

MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 15th June 2022
Time: 13.30hrs – 17.00hrs
Venue: Virtual Meeting - Microsoft Teams

Attendees:	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) Justin Johnson (JJ)– National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) (Deputy for Mark Hardingham)
In Attendance:	Jushna Chowdhury (JC) – Home Office Lucy Ellender (LE) – Local Government Association (LGA) Jenna Marsh (JM) – Home Office Thomas Pinchbeck (TP) – Home Office Eddie Smithwick (ES)– Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC)
Fire Standards Team:	Aria Berwick (AB) - NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Dan Daly (DD) - NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Natasha Elia (NE) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Joy Flanagan (JF) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST)
Guest Attendees:	Wayne Bowcock (WB) – Leadership Fire Standards Justin Johnston (JJ) – Leadership Fire Standards Stuart Errington (SE) - Emergency Preparedness & Resilience Fire Standard Kevin Longshaw (KL) – Emergency Preparedness & Resilience Fire Standard
Apologies	Mark Hardingham (MH) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)

Introductions, welcome and apologies and conflicts of interest

Chair

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and introduced Justin Johnson (JJ) who deputised for Mark Hardingham.

No conflicts of interest were expressed by Board members.

Minutes of meeting and matters arising

Chair

Minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting of 8th December 2021.

Updates on the outstanding actions listed on the Actions and Decisions Log were provided. It was agreed that a number of actions on the Log linked to the subject of benefits and impact of the Fire Standards. It was proposed these should be consolidated to reflect the progress made in these areas and work currently underway by the Fire Standards Team (FST).

Action FSB-A109 – It was agreed that this action was incorrectly logged as completed. The action was still in progress and JF advised that Item 6 – Paper 3 would be addressing this matter. Considering this, JF proposed that the action should be closed to which the Board agreed.

Item 3 Paper 1 – Fire Standards Phase Two Delivery Progress Report *for information*

FST

JF summarised the paper and highlighted that the Fire Investigation Fire Standard and the Emergency Preparedness and Resilience Fire Standard were both published, resulting in a total of eleven published Fire Standards at the time of the meeting.

In relation to the Leadership and People Fire Standards, JF highlighted the gap analysis report at Appendix B of the Paper. She explained that this report was written by the external leadership consultant, who is supporting the development of these standards, and contains details of the comparison work the consultant carried out. This includes benchmarking both draft Fire Standards against leading industry-based standards for Leadership.

JB congratulated the FST on the publication of the two standards. He queried whether the Data Management Fire Standard was delivered as planned. JF responded by explaining that there had been external influences that caused a delay to the original timetable for that standard's publication, but that an explanation of this and a new timeline had been presented to the

Board which they agreed. Therefore, the standard had been delivered in line with the revised timeline.

Item 4 – Guests
for information

FST

Emergency Preparedness and Resilience Fire Standard – Stuart Errington (SE) and Kevin Longshaw (KL)

The Board welcomed SE and KL to the meeting to discuss the Emergency Preparedness and Resilience Fire Standard. KL praised the expertise, flexibility and commitment of the working group that developed and delivered the published standard. He stressed that having sector-based expertise was invaluable, and that the FST helped identify the right people and organisations to be included. Irrespective of roles and hierarchy the group worked well together because of the common purpose they shared. KL also praised the clearly defined and well-structured development process which supported the delivery of the standard to the agreed timescales.

KL queried the process for reviewing the standard outside of the three yearly review process, how benefits as a result of the standard would be measured, the Inspectorate’s expectations for services and how the White Paper would impact the delivery and maintenance of Fire Standards generally going forward.

SE echoed KL’s comments and provided additional context. The working group took the decision early on to align the standard to the Local Resilience Forum Standards developed through the Cabinet Office, which the group felt was key in maintaining consistency. He explained that revisions to legislation and new guidance and strategies relating to local and national resilience were due to be delivered shortly. He went on to explain that this may lead to a need to review the Fire Standard potentially before the date of the standard’s expected three-year periodic review.

NC queried whether the term “disruptive challenges” within the standard covered industrial action. KL confirmed that the term did include industrial action and that the standard included expectations for services maintaining business continuity, whatever the disruptive challenges may be.

SMcC explained that the Board would be discussing the impact of the White Paper later in the meeting but invited JB to respond.

JB said that the White paper was a vote of confidence for the Fire Standards Board and the proposed College of Fire should be seen as a positive evolution of the standards model set out

by the Board. He praised the effective partnership working that had been achieved. He said that the aspiration for a College of Fire was that it would build on the work done to date by the Board and that the Fire Standards would be a key pillar for the sector.

AS responded that the Board had maintained continued dialogue with the Inspectorate on how Fire Standards are approached during inspections. The focus of those discussions had been on a pragmatic approach to assessing services on standards that had only been published for a short period of time, with the Inspectorate looking for a plan or progression of how they would adopt the respective standards. SMcC added that the NFCC Implementation Team had developed a plan to assist services in sharing knowledge and experiences in adopting Fire Standards with other services.

JF clarified that the process to review standards did include an exceptional review element, allowing for assessments outside of the three yearly process. Any new supporting guidance could easily be added to the standard in the future, when required. She added that how the Board was informed of changes which may impact standards should be considered.

Action FSB-A113 – The FST to work with colleagues within the NFCC producing supporting guidance to consider when any new supporting guidance is published, how the FST and Board will be notified to ensure the guidance is linked to the appropriate Fire Standard.

JF said she appreciated that the Board was keen to understand how the benefits of all Fire Standards would be realised. She went on to explain that feedback from all the consultations so far had indicated that many services estimated that it would take between two to three years for them to fully adopt each standard. As a result, benefits realisation would take much longer to evidence. However, she explained that the FST was working to gather feedback about the impact of standards on services and the levels of implementation in liaison with the NFCC Implementation Team. Impact Assessment would be discussed at Item 6 – Paper 3.

KL thanked the Board for the clarification and stated that the implementation toolkits are invaluable for services.

JB reflected on the conversations and suggested that some consideration should be given to bringing together the learning from both HMICFRS and the NFCC Implementation Team to explore how the learning they are both gathering and the improvement picture may fit together.

The Board thanked SE and KL and they left the meeting.

Leadership and People Fire Standard – Wayne Bowcock (WB) and Justin Johnston (JJ)

The Board welcomed WB to the meeting to discuss the Leadership and People Fire Standards, alongside JJ. WB praised the FST and those involved in the development. He highlighted the

difficulties faced in the development of the standards, notably the varied opinions on the meaning of Leadership and therefore the content of the standards.

WB reminded the Board of the steps taken to reach the current position and added that learning from the development of the Code of Ethics Fire Standard was embedded in the process. WB said that the revised scope was a key point of clarification in the development of the two standards which helped to then drive progression forward. He clarified that the standards were about how a well-run organisation functions with effective corporate governance and how employees would be developed and supported throughout their careers. They were not about the roles of members or the governing body.

JJ added that he considered the Leading the Service Fire Standard almost as a “parent” fire standard for leaders which would be useful as it was the first time anything like that had articulated expectations as clearly as this did. He felt the standards could be used by services to ask themselves if they feel they are covering all the elements of service delivery well enough.

He and WB welcomed the gap analysis work undertaken by the leadership consultant supporting the development work, especially the benchmarking against other sectors and recognised leadership standards.

WB emphasised the consensus was that the current draft standards had reached the point where wider consultation was needed, but there was an acceptance that they may be enhanced further following feedback received through the consultation.

In response, BA said there had been considerable progress since the previous drafts were shared with the Board in February. He felt the standards complemented each other well.

JB agreed and praised the positive engagement undertaken with stakeholders to reach this stage. He requested clarification from BA and NC as to whether they were content with how operational and strategic planning were described in the standards. After a short discussion NC and BA both confirmed they were content with the current wording.

WB replied that when developing the standard, it was intentional to avoid using the term “operational planning”. The standards had been developed to describe the overall running of the organisation at a strategic level. At an operational level, there are three Operational Fire Standards; Operational Learning, Operational Competency and Operational Preparedness. Together they describe the operational expectations of services. Using the term “operational plans” might be misleading. He added that strategic planning is completed in partnership with the governing body with the final strategy being "owned" by the authority (or governing body) but developed in partnership with officers.

JB acknowledged the points made and said the collegiate collation of strategy with clear responsibility for who does what was the important outcome. He went on to query why Incident Command was not more explicit in the Leadership Standard.

JF explained that it was felt Incident Command was a specific style of leadership required in emergency response situations, which is included in the National Operational Guidance which underpins the three operational response Fire Standards. These Leadership and People Fire Standards very much addressed the style of leadership required to lead an organisation.

JB requested that Incident Command Leadership is referenced elsewhere, if not suitable within the Leadership and People Fire Standards.

He stressed the importance of the Code of Ethics Fire Standard in relation to these standards, and that the direction in the White Paper is to give the Code of Ethics more emphasis.

JF summarised the revisions to the two Leadership and People Fire Standards proposed by Board members through discussions prior to the Board:

1. Leading the Service: A positive outcome of leading a service well is about upholding and maintaining the reputation of the service. This would be added to both the Desired Outcome and To Achieve the Fire Standard sections.
2. Leading and Developing People: There was a reference to peer review in the To Achieve the Fire Standard section and a concern was raised by the LGA around their peer review programme. It was suggested to reword peer review to peer support to avoid any conflict or confusion.

Decision FSB-D041: The Board agreed that, subject to minor revisions to the Leadership and People Fire Standards as detailed above, they were content for the standards to be opened for consultation.

Action FSB-A114: FST to revise the Leadership and People Fire Standards based on feedback provided by Board members prior to the Board and recirculate for approval. The Board would be asked to provide their response within 24 hours.

Action FSB-A115: FST to review how Incident Command Leadership could be clarified or referenced in either the Fire Standards or through communications. This would be brought back to the Board for further discussion.

Item 6 Paper 3 – Impact Assessment

FST

for information

JF introduced the paper and summarised the proposed rationale and approach to benefits management and assessing the impact of Fire Standards.

Through discussions with services, it became evident that it would take time to realise the benefits of standards, due to the time taken for services to adopt and embed the standards.

She added that the mechanisms to easily assess benefits realisation are not in place yet, although ongoing conversations between the Fire Standards team and HMICFRS were useful in identifying potential mechanisms and data sets to support this. In parallel, from their visits to services, the NFCC Implementation Team was collating feedback which is helping both with assessing impact and understanding how benefits may be realised in future. JF said that more time was needed to clarify the benefits realisation further.

JF added that as the process to develop standards had matured, so had the level of rigour applied when developing benefits. She suggested that as the Board approach the delivery of the full suite of standards, there may be a need to review the phrasing of the benefits within the standards published in the first phase.

JF directed the Board to Appendix A of the paper which summarised the findings from the NFCC Implementation team when conducting visits to services, highlighting the importance of the Implementation Tools.

JF explained that thinking behind Action FSB-A109, to develop and carry out an impact assessment survey, had evolved. It was widely recognised and fed back by services to the NFCC that the number of surveys and consultations is high. This can mean that some responses are less meaningful than intended and that surveys may not get the right level of attention and accuracy in response.

After discussions with the Implementation Team, as an alternative, it is proposed that an online impact assessment tool would be more appropriate and useful. The tool would still pose questions and could be used to gather feedback within a contained time frame. However, it could also be used at any time by services to provide feedback or be used in conjunction with the Implementation Team to facilitate discussions about impact and potentially draw out both concerns, but also good practice that might be shared with others.

The results gleaned from the tool could still be used to collate feedback for the Board on impact and implementation. To complement this, it was proposed that the Fire Standards Chair, Vice-Chair and Team would conduct several in-person engagement events with services. These events would allow the team to collect additional data and feedback on the impact of Fire

Standards. It was thought that these would act as a catalyst for services in completing the tool once available. The data collected through these proposals would be reported to the Board.

SMcC said that considering the short period of time that standards had been published and services were adapting to them, it was important to engage with services to understand their impact. She added that the proposed approach seemed appropriate to build the evidence case for data required when realising the benefits of the Fire Standards.

BA commended the approach and queried whether HMICFRS would be engaged with throughout. JF said that the team were in the process of establishing more regular communication with HMICFRS. She added that only a small number of standards had been published when the questions and judgment criteria for the last round of inspection had been devised. With the increase in standards published, the team would be seeking to liaise with the HMICFRS team who are designing the inspection framework and judgment criteria for the next round of inspections to ensure appropriate references to the published standards are made.

AS said that the input and evidence from the implementation team is helpful, and it is unfortunate that there is no current data we can draw on. She stressed that gathering a perfect data set may not be possible for some time. Therefore, she supported the current direction being proposed by the FST. Collecting evidence where we can, she added, could at least provide the Board and wider sector with assurance that the standards are on the right track. She added that she didn't foresee HMICFRS measuring the effectiveness of standards, but instead expected standards to be referenced during their assessments.

JB was pleased to see the value the NFCC Implementation Team have brought to the Fire Standards Board and supported the work being undertaken as this would help protect funding for the Fire Standards. He agreed with the proposed approach but asked whether an interim assessment could be produced in a shorter time to satisfy those preparing funding allocations?

JF responded that initial feedback from the engagement events and the impact assessment tool once launched could be provided in the Autumn as an interim measure.

SMcC added that data provided should be meaningful and suggested that any data provided as an interim measure, should be considered by the Board as indicative and not conclusive until a full and thorough assessment had been undertaken.

Action FSB-A116: The FST will provide initial feedback on impact assessment from the engagement event taking place in July to the Board at its next meeting in September. The FST will continue to report progress to the Board at future meetings as further impact assessment work is completed during the Autumn.

Decision FSB-D042: Board was content with the proposed approach to impact assessments

Decision: FSB-D043: The Board agreed that actions FSB-A080, FSB-A081 and FSB-A110 were to be closed and new action FSB-A116 to be opened which would supersede these.

Item 7 Paper 4 – Fire Standards: Phase Three - *for decision*

Chair

JF introduced the paper and identified the remaining areas of the Activity Framework where Fire Standards may be required. She confirmed that discovery work had been undertaken on those areas, with the results described within the paper. She asked the Board to consider the proposed standards and timeline.

JF added that there were two remaining areas; Health and Wellbeing and Digital and Technology. The NFCC People Programme had a view that Health and Wellbeing as a standalone Fire Standard would be an anomaly when considering all the things that should be in place to care for a workforce. She suggested that the FST conduct a review of the Leadership and People Fire Standards upon publication to establish whether:

- a) Health and Wellbeing had been sufficiently covered; and
- b) supporting guidance for Health and Wellbeing might be required for development, negating the need for a Fire Standard on this topic.

JB was pleased with the evidence provided and added that he would be interested in these standards, in particular the Fire Control and Commercial Fire Standards. He agreed that a Fire Standard on Health and Safety would not likely add value. He challenged the Board regarding whether equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) should be considered a standalone Fire Standard.

JF responded that within all standards developed to date, reference had been made to inclusive ways of working; diversity within workforces; and equality of access. She added that having an independent viewpoint from the leadership consultant working on the Leadership and People Fire Standards, had been helpful in understanding that current thinking across all sectors. Many organisations are now evolving their approach which traditionally grouped together equality, diversity and inclusion as operating that way had not achieved the desired change.

Instead, the Leadership and People Fire Standards had been drafted with EDI weaved throughout, for example, consideration of achieving diversity through positive behaviours role modelled by leaders.

JJ added that EDI is similar to the topic of Health and Wellbeing, both are cross cutting themes which integrate all aspects of running a service. He said following discussions within the NFCC, there was a view that having a specific standard relating to EDI could result in duplication of what services have in place already or could result in a “tick box” approach to EDI.

AS queried what content would be considered within an EDI Fire Standard, given the Leadership and People and Code of Ethics Fire Standards. She added that in her experience, organisations have EDI policies and guidance or strategies, but not standards.

JB considered the points raised and queried whether minority groups had been given the opportunity to review the standards. JF responded that all groups are offered the opportunity to respond at consultation stage. She, however, proposed that a question on EDI be considered as part of the Impact Assessment Tool.

AS said there was a potential disconnect with HMICFRS about improvements in ethical behaviour as articulated in the Core Code of Ethics, and in EDI overall. She suggested that more guidance on EDI may be the solution, but more work was required to understand what might be needed.

JF responded that it was important for HMICFRS inspectors to fully understand the context of the Fire Standards and to be able to interpret them consistently to avoid any unintended negative judgments of services and their approaches to EDI.

Action FSB- A117: FST to draft a question on EDI within the Impact Assessment Tool.

Action FSB-A118: FST to carry out a review of existing standards for EDI references and provide a report to the Board with conclusions by the December meeting.

Action FSB-A119: FST to arrange meeting with HMICFRS to discuss how their inspectors interpret Fire Standards to ensure accurate judgements of service progress with implementation are made.

Item 8 Paper 5 – General Progress Report *for information*

FST

SMcC introduced the paper. On the matter of the White Paper consultation, she proposed a simple response from the FSB Chairs could be sent, confirming that the Board is committed to delivering the Fire Standards until there is a body to take over the role, stressing the importance of appropriate ongoing funding to support.

JB confirmed that this was a sensible approach as the organisations represented by individual members at the Board were likely to submit their own responses. He stressed the future costs of a College of Fire have been considered and included in the impact assessment provided as part of the consultation.

NC confirmed that he was happy with this approach, adding that it would be difficult to have a Board position.

Action FSB-A120: letter to be drafted in response to the White Paper and share with the Board for information.

Item 9 – Any Other Business

Chair

No other item was raised under Any Other Business.

The next Board meeting is scheduled to take place online on 9th September 2022.