

Good morning Ladies & Gentlemen.

**I'm delighted to be with you all today at the
European Communication Summit.**

In our line of work, we spend so much time talking to outside audiences – as of course we must. But it's useful every now and then actually to talk to each other! This Summit provides a really valuable opportunity to do this - and I'm very pleased to be taking part.

In this session, we're discussing 'Communications in times of crisis' – situations which really test us and our teams.

And Paul Mylrea and I are going to use as an example the London bombings of July 2005.

I am the Director of Public Relations at the City of London Corporation. For those of you who aren't familiar with who we are and what we do, I'll give you a brief outline.

The City of London has 3 key roles:

- **First - to promote the City as the world's leading international financial centre;**
- **Second - to provide excellent local government services for the Square Mile;**
- **And third – to provide valued services for London and the nation as a whole.**

For example we own and run a number of large open spaces in and around London. We are also a big player in the Arts world, running the Barbican Arts Centre and co-funding the Museum of London. And we are involved in many partnerships with other London boroughs and agencies to help improve schools and skills, and to boost economic development in the capital.

Now – the City of London Corporation is not to be confused with the Greater London Authority and the Mayor of London Ken Livingstone. And believe me – this does still cause some confusion!

Ken Livingstone and the GLA are accountable for the strategic government of Greater London. Working alongside the Mayor and the GLA in London are 32 boroughs plus the City of London Corporation, which all look after the day-to-day local government services in their part of London.

And as I said earlier, we at the City also have other key roles such as the promotion of the City as a global financial centre.

I can assure you that no 2 days in the City are ever the same for the public relations office. And certainly 7th July 2005 – or 7/7 as it has come to be known - sticks in my mind as a particularly extraordinary day.

I'm sure that most of you don't need reminding of what happened on 7/7, but to summarise briefly:

In a coordinated attack, 4 suicide bombers struck on the London public transport system – 3 on tube trains, and 1 on a bus - killing 52 and injuring more than 770 people in the morning rush hour. Hundreds more suffered psychological trauma, which for many people persists to this day.

Londoners are often accused of being unfriendly and unhelpful – perhaps with reason!

But when it really mattered, passengers and underground workers helped and supported each other; the emergency services gave their all – and shop staff, office workers, and passers-by offered what help they could.

The humanitarian response to these events was incredible.

But away from the physical bomb sites, an effective communications response was also required by a multitude of organisations in London – one being the City of London Corporation.

And today, I'm going to run through how the City reacted; how prepared we were for such an incident, and what we learnt.

For my part on 7/7, the first I knew that anything was wrong was on my way into work. I was on the tube, on the Northern Line, on my way into Waterloo when there was an announcement that the line had been suspended. I walked the rest of the way to work.

At first I had no idea what the problem was. As anyone who uses the London underground regularly will appreciate, unexplained delays and disruption to the service are par for the course for a commuter!

However, as I came nearer the office, I started to pick up that something serious had happened. Buses were evacuating their passengers, and I could see on TV screens in City offices that a major news story was being reported.

When I got into our office, it was immediately apparent that there was a substantial and major incident under way. One of the bombs had gone off between Aldgate and Liverpool Street stations in the City – so this was on our patch.

We needed to get information

- to the media;
- to businesses;
- to City workers and residents;
- ...and also to maintain confidence in London as the world's leading international financial centre.

All in extremely difficult circumstances.

Our Head of Media was in Malaysia with the Lord Mayor - and due to the disruption of the transport system, many of our PR team were unable to get into the office.

So it was a case of all hands on deck, and staff having to perform whatever tasks were necessary. Political advisers became press officers; film officers became web editors; literature staff became our link with the City police. And so on.

It's a sad state of affairs, but in this day and age, with the ongoing terrorist threat, we had already prepared for such a scenario.

Unfortunately, the City is no stranger to terrorism. In the 1990s, the Square Mile came under attack from the IRA with bombs at Bishopsgate and the Baltic Exchange.

And then came 9/11 in the US, which caused all London authorities to assess how they would cope with a similar attack. London had been warned repeatedly that an attack was inevitable. It was a question of when not if.

So, both before – and since 7/7 - the City PR office has regularly run through the scenario of an attack in the Square Mile, and rehearsed the necessary PR tasks.

All staff keep on their desks a laminated sheet which outlines '8 Things to Do in an Emergency'. Panic is not one of them!

And so on 7/7, whilst staff were shocked and saddened at what was unfolding, the atmosphere in the office was calm and professional as they put into practice their training for just such an event.

When I arrived in the office, our TV screens were tuned to Sky and BBC News 24, but very little was known at this point – and so my staff were busy verifying the facts of the situation with the City of London police – the City's own police force which has a particular expertise in security and civil protection.

It soon became clear however, that this was a 'major incident' affecting a wider area than just the City – and so, in line with the agreed protocol, the Metropolitan Police (which covers the whole of Greater London) took overall control of the situation.

This said – the City still had a key role to play in communicating with its many stakeholders, and we continued to put into place our well-rehearsed, co-ordinated emergency planning procedure.

This involved establishing a Control Centre to bring together staff from different City departments to pool information and to act as an operational centre. A representative from the Public Relations Office was based there all day to pass updated information back to the press office.

The next step was to make sure that all the relevant people in the organisation were contacted and briefed. This included the City's Chairman of Policy, Michael Snyder, who is our lead elected politician.

Once briefed, the Chairman was in regular touch with the media – conducting down-the-line interviews, as well as TV interviews outside at the police cordons.

In 8 hours he did 18 broadcast interviews with local, national and international media – condemning the attacks, but crucially reassuring the outside world that it was ‘business as usual’ in the City. Our staff had already verified this with a number of key City organisations – for example the London Stock Exchange and the other major markets.

In the midst of such human tragedy, whether or not the City is trading may seem a little unimportant. But of course it is our role at the City of London Corporation to promote and protect the standing of the City. And the prosperity of the whole country depends on the City financial. So it was vital on 7/7 to assure the world that the City will strive to remain ‘open for business’, whatever the circumstances.

As well as key City institutions we were also in regular contact with others who were dealing with the response to 7/7 – for example the Greater London Authority, Downing Street, other London Boroughs and Transport for London where Paul Mylrea was working at the time – and he will tell you more about his role on 7/7 in a moment.

Communication between various agencies was made easier on 7/7 because systems were already in place – for example through the ‘London Resilience Partnership’ – a coalition of agencies which had planned and prepared for potential emergencies post 9/11.

On 7/7 in London, this planning came into its own in all aspects – including communications - and within minutes of the explosions communicators were sharing information via pager and email, and a conference call was taking place within 20 minutes of the bombs.

So – we were co-ordinating our media liaison with a number of outside bodies under the overall direction of the Metropolitan Police.

But of course, dealing with the media is just one dimension of a comms strategy in a crisis.

It's easy just to focus on the media, as they often demand the most attention – desperate for details and comment. But you cannot ignore your other stakeholders.

For example your own staff. Early on in the day on 7/7, our employees were sent an email outlining the situation, and asking them to keep referring to our web site for updates.

This was also the guidance that we gave to City businesses, whose employees wanted to know whether it was safe to start their journeys home and so on.

And web updates worked alongside the pager alerts system used by the City police to give advice to City businesses in the event of major incidents.

We also had to keep in touch with other audiences – for example the parents of children attending schools in the City. This was done directly with the schools, and again via our web site.

So – to draw all of this together. I have used 7/7 as a case study, but what are the key things to remember about communications in crisis situations?

1. Be **proactive** and keep in regular contact with **all** key stakeholders. Verify the facts, and then act quickly to reassure that you understand the situation and are taking the appropriate action. By saying nothing, you will simply create a vacuum in which speculation is rife.
2. Get your relationships built with key outside organizations **before** any crisis actually hits. On 7/7, the City Corporation was just one part of the jigsaw of London's response – but we knew where we fitted into that jigsaw.
3. Keep on updating and rehearsing your crisis comms plan. On 7/7, the City was put to the test, but it was prepared and ready – and so were the other key London agencies.

Of course the response to crisis situations will never perfect, and there will always be lessons to be learnt.

After 7/7, the lessons London needed to learn were highlighted in detail by the London Assembly's investigation and report published last summer.

One of the general failings was communication with survivors and others on the street in the areas of the blasts. In the City, we now have an extra tool available to help address this issue. We have recently fitted loud speakers on CCTV masts at 8 locations around the City to advise, warn and inform and direct people to safety in the event of a major incident.

The City continues to refine its emergency planning response.

Of course we hope that there will never be another 7/7 – but

the current terrorism threat level in the UK remains severe.

Should the worst come to the worst, the City is ready.

Thank you.