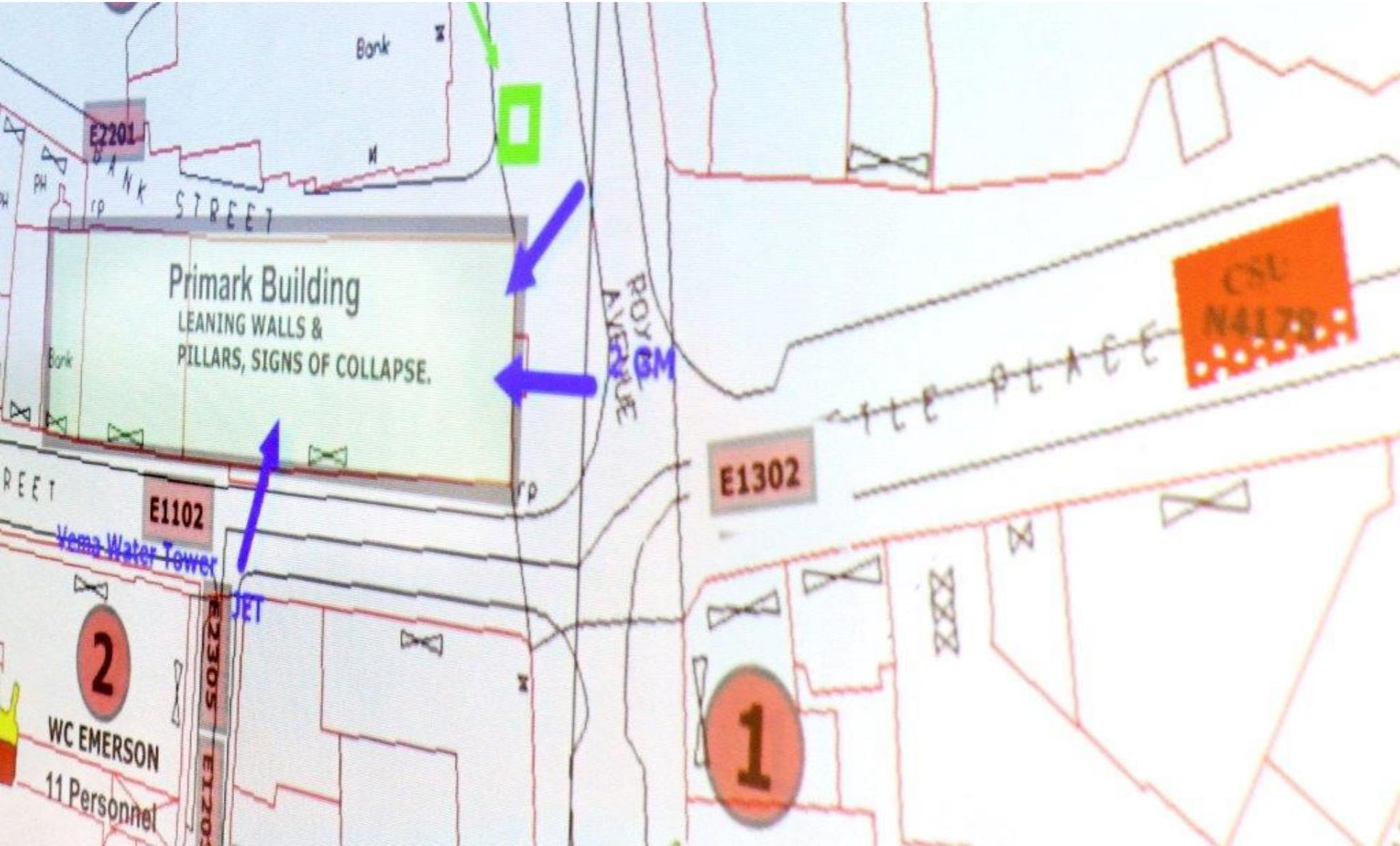


- NIFRS has 3 High Volume Pumps
- Whitla, Armagh and Omagh Fire Stations
- Module One - Hydro-sub pump sled with 7000 L/min capacity, and a second sled containing 1km of hose.
- Module 2 two sleds each containing 1km of hose each.
- ancillary equipment



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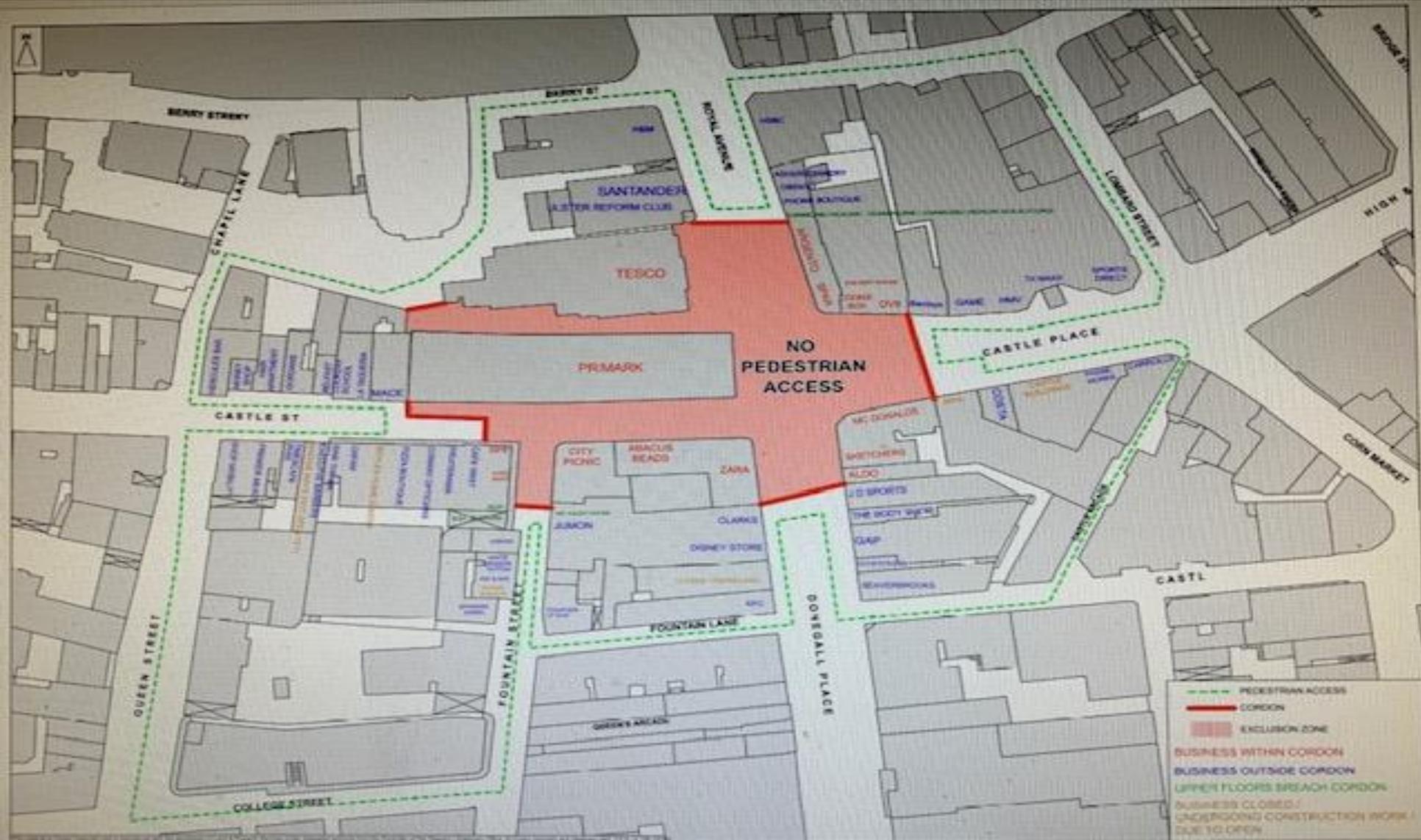
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- In the event of escalating fire conditions deemed to present a risk to firefighter safety, safety officers were briefed to withdraw crews using the ACME thunder whistle and RV at CSU for accountability.
- Firefighting operations prevented fire spread to the 30,000 square foot new extension (known as Commonwealth House) to the rear of Primark Bank Buildings.
- Operations were scaled down in stages over the following days with NIFRS handing over the building to Primark structural engineers and control of the outer cordon to a Primark security contractor at 18:05 hours on 31 August 2018.



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## Normal Service Delivery

- On Tuesday 28 August 2018, NIFRS received 123 calls, 12 of these calls related to the Primark incident
- NIFRS mobilised to 88 incidents
- In addition to the Belfast personnel, crews attended from Lisburn, Carrickfergus, Portadown, Newtownards, Bangor, Lurgan, Ballymena, Kilrea, Armagh, Antrim, Glengormley
- Crews from other Fire Stations were brought into Belfast to provide standby cover.



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- Between 11.00hrs on 28 August 2018 and 18.00hrs on 31 August 2018, NIFRS mobilised 351 appliances to more than 250 other incidents.
- The operation was being supported behind the scenes within our Regional Control Centre, Operations Support, Transport Department and Corporate Communications Department.
- The impact of such a protracted incident on On-Call firefighters and their employers.



## Multi-Agency Response

NIFRS have worked in both the response and recovery phases of the incident with a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies.

Health & Safety Executive	Department for Communities	Rapid Relief Team
PSNI	G4S	Skywatch
Translink	Phoenix Gas	NIE
NIAS	NI Water	Rivers Agency
Belfast City Council	Red Cross	Public Health Agency
Belfast City Centre Management	Department for Infrastructure – Roads	Belfast Emergency Preparedness Group



## Business Recovery - Salvage Operations

- A number of issues were identified during the first meeting of the Recovery Co-ordinating Group on 29 August 2018 at 09:00 hours.
- Stores which remained unsecured or had accessible cash due to the speed of the evacuation of the inner cordon.
- First Trust Bank identified the ATM's at the front of Tesco Metro as a potential vulnerability which would require action.
- Primark staff lockers in the days before the incident had been relocated to Commonwealth House. NIFRS assisted recovered personal items to staff from Primark
- Similar salvage operations were conducted with Zara, Tesco's, Abacus Beads,Argento, Spar and City Picnic.



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## Business Recovery – Fire Safety

- A number of premises outside the cordon were identified through the Business Recovery meeting which may be unable to open for business as they had front doors outside of the cordon, however rear emergency exits doors were within the cordon.
- NIFRS Fire Safety Inspecting Officers attended four premises (Disney, Clarks shoes, and two premises in Diamond House) to carry out fire safety audits with the outcome being that the premises could be kept open for business purposes with only minor amendments to their fire risk assessments.



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## NIFRS Recovery

- Media
- Vehicle inventories
- Damaged and lost equipment
- Fire ground feeding
- Personnel welfare
- Accident investigation
- Fire investigation
- Resourcing recovery operations
- Debrief and learning





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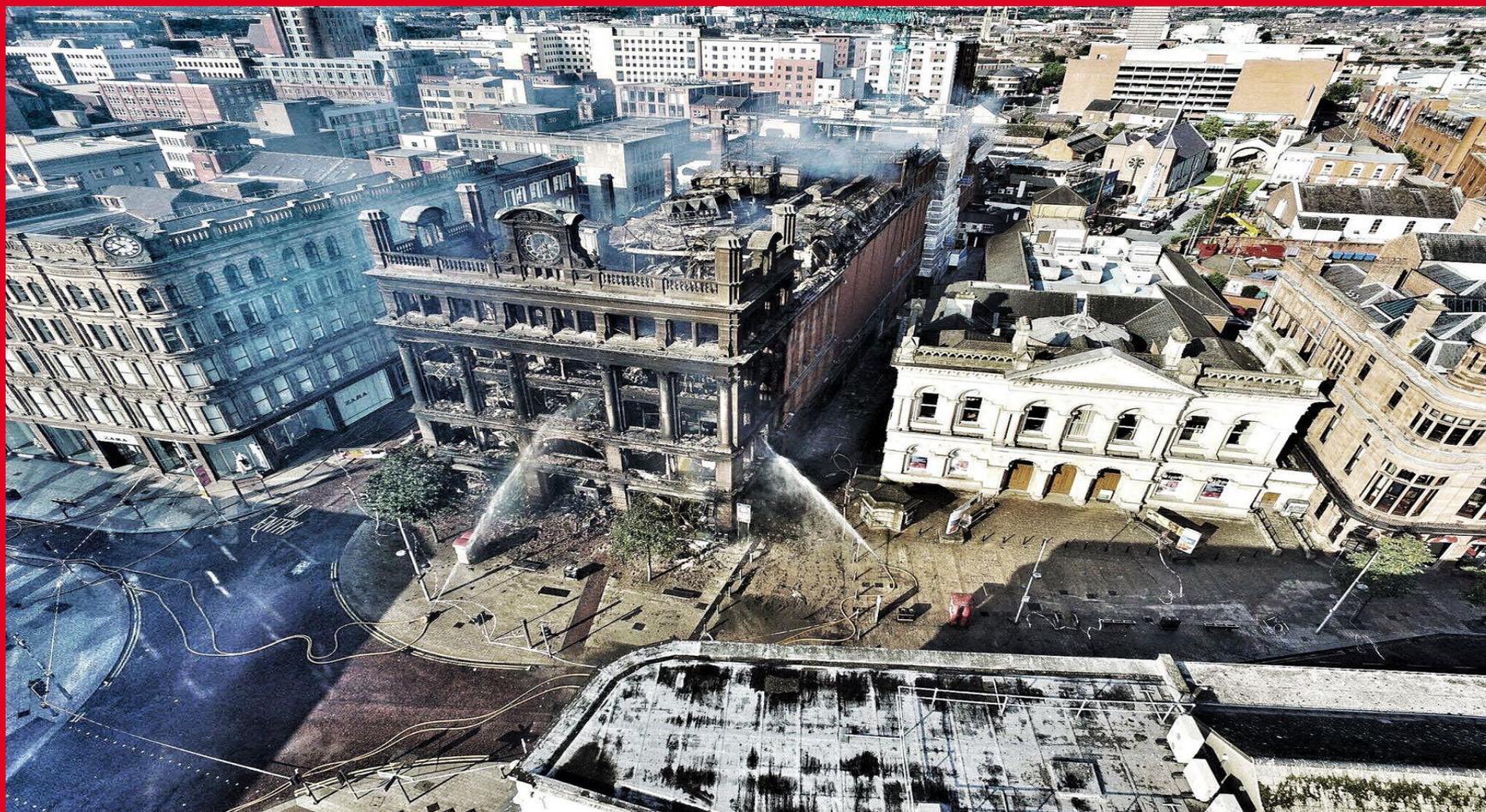
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- The fire investigation began on 29 August 2018 with NIFRS appointing two level two Fire Investigators.
- The investigation is being conducted in conjunction with the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, as in addition to Bank Building being a relevant premises under The Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, the building was also at the time of the fire, a construction site and therefore within the scope of The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016.
- The standard timeline for completion of an investigation is 28 days however the complexity of this incident has extended this investigation.



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I will remember this incident for the expertise, resilience and dedication of our Firefighters and staff from right across NIFRS as well as the outpouring of kindness, generosity and public - spiritedness which underpinned and helped reinforce our operational response.



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**THANK YOU  
QUESTIONS?**

