
STATES OF JERSEY



BREAKDOWN OF RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE JERSEY SEARCH AND RESCUE COMMUNITY: INDEPENDENT REPORT

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by the Council of Ministers**

STATES GREFFE

Independent Report

Breakdown of Relationships

within the

Jersey Search and Rescue Community

This independent report is commissioned by the States of Jersey
Department of Economic Development, Tourism, Sport & Culture

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1.0 Terms of Reference

1.1 The terms of reference supplied to the author were:

TOR 1

To gather information and compile a report into the breakdown in relationships in the Jersey search and rescue community including, but not limited to the events leading up to

- a. the walkout of the St. Helier Lifeboat Station volunteer crew on 7th April 2017 following the dismissal, by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (the RNLI), of the St. Helier coxswain,**
- b. the subsequent decision of the RNLI to reinstate the St. Helier coxswain on 28th June 2017, and**
- c. the withdrawal from service of the St. Helier All-weather Lifeboat 'George Sullivan' on 17th November 2017;**

TOR 2

To review and report upon whether the Government response from April 2017 onwards to the events cited above were sufficient to mitigate the risk of lives being lost at sea; and

TOR 3

With reference to sub-paragraphs TOR 1 and TOR 2 above, to make recommendations with a view to further improving the resilience of the Island's capacity to save lives at sea.

2.0 Information Gathering

2.1 The information gathered to compile this report was derived from both document review and one-to-one interviews in Jersey over a 3-day period and included, but was not limited to, input from Jersey Coastguard, Jersey Fire and Rescue Service, the Jersey Harbour Master and volunteers from the Jersey RNLI operations team. The RNLI also participated providing written response to questions submitted. The information was provided voluntarily.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Relationships within the Jersey Search and Rescue (SAR) Community appear to have deteriorated over many years, dating back at least 10 years prior to 2017, when they completely broke down between the local RNLI volunteer crew in St. Helier, certain organisations and key personnel.
- 3.2 The catalyst for the recent events of 2017 was an alleged complaint that the RNLI St Helier Inshore Lifeboat (ILB) was self-launched by the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station Coxswain and not at the request of Jersey Coastguard (JCG) on 28th October 2016.
- 3.3 This resulted in an RNLI investigation which found whilst the boat was self-launched without being requested by Jersey Coastguard, RNLI procedures were mostly followed and therefore the complaint regarding the self-launch allegation was not upheld.
- 3.4 It was however determined during the investigation that due to significant breaches of the volunteer code, a total breakdown in communications and a serious breakdown in working relationships resulted in the St Helier RNLI Coxswain being 'stood down' by the RNLI. The entire St Helier crew subsequently 'walked out' in protest at the perceived treatment of the Coxswain.
- 3.5 The RNLI reacted by providing a relief lifeboat crew to maintain cover at the St Helier Station.
- 3.6 An appeal was made and considered by the RNLI whilst at the same time, all relevant parties including the States of Jersey (SoJ), Jersey Coastguard, the RNLI and members of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat station met. It was broadly acknowledged that all parties could have intervened at an earlier stage prior to the breakdown in relations and it was agreed to put the past behind them and move forward.
- 3.7 On this basis, the former Coxswain and crew were reinstated by the RNLI at the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station.
- 3.8 Relationships continued to fail between the RNLI and the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station crew which resulted in a complaint being lodged by the crew about the RNLI Area Manager's conduct during the previous investigation. This complaint was considered by the RNLI but was not upheld.
- 3.9 Discussions followed between the RNLI and the St Helier RNLI Lifeboat Station crew during the week of 6th November 2017. These discussions ultimately resulted in the RNLI closing the St Helier Lifeboat Station and the crew were stood down on 17th November 2017. The RNLI also re-positioned the all-weather lifeboat (ALB) 'George Sullivan' from St Helier and returned the vessel to Poole for servicing whilst a local crew was not in place.

- 3.10 Subsequent focus shifted on restoring the RNLI ILB at St Helier by working closely with the St Catherine's RNLI Lifeboat station and the Jersey Fire and Rescue Service (JFRS). An RNLI ILB capability was declared at St Helier on 4th December 2017.
- 3.11 The RNLI returned the ALB to St Helier on 5th December 2017 and the RNLI has since been working on recruiting a new crew for the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station ALB. The ALB has been on service using UK staff crew and local volunteers.

4.0 Detailed findings/observations

4.1 Ref: TOR 1a

- 4.1.1 Relationships have deteriorated between certain parties within the Jersey SAR Community over a period of approximately 10 years. These parties were primarily individuals within the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station volunteer crew but also more widely the organisations of JCG, the RNLI St Catherine's Lifeboat Station and the JFRS.
- 4.1.2 There has been inconsistent oversight and management of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station by RNLI headquarters, resulting in a lack of leadership and guidance at the station. This essentially resulted in the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station being left to its own devices without appropriate scrutiny from the parent organisation.
- 4.1.3 In recent years the local management of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station has largely been ineffective and has not functioned as it should. The formal local management structure of a Lifeboat Management Group with a Lifeboat Operations Manager (LOM) leading the wider operational team was not properly enforced.
- 4.1.4 Despite the best efforts of a succession of LOMs, the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station continued to suffer from an inability to manage at a local scale. A culture existed where the Coxswain was effectively 'in charge' without oversight or opportunity for challenge. This situation strengthened in recent years when a well-respected LOM was replaced, allowing the Coxswain to further influence the station. In defence of the Coxswain, due to the lack of management, some form of leadership and decision making was required however, this may not have aligned to the RNLI policies and procedures.
- 4.1.5 In recent years, a 'toxic culture' ensued where members of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station would not challenge decisions made by the Coxswain, in fear of reprisals. A 'selective cult' was described to exist. Behaviour which could be construed by some as 'Cyber bullying' on social media was prevalent.
- 4.1.6 The RNLI recognises that governance and oversight of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station was lacking for many years. Attempts were made to correct this matter with the introduction of more frequent and focused management. It is possible that this concentrated attention, after many years of very little presence, overburdened the station and its members. A plethora of policies and rules which had not been

implemented and adhered to, descended upon the station with little explanation which may have been interpreted by the Coxswain and others as being critical of the existing operation.

- 4.1.7 This also coincided with a period where Jersey Radio was re branded and re modelled as a Coastguard service to meet Jersey Coastal State responsibility. This also resulted in process and procedures being formalised. It would appear that through this process Jersey Coastguard and several Harbour Masters became remote and failed to understand the importance of maintaining local relationships.
- 4.1.8 Communications between JCG and the RNLI have historically been primarily at a local level, without RNLI headquarters oversight. Furthermore, most communications appear to have been with the Coxswain and not the Lifeboat Management Group or former LOM, further fuelling the issue of lack of oversight.
- 4.1.9 An informal complaint was made by the 'then' Jersey Harbour Master to the Chief Executive of the RNLI regarding an alleged 'self-launch' of the St Helier ILB. The RNLI CEO instructed an investigation into the allegation be carried out.
- 4.1.10 It is understood that the investigation determined the 'self-launch' was mostly appropriate and authorised in accordance with RNLI procedures despite the ILB not being requested by Jersey Coastguard. However, due to 'breaches of the volunteer code, breakdown in communications and a serious breakdown in working relationships', the St Helier Coxswain was 'stood down'.
- 4.1.11 With the benefit of hindsight, given the informal nature of the complaint made by the 'then' Jersey Harbour Master over the RNLI 'self-launch', the formal investigation undertaken by the RNLI should have quickly determined there to be no case to answer and terminated at that point. The issue was between the RNLI and Jersey Coastguard as the ILB was not requested by the Coastguard. This should have further highlighted the need for the RNLI to instil better management at the St. Helier station.
- 4.1.12 The decision for the entire volunteer crew of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station to walkout on 7th April 2017 is reported as not being unanimous however, fear of reprisal and behaviour which could be construed by some as 'cyber-bullying' on social media resulted in no crew willing to speak out.

4.2 [Ref: TOR 1b](#)

- 4.2.1 The subsequent decision of the RNLI to reinstate the St Helier Coxswain on 28th June 2017 was because of a series of events and detailed discussions.
- 4.2.2 The Coxswain appealed the decision of the RNLI to 'stand him down' and a senior officer of the RNLI from Northern Ireland was appointed to hear the appeal.

- 4.2.3 During this appeal, several meetings took place between the various parties, including States of Jersey, RNLI Management (both headquarters and local), Jersey Coastguard, the Coxswain and volunteer crew.
- 4.2.4 The States of Jersey were successful in mediating the process between all parties. It was broadly acknowledged that all parties could have intervened at an earlier stage prior to the complete breakdown in relations and it was agreed to put the past behind them and move forward to allow for the reinstatement of the Coxswain.
- 4.2.5 In addition, at a meeting attended by most of the RNLI volunteer crew, it was agreed that the Coxswain and crew would all sign the RNLI Volunteer Code of Conduct and agree to abide to it.
- 4.2.6 As a result of this successful mediation by the States of Jersey, the RNLI reinstated the St Helier Coxswain and volunteer crew on 28th June 2017.
- 4.2.7 Despite a resolution being achieved at this point, concerns were voiced over the ability for individuals in the St. Helier crew to put the matter in the past without seeking 'revenge'.

4.3 [Ref: TOR 1c](#)

- 4.3.1 A complaint was immediately made by the volunteer crew of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station over the conduct of the RNLI Area Manager during the previous investigation.
- 4.3.2 RNLI headquarters considered the complaint over several weeks and determined that it would not be upheld. Allegations that the conduct of the Area Manager was inappropriate and that proper process was not followed were unsubstantiated. In fact, an interview between the Area Manager and the Coxswain was secretly recorded by the friend accompanying the Coxswain which, reportedly, confirms the conduct of the Area Manager to be entirely appropriate. The recording was not available when compiling this report.
- 4.3.3 During the week of 6th November 2017, the RNLI Director of Community Lifesaving & Fundraising met with the volunteer crew of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station to advise that after investigation the complaint over the Area Manager was not upheld.
- 4.3.4 During the meeting, the Coxswain reportedly advised the RNLI that he and the crew wished to resign and operate an independent lifeboat service. Approximately only 7 or 8 crew were in attendance. Again, this decision is reported to not be unanimous and some volunteer crew wished to remain part of the RNLI. Again, fear of reprisal and behaviour which could be construed by some as 'cyber-bullying' on social media resulted in no crew willing to speak out. The RNLI Director of Community Lifesaving & Fundraising acknowledged this declaration and indicated the RNLI would not oppose this action. She advised that the RNLI would consider their position and report back later in the week.

- 4.3.5 Prior to reporting back, during the interim period, social media was used by some of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station crew to make derogatory comments about the RNLI and expressed that the 'relationship was broken'. This view was confirmed in a letter to the RNLI.
- 4.3.6 Given the fractious relationship, the RNLI Director of Community Lifesaving & Fundraising asked the crew if they wished to continue to volunteer under 'the RNLI flag'. They subsequently indicated their desire to leave the RNLI and establish a lifeboat service independent of the RNLI, however also declared their willingness to continue to crew the RNLI lifeboats at St Helier and follow RNLI procedures and policies until they could set up their own independent lifeboat.
- 4.3.7 On the 17th November 2017, having considered the 'broken' relationship, the position of the crew, and the RNLI's ability to safely and effectively manage the St Helier station, the RNLI stood the St Helier crew down and closed the station.
- 4.3.8 With the station closed, the decision was made by the RNLI to reposition their St Helier ALB to Poole for a brief period to undergo a service.

4.4 [Ref: TOR 2](#)

- 4.4.1 Following the events of April 2017, The States of Jersey and the Harbour Master organised a series of workshops designed to facilitate more collaborative working amongst the Search and Rescue (SAR) community and thereby avoid the situation of the past. These workshops have proved extremely productive despite a lack of engagement from the St Helier crew (although the Deputy Launching Authority individuals did attend).
- 4.4.2 Co-ordinated by the Harbour Master, the States of Jersey, Ports of Jersey Limited, Jersey Coastguard, the Emergency Planning Officer, JFRS and RNLI worked collaboratively to ensure appropriate contingency plans were reviewed, modified and effective.
- 4.4.3 During the period where the RNLI St Helier Crew were not declared (until 28th June 2017), the RNLI provided a professional relief lifeboat crew to Jersey to maintain ALB cover. It was acknowledged at the time that this relief crew would lack the local knowledge of the volunteer crew and mitigations were put in place.
- 4.4.4 Following the events of November 2017 where the entire RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station crew were stood down and the RNLI re-positioned the St Helier ALB back to Poole for servicing, a further risk assessment was conducted by the Harbour Master.
- 4.4.5 It was assessed that existing assets remaining available to Jersey were adequate to provide appropriate SAR responses in Jersey waters. This assessment considered the use of remaining RNLI assets, JFRS inshore rescue boats, Ports of Jersey Limited – Marine Section and MANCHEPLAN initiated support from flank stations.

- 4.4.6 The risk assessment concluded that the overall ability to allocate an appropriate asset was not impacted, however there was the potential for an increased transit time dependent on weather and tidal conditions and the possibility that protection of property may not always be prioritised.
- 4.4.7 Jersey assets remained available for inshore and coastal incidents and offshore capability from Guernsey and France through MANCHEPLAN.
- 4.4.8 Since November, the RNLI, JCG, JRFS and the SoJ have worked very closely to implement arrangements resulting in the RNLI St Helier ILB being available on 4th December 2017. This work consisted of establishing training and interoperability between existing locally trained volunteers of the RNLI and JFRS.
- 4.4.9 In an effort to re-establish an ALB capability in St Helier, a core of local Jersey volunteers underwent intensive training in early December 2017 to allow them to crew the ALB, in support of RNLI staff Coxswain, Navigator and Engineer. This provision was made available when the weather conditions were forecast to be outside of the operating limits of the RNLI IRB (Beaufort Force 7).
- 4.4.10 In summary, risk assessment rightly determined that there was an increased risk in the ability to protect property only and even so, this risk was tolerable.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 There has been inconsistent oversight and management of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station by RNLI headquarters, resulting in a lack of non-operational leadership and guidance at the station. This essentially resulted in the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station being left to its own devices without appropriate scrutiny from the parent organisation.
- 5.2 Recently, local management of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station has largely been ineffective. The formal local management structure of a Lifeboat Management Group with a Lifeboat Operations Manager (LOM) leading the wider operational team, was not properly enforced. Despite the best efforts of a succession of LOMs, the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station continued to suffer from poor local management. A culture existed where the Coxswain was effectively 'in charge' without oversight or opportunity for challenge from the LOM, which strengthened in recent years when a well-respected LOM was forced out and replaced.
- 5.3 In defence of the Coxswain, the lack of management required some form of leadership and decision making however, this may not have aligned to the RNLI policies and procedures.
- 5.4 Since 2008, a 'toxic culture' ensued where members of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station would not challenge decisions made by the Coxswain, for fear of reprisals.

- 5.5 Communications between Jersey Coastguard and the RNLI have historically been primarily at a local level, without RNLI headquarters oversight. This is not appropriate given the increasing demands for compliance and governance.
- 5.6 The informal complaint made by the 'then' Jersey Harbour Master to the RNLI CEO over an RNLI 'self-launch' should not have been investigated and led to conspiracy theories around the matter. There is a poor understanding of the relationship between Jersey Coastguard and RNLI declared assets which fuelled the conspiracy theories.
- 5.7 The States of Jersey were successful in mediating the process between all parties. It was acknowledged that all parties could have intervened at an earlier stage prior to the breakdown in relations and it was agreed to put the past behind them and move forward. Despite a resolution being achieved at this point, concerns were voiced over the ability for individuals in the St. Helier crew to put the matter in the past without seeking 'revenge'.
- 5.8 The conduct of the RNLI during investigations was satisfactory however, it was construed by many to be cumbersome and lacking in understanding of local issues and respect.
- 5.9 Leading up to 17th November 2017, social media was used by some of the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station crew to make derogatory comments about the RNLI and confirming that the 'relationship was broken'.
- 5.10 Given the state of the relationship, the RNLI Director of Community Lifesaving & Fundraising asked the crew if they wished to continue to volunteer under 'the RNLI flag'. They subsequently indicated their desire to leave the RNLI and establish a lifeboat service independent of the RNLI, however also declared their willingness to continue to crew the RNLI lifeboats at St Helier and follow RNLI procedures and policies until they could set up their own independent lifeboat.
- 5.11 On the 17th November 2017, having considered the position of the crew and the RNLI's ability to safely and effectively manage the St Helier station, the RNLI stood the St Helier crew down.
- 5.12 Once it was clear the RNLI could not safely operate the St. Helier Station as the crew had made their feelings and intentions clear, the decision by the RNLI to re-position the St Helier AWB to Poole for servicing was entirely theirs to make and did not result in risk to life, however the ability to save property was impaired.
- 5.13 The recent collaborative effort to re-establish full service provision should be recognised and congratulated.
- 5.14 The RNLI should remain a major partner in Jersey's SAR Community. The St Catherine's Station and Beach Lifeguard service operate with none of the issues experienced over many years in St. Helier.

5.15 The events of 2017 were essentially an internal staffing matter within the RNLI St. Helier Lifeboat Station. At no point were lives put at risk and the issues are now in the past. The key point is that lessons have been learned and increased communication and the establishment of an open environment where issues can be raised in a safe manner is now in place which would prevent a reoccurrence. The SAR community is, by its very nature a collaborative one where no one asset has primacy and the ability to work as a team to established standards and practices is vital.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Memorandums of understanding (MoU) should be established between Jersey Coastguard and all SAR partners to define relationships, asset availability, expectations and common lines to take.

6.2 In addition to a MoU between Jersey Coastguard and the RNLI, specifically, Jersey Coastguard, the States of Jersey and the RNLI should agree a routine communications strategy to ensure the correct level of engagement at strategic, tactical and operational levels is in place. This should prevent 'blurred lines' which will otherwise almost inevitably occur in small communities.

6.3 The RNLI should continue with its progress to provide a more regular presence of management in Jersey by way of the Area Manager and Area Lifesaving Manager roles. It is acknowledged this was already in progress prior to these events.

6.4 The RNLI should consider a joint Jersey RNLI Management Group to provide oversight, governance and leadership to all RNLI interests in Jersey. This is essentially the informal default position adopted over recent months and has proved successful.

6.5 The local SAR committee should be formalised with terms of reference agreed and published. Membership should reach a broad base and not be limited only to organisations providing assets. For example, these could include representations from boating associations, fishermen, ferry operators, education, health, parish officials and any other interested parties.

6.6 Policies should be reviewed and re-issued by all organisations for individuals to be able to report welfare matters in confidence and without reprisal. One-to-one meetings is an effective option to be considered.

6.7 Policies around the use of social media should be reviewed and re-issued by all organisations to attempt to prevent misinformation and deformation of organisations or individuals.

6.8 A formal Committee of Enquiry, whilst ultimately a matter for the States Assembly, is considered unnecessary at a professional level given the amount of information available in the public domain and that essentially, the events of 2017 were an internal matter for the RNLI St Helier Lifeboat Station.