

# MINUTES

**Date:** Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2021

**Time:** 09:00- 13:00 hours

**Venue:** Virtual Meeting - Microsoft Teams

<b>Attendees:</b>	Suzanne McCarthy (SMcC) – Chair Alison Sansome (AS) – Vice-Chair Ben Adams (BC) – Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC) Jonny Bugg (JB) – Home Office Cllr. Nick Chard (NC1) – Local Government Association (LGA) Mark Hardingham (MH) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Rachael Aldridge (RA) - Local Government Association (LGA) Jushna Chowdhury (JC) – Home Office Lucy Ellender (LE) – Local Government Association (LGA) Thomas Pinchbeck (TP) – Home Office Eddie Smithwick (ES)– Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC)
<b>Fire Standards Team:</b>	Nick Collins (NC2) - NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Natasha Elia (NE) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Joy Flanagan (JF) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Laura Ladd-Harris (LLH) - NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST)
<b>Guest Attendees:</b>	Chris Blacksell (CB) – NFCC Fire Investigation Committee Chair Dave Bristow (DB) – NFCC Fire Investigation Andrew Hopkinson (AH) – NFCC Data and Digital Programme Executive Apollo Gerolymbos (AG) - NFCC Lead for Data Steve Beakhust (SB) - NFCC Data and Digital Programme Manager
<b>Apologies</b>	None

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## Introductions, welcome and apologies and conflicts of interest

Chair

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and introduced Ben Adams (BA) as the new representative from the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners.

No conflicts of interest were expressed by Board members.

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## Minutes of meeting and matters arising

Chair

Minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2021. It was noted that three actions included in the minutes were not listed in the Action and Decision Log. This would be amended.

Updates on the outstanding actions were provided from the Actions and Decisions Log. As a result, three further actions were agreed:

**Action FSB-A099:** the Fire Standards Team to update the Action log with the missing actions from the minutes of the previous Board meeting.

**Action FSB-A100:** MH to draft a paper on NFCC Assurance processes and share with the Board at the next meeting

**Action FSB-A101:** Fire Standards Team to revise layout and style of action log to improve clarity

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## Item 3 Paper 1 – Fire Standards Sign-Off – *for decision*

FST

JF presented the draft Safeguarding Fire Standard and the related post-consultation report with a request for the Board to review and then approve that quality assurance (QA) could commence.

BA queried the wording of a benefit relating to safeguarding referrals, with concerns that it may be misinterpreted by services and could lead to a negative impact. After discussion it was agreed that a minor change to the wording of the benefit would be beneficial.

JF proposed that to avoid delay, QA could commence alongside work to revise the wording of the benefit. Once the minor revision to the benefit was completed the Fire Standard would be shared with the Board by email for reassurance the issue had been addressed.

MH added that the Minister had recently written to him to applaud and encourage the NFCC in supporting services in their approach to Safeguarding.

**Decision FSB-D038:** The Board agreed to approve the draft Safeguarding Fire Standard to commence QA, notwithstanding a revision to benefit one.

**Action FSB-A102:** Fire Standards Team to work with the Safeguarding Workstream Lead to revise the wording of benefit one of the draft Safeguarding Fire Standard and share the revised version with the Board for approval via email.

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## Item 4 – Paper 2 – Fire Standard Review Process – *for decision*

FST

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In response to action FSB-A091, JF introduced the paper and the proposed review process for Fire Standards once published. She explained that the process covered the periodic review of a Fire Standard with a three-year periodic review date set at the point of publication. She then explained the exceptional review process which would be used at any other time when a Fire Standard review was required as agreed by the Board.

JF described the process of impact assessment that would be undertaken to determine whether a change was required and the levels of change that may be applied and subsequent associated actions. The levels ranged from minor to moderate to major.

JF added that included in the paper was an example of an issue that had been raised in connection with the already published Protection Fire Standard. An impact assessment had been undertaken and the result was that the level of change required would be the moderate review process, as described in the paper.

JF asked the Board for feedback on the periodic and exceptional processes, and she asked them to consider specifically the issue relating to the Protection Fire standard to confirm if they were content for the moderate change process to be applied in respect of that standard.

In discussion, JB suggested that as part of the moderate review process, once a proposed revision had been agreed with the FSB Chairs, the proposed change would be shared with the Board with an agreed time limit, providing an opportunity for comment.

NC1 said that the process was very clear, but that he would welcome further clarity on the methods of communication used for each change level in the review process. It was agreed methods for communications would be included in the process by the Fire Standards Team.

The Board approved both the proposed review process and that the Protection Fire Standard should be reviewed in line with the moderate review process.

**Decision FSB-D039:** The Board approved the Fire Standards Review Process.

**Decision FSB-D040:** The Board agreed that the Protection Fire Standard should be reviewed following the moderate review process.

**Action FSB-A103:** The Fire Standards Team to add the communication methods which would be used for each change level to the review process.

**Action FSB-A104:** The Fire Standards Team to revise the moderate review process to include an action for the Chairs to share their decision with the Board prior to it being completed with an agreed time limit.

**Action FSB-A105:** The Fire Standards Team to work with the relevant NFCC Lead to revise the Protection Fire Standard.

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## Item 5 Paper 3 – Phase Three Proposals - *for decision*

FST

JF introduced the paper and explained the remaining areas of the Activity Framework where Fire Standards may be required. She confirmed they primarily fell within the Cultural and Enabling categories of the Framework. The remaining areas included:

- Communication, engagement and consultation
- Health and wellbeing
- Resources (incorporating estate and fleet management, procurement, contract management and commercial activities)
- Assurance
- Digital and Technology

She proposed that an area which may need further consideration is Environment and Sustainability. She explained this subject had been considered during the ongoing development of the Leadership Fire Standards. As a result of feedback from that process however, it had become evident this subject area may require a Fire Standard in its own right. She proposed to hold further discussions with the NFCC Lead for Environment on this subject.

JF confirmed that this subject, and all the remaining areas, would require further exploration to establish where Fire Standards were relevant, and the necessary time needed for that. JF explained that further time is required to fully research the proposed Fire Standards and to clarify:

- a) the discovery work completed already;
- b) any areas where there are key drivers for a standard; and
- c) how many standards might be remaining.

Reflecting on the remaining areas, BA said that services are likely to be more involved in collaboration and strategic partnerships in the future and therefore would view the communications and engagement area as a priority. Similarly, he referenced his own services needs in relation to opportunities to collaborate on resources such as fleet to bring about efficiencies. He also agreed that environment and sustainability should be considered as a Fire Standard, advising that climate change would be a key driver for change across services.

MH asked the Board to bear in mind the capacity for both developing Fire Standards and implementation of them by services. He explained the specialist resources drawn on for development are largely from services with capacity issues themselves. Whilst recognising the need for raising standards in services, he asked the Board to consider the pace of publication and the capacity of services to implement and embed them effectively. MH also emphasised the importance of continued involvement of services so that they feel they have been engaged with on the next phase of standards.

MH recommended that environment and sustainability should be a standalone Fire Standard. He proposed the Fire Standards Team meet with the new NFCC lead for this area to explore work already completed to date that might underpin a Fire Standard. He added that health and wellbeing is an important subject and there is a lot of guidance to support a standard on this topic developed through the NFCC People Programme.

JB commended the Board for reaching the mid-way point in the production of Fire Standards and agreed with MH that a standard on wellbeing would be vital for services.

In relation to the areas outstanding for potential Fire Standards, JB asked for clarification on the Assurance activity. JF explained that a standard on Assurance would likely cover aspects such as the processes that services follow to provide assurance to their governing bodies and the government. Currently services must draft an annual statement of assurance and they are all subject to internal and external audits and the concept for the Fire Standard would be to describe principles for assurance that services should follow.

She added that importantly, there is discovery work to be done in this area, and the team would work closely with those who lead on assurance work within services to understand what else might need to be included in a standard on this topic.

JB suggested he speak to Home Office colleagues to identify whether any work within the Home Office may overlap or conflict with a standard on this topic.

The Board agreed for discovery work on the proposed Fire Standards should continue and a paper with proposals should be brought to the next meeting for further discussion and decision.

**Action FSB-A106:** The Board agreed for discovery work on the proposed Fire Standards should continue and a paper with the proposals should be brought to the next meeting for further discussion and decision.

**Action FSB-A107:** The Fire Standards Team to meet with the NFCC Lead on Environment and Sustainability.

**Action FSB-A108:** JB to clarify whether any work in the Home Office may overlap, conflict with or support a standard on assurance.

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## Item 6 Paper 4 – General Progress Report - *for decision*

Chair

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SMcC introduced the paper and summarised its content. The Board noted the Chairs engagement activities.

JF then introduced the other elements of the paper which in part was in response to a previous action (below for information):

*FSB-A080 - Fire Standards Team (FST) to work with key stakeholders as proposed in the paper to clarify the data required to form a current baseline and the metrics needed to measure benefits of Fire Standards in future.*

### *Impact Assessment*

With regards to the impact of Fire Standards, JF explained that the team had considered how best to gather evidence to report to the Board. What had become clear was that currently there are insufficient sources of data to be able to draw findings and conclusions from.

Only anecdotal evidence had been received through the new NFCC Implementation Team following engagement with services since late 2021. That feedback has included how useful services have found the implementation tools published for each standard. However, services would welcome more information about successful approaches taken by other services as they implement the Fire Standards.

The Fire Standards and Implementation Teams were seeking to work together to address the impact of Fire Standards and the first step towards this was the proposal to develop an “impact assessment tool”. This would take the form of an online questionnaire that services could use as a self-assessment guide to help assess their status against the standards. It may also be used by the Implementation Team to help guide discussions when visiting services and gather information in a consistent way. It was proposed that the tool would be available online and what is drawn from it could become an important data set for the Board.

JF went on to explain that data from HMICFRS would not be available until the end of the current inspection round. She said that they have confirmed those findings would only reference the Fire Standards that were published when the inspectorate planned their inspection approach. This was primarily the Operational Response and Code of Ethics Fire Standards.

HMICFRS confirmed they would note any further Fire Standards published in time for the third inspection round, however, they had also stated that direct questions about impact and benefits of Fire Standards were unlikely to be included. Discussion remains ongoing with HMICFRS about how useful data could be shared with the Board.

She concluded by stating that the aspiration was to provide an annual report of feedback to the Board. Currently, there is limited data to base any report on, but that there would be a much richer picture in the following year.

A discussion took place about the approach being proposed. MH supported the approach and suggested that with the revision of the National Framework currently in progress, there may be an opportunity for services to express their progress with implementing and achieving the Fire Standards as part of the annual Statement of Assurance they must provide to Government. He said that a link between the standards and inspections would be helpful and added that there appeared to be an opportunity to talk to the Inspectorate about how they would build standards into their inspection process in the future.

It was discussed that HMICFRS should be invited to a future Board meeting to discuss these points.

JB supported MH's comments but suggested that in the short term, a survey to understand the impact of Fire Standards on services could be conducted. This could be done alongside plans for the impact assessment tool and would provide the Board with some insights whilst data is collected for a more comprehensive annual report.

In response, JF explained that the concept of the impact assessment tool had been developed in conjunction with the Implementation Team. The initial concept was that it could be used for both a survey with a fixed period and as a tool available on an ongoing basis which the Implementation Team could utilise.

She asked the Board to consider that there are often multiple consultations and requests for services to provide information at any given time. There was a need to balance making requests for information regularly, ensuring the right level of attention is paid to each one, whilst not overloading services.

The Board noted these points, they considered gathering a baseline of where services are positioned with the implementation of standards as a priority. They requested the Fire Standards Team carry out a short survey in early 2022 to assess the impact of Fire Standards to date. If helpful, the survey could then be converted into an online tool that could be used to assess services implementation status, the longer-term impact of standards and to gather ongoing support requirements.

AS commented that it is important for the Board to understand whether Fire Standards are being adopted by services. She suggested a sample of services could be assessed as to whether they are referencing the standards, rather than all services, which would still provide a guide for the Board to consider.

JB commented that the survey may be useful as a way for services to express concerns about overload which is being reported anecdotally.

SMcC agreed and recommended that the survey be conducted by the Board with the request to take part coming from the Board and being sent directly to each Chief. This would help ensure that the survey was not perceived as coming from the NFCC.

The Board agreed with the approach to impact assessment and the survey as well as continued liaison with the HMICFRS as described.

## *Benefits Management*

JF went on to the second element of the paper relating to Benefits Management. She reminded the Board that it had agreed that benefits should be the result of services achieving the Desired Outcome of any given standard, or the suite of Fire Standards collectively.

She said that the process for drafting benefits had evolved with the development of each Fire Standard. The team was more mindful about the need to make sure any stated benefit could be measured, and this was something they emphasise when working with the subject matter experts on standards development.

JF explained that work had been done in the NFCC to look at how benefits management should be approached across all programmes and projects. A benefits manager is being recruited by the NFCC. However, after evaluation of the NFCC's approach, she had concluded that the NFCC approach was too granular for Fire Standards and therefore she proposed to work with either an external consultant or the new benefits manager, when recruited, to review how benefits could be approached at a more strategic level.

JF added that until services had time to implement a standard, the benefits of those standards were unlikely to be demonstrably evidenced. She confirmed benefits management would remain a focus for the team in 2022, and she requested the Board agree to allow more time for



the team to review and refine the benefits management process. The team would continue to liaise with Chairs and report progress regularly to the Board at its meetings.

## *Communications*

JF explained that the Fire Standards Team now had communications resources available to it. This had enabled some evaluation and forward planning work to take place.

JF highlighted the appendix to the paper which included an evaluation on the consultation approach used for the Safeguarding Fire Standard. She specifically highlighted the channels used and their effectiveness. The recommendations and learning from the evaluation would feed into future communication and engagement approaches.

JF explained that the provider of support for the Fire Standards Board's website had recently changed. The team would be working with that new provider on a review and refresh of the website during the first part of 2022.

She confirmed that progress with communications and engagement would be reported at subsequent meetings.

JB said that newly launched Fire England website had not received as much traffic as anticipated and suggested a more joined up communication approach may be beneficial for all.

MH said that an exercise is underway within the NFCC to consolidate the large number of websites that had evolved over time and make clear links with other parts of the sector, including Fire England. He welcomed a more joint approach to communication.

**Decision FSB-D041:** The Board agreed an impact assessment survey was required to establish a baseline and provide insight to the Board about whether Fire Standards were being adopted by services and how they are approaching their implementation.

**Action FSB-A109:** Fire Standards Team to draft an impact survey in early 2022 and share with Board for review before circulating to services.

**Action FSB-A110:** Fire Standards Team to review benefits management process with either an external consultant or the NFCC's benefits manager when available, to continue to liaise with the Chairs and provide an update at the next Board meeting.

**Action FSB-A111:** The Fire Standards Team to invite a representative from the HMICFRS to attend the next Board meeting.

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**Item 7 – Guests – for information**

**FST**

## **Fire Investigation Fire Standard - Chris Blacksell (CB) and Dave Bristow (DB)**

The Board welcomed CB and DB to the meeting to discuss the progress of the Fire Investigation Fire Standard development. CB indicated the range of people and organisations that had been involved in the NFCC Fire Investigation Strategic Steering Group and others such as the UK Association of Fire Investigators and the Institute of Fire Engineers.

He confirmed that a Code of Practice for Crime Scenes (code), which underpins the standard, had been developed in collaboration with the Institute of Fire Engineers and the UK Association of Fire Investigators. Alongside this, a Fire Investigation Competency Framework had been developed and implemented nationally.

DB added that together the Fire Standard, the Code of Practice and the Competency Framework documents formed a robust suite of documents which had been well received by FI colleagues in services across the country.

CB clarified that fire investigation is not a statutory duty for services, but that they have powers which allow them to enter premises to carry out fire investigations. He stated that there is a statutory duty on all services to report the likely cause of each fire to the Secretary of State via the current Incident Recording System (IRS).

He also stated that new legislation instigated by the Forensic Science Regulator would state that any fire and rescue service wishing to investigate crime scenes for, or in conjunction with, police forces must be ISO17020 accredited. Not all services would have the capacity or resources to achieve and maintain that accreditation. Therefore, in areas where the service decides not to gain accreditation, police forces may have to carry out their own investigations or procure private services to do this on their behalf. The Fire Standard had been written to accommodate this accreditation but does not stipulate that all services must be accredited. The legislation is in progress and anticipated to be enacted by October 2023.

CB said that as there has not been legislation covering the role of the fire and rescue services with regards to fire investigation, the standard would help bring clarity and consistency. It would also improve the professionalism of fire investigation in fire and rescue services and underpin their ability to promote fire safety more effectively.

JB thanked CB and DB for the work to date and for helping Home Office colleagues understand and explore the implications of the ISO accreditation for both fire and rescue services and police forces.

JF clarified that analysis on the feedback of the consultation would take place throughout December. A consultation report and a revised Fire Standard would be shared with the Board early in the new year for sign-off to commence quality assurance.

SMcC thanked CB and DB for their contribution. CB and DB left the meeting.

## **Data Management Fire Standard – Andrew Hopkinson (AH), Apollo Gerolymbos (AG) and Steve Beakhust (SB)**

The Board welcomed AH, AG and SB to the meeting to discuss the progress of the Data Management Fire Standard.

AH provided an overview of the work to date within the Data and Digital programme. He explained that the programme had been deliberately split between digital and data, as both elements encompass a large amount of work. Work on the data aspect of the programme had been prioritised and the digital aspect of the programme would be delivered later.

He explained that the Fire Standard was one of four key areas which had been prioritised. He recognised that the standard and the work of the programme underpinned everything the sector was trying to achieve as services become more reliant upon data to drive and improve decision-making. He articulated the challenge of raising awareness and building understanding of the importance of data amongst Chiefs and senior leaders. The programme was keen to ensure all services fully understood the benefits utilising accurate data could bring to their service and nationally, and the requirements of them and their people in achieving that.

He went on to describe the process that had been followed to start development work on the standard, including forming a working group of data subject matter experts from services across the country. He mentioned that the programme had planned a large data workshop aimed at senior managers from services in early 2022 to engage and help explain the scope and potential impact of the Data Fire Standard.

NC1 asked how data comparison could be improved. AG responded that the standardisation and definition of data parameters is key and although the standard would not retrospectively change the definitions already in place, it would ensure that future definitions are consistent. AH added that this would allow service performance to be compared more consistently.

AS welcomed the work undertaken by the programme and acknowledged the scale of such work. She endorsed the approach of splitting data and digital into separate areas of focus and agreed data comparison was of importance but stressed that clarifying definitions was also important. It was key that services are able to process and report data in a consistent way. AG agreed and added that data requiring complex methods of collection and a higher level of skill to analyse could be done centrally, as many services do not have the appropriate data expertise and capacity locally. This is something the programme is seeking to achieve. He added that the standard points to ethical frameworks which encourage a more open approach to data sharing, publishing and taking advantage of expertise from outside the sector.

AH summarised some of the other work linked to the Fire Standard, all of which together it is hoped would address many of the long-standing issues with data in fire and rescue services.

MH said the standard needed to be balanced, easily understood so that people engaged with it but also quite stretching. He also proposed that the Board should not try to seek perfection in the first iteration of the Fire Standard because of the likely evolution of the sector's approach to data in the coming months and years. He suggested the periodic review of the Fire Standard should enable the Board to ensure it remained appropriate and current.

SB said that links with police and health had been made as part of the working and peer review groups and the standard could point to good practice that exists across the wider public sector.

SMcC thanked AH, AG and SB for their contribution. AH, AG and SB left the meeting.

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## **Item 8 Paper 5 – Fire Standards Progress Report - *for information***

**FST**

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JF introduced the paper and highlighted some key points discussed as summarised below.

She indicated a likely delay to the Data Management Fire Standard. This is partly due to wanting to align to the work of the NFCC programme which is supporting development work and the availability of stakeholders to attend workshops to inform the draft Fire Standard. She reassured the Board that progress had been made and an early draft was now undergoing peer review. The Board should expect to see a pre-consultation version during February 2022.

She confirmed that the Emergency Planning and Resilience Fire Standard was undergoing peer review and several external parties, notably the Cabinet Office who work with the Local Resilience Forums, had provided valuable feedback already. As a result of this feedback, it was proposed the name of the Fire Standard be altered to *Emergency Preparedness and Resilience* as emergency planning was one element of services being prepared to respond to emergencies and major incidents. Consultation on this standard would be initiated in January 2022.

JF explained that work on development of the Leadership Fire Standards had taken longer than anticipated. This was partly due to the nature of these standards and level of interest in them from a variety of stakeholders. There had been challenges in availability of those senior leaders in services to attend development workshops.

Additionally, there had been concerns that other work with national impact, such as the revised National Fire Framework and the Fit for the Future initiative, could have implications on what is included on the Leadership Standards.

NC1 supported the work to date and proposed that due to the connection to the political leadership of services, governing bodies should be afforded the opportunity to provide comment prior to consultation. BA supported this and requested that the APCC also be able to provide feedback at this early stage.

MH responded that the standards were for the “profession” and therefore not aimed at those providing governance through fire authorities or other governing models. However, he did note that as these standards, much like the Code of Ethics Fire Standard, were designed to drive improvements in the culture and working environments of services, it would be appropriate for political leaders to be included at this early stage.

MH said that these standards would be likely to create considerable national debate alongside the publication of the Government’s White Paper for Fire. As a result, he felt there would likely be delays in progressing these standards to publication. He echoed his comment made about the data standard, which is to request the Board not to seek perfection. He suggested the Board should accept that an initial draft may require early review and that any imperfections could be addressed at the three-year review cycle or before, if required.

SMcC summarised the discussion, agreeing that some involvement at peer review stage was acceptable if that did not extend the process too far. She reminded the Board of the other opportunities for input both at Board meetings and during the open consultations.

It was agreed the draft leadership standards would be shared with the LGA and APCC by the end of December 2021 for them to carry out engagement with their respective members and provide feedback by the end of January to avoid too lengthy a delay in getting to the consultation stage.

**Action FSB-A112:** Fire Standards Team to share draft Leadership Fire Standards with LGA and APCC colleagues in December for early peer review feedback by January 2022.

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## Item 9 – Any Other Business

Chair

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It was noted that the proposed in-person Board workshop would now be scheduled for the early part of 2022, the date being dependent on the availability of members and on COVID restrictions being lifted.

No other item was raised under Any Other Business.

The next Board meeting was scheduled for 16<sup>th</sup> March 2022, but prior to these minutes being published, the meeting date has been rescheduled to 2-5pm on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022.