

MINUTES

Date: Friday 9th September 2022
Time: 09:00hrs – 11:30hrs
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) Mark Hardingham (MH) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)
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) Joy Flanagan (JF) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Heidi Plewes - NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST)
Guest Attendees:	Susannah Hancock – NFCC Chief Operating Officer (observing) Marie Langtry - NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Claire Whitehead-Wall – consultant for Leadership and People Fire Standards (CWW) Roy Wilsher – His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services
Apologies	None received

Introductions, welcome and apologies and conflicts of interest**Chair**

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

A minute's silence was held in recognition of the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

No conflicts of interest were expressed by Board members.

JB confirmed that, in light of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and pending funeral arrangements, he would have to make his apologies for part of the meeting and advised TP would deputise in his absence.

He also reminded the Board about the limitations now placed on external communications which he indicated may impact the communications plans for the Board. He explained this was in line with protocols for the period of official mourning and anticipated those would be lifted following the funeral.

JB also confirmed the new Fire Minister as Jeremy Quinn who was due to be briefed accordingly. A meeting with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Board would be arranged.

Action FSB-A120: JB to arrange an introductory meeting between new Fire Minister and Chair and Vice-Chair of the Fire Standards Board.

Minutes of meeting and matters arising**Chair**

Minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting of 15th June 2022.

To help the Board understand when actions are expected to be completed, SMcC requested that a target completion date be added to the Action log for all outstanding actions. JF agreed.

Action FSB-A121: FST to add completion dates to the Action Log.

**Item 3 Paper 1 – Fire Standards Fire Standards Impact Assessment
for information****Chair and FST**

SMcC summarised the paper, explaining that it was in response to Action A116 which was:

“The Fire Standards Team 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. The focus will be on impact of Fire Standards rather than benefits at this stage.”

She explained that a pilot event was held in July in London to understand the impact of published Fire Standards on services to date. She added that the paper provided the Board with a summary of the approach taken by the FST to assess the impact, including a summary of the initial feedback received at the event. The event was well attended with 20 services represented.

The paper highlighted some areas of concern, notably the perception some services have about the Fire Standards.

The two main themes from the feedback related to the relationship between the Fire Standards and the Inspectorate’s reference to them in inspections and how Fire Standards have been received by services respectively. There appeared to be differing interpretations of Fire Standards by inspectors, as well as a misunderstanding about the links between national guidance and standards.

JF added that, overall, services may not be appreciating how all the various component parts that contribute to continued improvement of service performance fit together. She proposed that targeted communications may help clarify the perceptions of services, especially if messaging could be joint between HMICFRS, the Board and the NFCC.

JF confirmed that discussions had already taken place between the Chairs and RW from HMICFRS, and that RW would be joining the meeting shortly. Further opportunities to engage with services on this aspect would be considered over the coming months. Discussions have also taken place between the FSB Chairs and the NFCC Chair.

The paper recommended that further feedback should be gathered to assess the situation more fully. This would be done through two further engagement events in October and November. She confirmed that a further update including services feedback would be provided to the Board at its December meeting.

SMcC invited the Board to comment on the paper.

NC commented that the paper indicated that the impact may be purely operational, but that there is a role for elected members and that the Board may wish to consider how to inform and engage elected members on this aspect.

He suggested utilising an internal magazine produced by the LGA as one potential avenue to reaching all elected members. He also welcomed the Chiefs and Chairs events that have evolved in recent years and proposed that those may provide a useful platform to reach an audience who could influence thinking across fire authorities and services.

BA agreed with this proposal.

SMcC welcomed this suggestion and proposed that a meeting be arranged between the Chairs and both NC and BA to discuss this further. This was agreed.

Action FSB-A122: FST to facilitate a meeting between the FSB Chairs, NC and BA to discuss elected member engagement.

MH added that there was a need to make Fire Standards a more obvious part of the fire and rescue tapestry. The FSB Chairs have attended Council sessions and NFCC conferences in the past, but perhaps not with a specific agenda of discussing impact. He suggested there may be future opportunities to do this, potentially in curriculum for the various leadership programmes the NFCC has developed.

He also discussed several areas of work where the NFCC reference and support Fire Standards already, including the Implementation Support Team, but also the work of the Sector Improvement Committee and their work on peer review with the LGA team.

MH went on to propose that the review of the National Fire Framework is key in positioning the Fire Standards for services. He acknowledged that HMICFRS are not there to inspect the implementation of Fire Standards, but suggested that the Board would want to hear from HMICFRS about how services were using Fire Standards as part of their continuous improvement journey.

JB commented that Fire Standards form part of the “virtuous circle of improvement” in services’ performance. He added that feedback from HMICFRS would be important for the Board to consider and how that may affect already published and future Fire Standards. He confirmed that it was likely the National Fire Framework would undergo a major review post the White Paper on Fire Reform which was shared earlier this year.

MH went on in response to NC’s earlier comment about the role of fire authorities and elected members in holding officers to account with regards to the implementation of Fire Standards. He said services would need to consider how they provide assurance that standards are being implemented. This may be evidenced from inspection outcomes, but equally could be part of an evolution of the current annual statement of assurance. He reiterated the importance of referencing standards appropriately in the revised National Fire Framework.

JF proposed that more targeted communications may be a useful vehicle to respond to the feedback from services. This was discussed by the Board, and it was agreed that all opportunities to communicate and engage with services should be explored.

AS added that what is important is that all parties communicate in a consistent way, to clarify that all the component parts are intended to help services achieve the same aim - improved service to the public.

MH questioned how the Board can best support the inspectors in better understanding Fire Standards. Considering that many are seconded from services at Station Manager level, they may not have had exposure to the Fire Standards. He suggested this was something to be raised with RW when he joined the meeting.

NC remarked about the timing of inspections aligned to the publication of a Fire Standard. He said that it was unreasonable to expect a service to achieve a Fire Standard as soon as it was published. MH added that original discussions at the HMICFRS Expert Reference Group had clarified expectations that services would need time to analyse the standards on publication, carry out gap analysis and then be given time to address any gaps identified.

JF reminded the Board that at the start of the last round of inspections, only four Fire Standards were published. Therefore, whilst more standards are now available, it would not be appropriate for HMICFRS to change its inspection arrangement's part way through an inspection round. She explained that HMICFRS had confirmed that all published Fire Standards would be considered before the next round of inspection due to start in January 2023. She confirmed that whilst still not published, the draft Leadership and People Fire Standards would also be shared with HMICFRS to inform their future inspection arrangements.

For clarity, JF asked the Board if it agreed that services would not be expected to achieve a standard on publication, but that they must show how they are working towards achievement when inspected. The Board agreed.

Decision FSB-D044: The Board agreed that services would not be expected to achieve a standard on publication, but that they must show how they are working towards achievement when inspected.

Action FSB-A123: FST to develop targeted communications to respond to service feedback.

Item 4 – Guest
HMI Roy Wilsher

RW joined the meeting.

Reflecting on the Impact Assessment Paper shared with him, he confirmed that the HMICFRS was not there to audit the standards or services against them, but that the inspectorate would reference the Fire Standards, where appropriate.

He reminded the Board of the original fire reform pillars as set out in 2017 of which Fire Standards was one. He suggested that the standards would form a benchmark that they would use during inspections. He went on to say that it is important for services to understand that achieving the Fire Standards is more likely to result in positive inspection outcomes.

He described how the inspectorate team is currently working and its preparations for the next round of inspections. Something that has been observed is that services appear to have multiple improvement plans rather than collating all improvements together and considering them more holistically. He indicated this would be a point raised at the upcoming Chiefs and Chairs event in October.

NC raised his concern around the timing of inspections and Fire Standards release dates. In the context of how services prioritise their actions, he proposed that local priorities are considered during inspections.

RW confirmed that inspection frameworks would not be altered during a round of inspection. He confirmed there is a recognition that implementation takes time, but that the inspectorate would expect services to recognise a new standard exists and have plans in place to consider and act on it. He added that inspection is there to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of a service, and that Fire Standards were part of that evaluation.

MH proposed that the third round of inspections alongside more of the Fire Standards being published may result in a more mature approach by services, which may be evident in how services are inspected. He suggested that it would be important for services to evidence that there is both a strategic and operational process for handling new Fire Standards.

He also raised a concern about the familiarity in those carrying out inspections with Fire Standards. How services implement standards would vary from service to service with some having longer term changes planned. He asked how inspectors would recognise those differences and judge appropriately and suggested that the NFCC may have a role in providing support all round.

RW responded by confirming that discussions were underway about how the FST and the inspectors may come together to help improve levels of understanding about Fire Standards.

BA noted both the important role standards have in bringing about consistency of approach, but also consistency in inspection. Services are benchmarking themselves against a standard and may believe they are achieving it. It may be a matter of the service not being able to evidence that in a way that an inspector may recognise, rather than not achieving the standard. He suggested that equally a service may exceed the expectations outlined in a standard, which should also be flagged. He asked if the inspectorate identified good practice, how that would be shared to inform and potentially assist in the development of the standards themselves.

RW stated that consistency in inspection approach is the target, and that inspectors would acknowledge local differences. He requested that, if through our engagement work we find any examples where services perceive that they have received an inconsistent approach or generally have concerns about the inspectorates' approach, we share these with him and his team.

JB reinforced his earlier point about a virtuous circle of improvement which starts with standards being set by the Board, services working to achieve those standards and then inspected by HMICFRS. That would tell us what is working well and where there is more work to do.

AS acknowledged RW's point that Fire Standards are only part of the inspection process, but an important part. She added the importance of services understanding the relationship between Fire Standards and inspection. She requested that any mention of Fire Standards by HMICFRS in their messaging be quite explicit to clarify this link for services until that relationship was more widely understood.

She added that it is accepted that only published Fire Standards can inform inspection. Given the importance of driving change in service culture and leadership, she requested that HMICFRS consider the current draft versions of the Leadership and People Fire Standards, due for publication in December, as they prepare for their next round of inspection. She acknowledged that services are not likely to have implemented them, but that they should at least be referenced in inspections. Any support that can be given from the Board and FST to help achieve that would be beneficial for all.

RW acknowledged the importance of the topic and offered to do what they could to consider those standards.

SMcC summarised the discussion emphasising the importance of all the relevant parties aligning their communication messages. She went on to ask a question based on the feedback received to date from services. Specifically, she referenced that some services being focussed purely on what they perceive the measurements are, rather than approaching improvement more holistically to create a better environment for their communities and for their service. She asked how the inspectorate could avoid a potential impact of having a perverse outcome on approaches to service improvements?

RW said that he was not aware that was happening and that he felt their inspection questions and how they are all considered equally, worked well. However, he reiterated his earlier request for any examples which indicate this approach is not working.

MH added that it is for the leaders in services to keep the focus on delivering a good service to the public. He suggested that the new inspection regime is very different to the old, and some

services and authorities may not fully understand the role of the inspectorate in supporting their improvement. He reiterated that for many services, improvement is seen in a more holistic way and is not just about the inspection score.

SMcC thanked RW for his attendance and RW left the meeting.

Item 5 Visitor

Claire Whitehead-Wall – Leadership and People Fire Standards Consultation

JB left the meeting at the start of this item and TP was acknowledged as his deputy for the rest of the meeting.

CWW provided a summary of the engagement activity undertaken for the Leadership and People Fire Standards. The Board was asked to note Appendix C of Paper 2 which provided a full report from CWW.

CWW went on to describe how the engagement sessions were organised, the high levels of attendance at the online engagement sessions (over 70 people in attendance) and an overview of the feedback. CWW proposed that the high levels of engagement at the sessions was an indication of the importance of these standards for services.

Overall, she said the feedback from services was very positive and that they felt content with them in principle. In more detail, she added in reference to the Leading the Service standard, that the key message that leadership applies at all levels in an organisation and is not just about strategic or senior leaders, was seen as a positive step forward in driving culture change.

She added feedback indicated that people felt this standard would help people at all levels understand their roles within the service and for their communities. Many mentioned the standards being useful in terms of benchmarking and standardisation of approach.

She stressed that what services wanted was for the standards to be published to allow them to start using them, rather than strive for perfection in content on first publication. There was an acceptance that the standards may need to be tweaked, and so it was important when publishing to make clear that there was an agreed timescale and process for review as and when needed. Innovation, agility and flexibility were all aspects that featured in discussions she said, and that we would need to be mindful of these aspects when the consultation feedback is considered.

CWW did pick up on services potentially approaching standards and how to achieve them with a tick list mentality rather than considering standards as part of the whole transformation or continuous improvement landscape. However, as discussed earlier in the meeting, it was

recognised appropriate communications could help services with understanding where Fire Standards fit in that landscape.

In addition, she raised the challenge of how services would measure themselves against these standards. She proposed that leadership is a very broad area with multiple viewpoints on what good leadership looks like and therefore it is more of a challenge to measure that in a simple way. She added that there is a clear role for leaders in underpinning their services' approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, but that again there is no single measurement for improvements in these aspects.

She also raised a concern from the engagement sessions about the links between standards and inspection. She suggested work was needed to better understand the identification of the measures for these standards and that communication with HMICFRS may be beneficial.

She concluded with some observations from the feedback from services which included:

- Concerns about the impact of these standards for services, especially those with limited resources and workload (capacity)
- Clarification of how Fire Standards fit into the overall landscape of transformation and improvement. The suggestion was something on a single page for communication purposes
- Questions about what support is available for services once standards are published
- Guidance about a reasonable timescale for services to achieve Fire Standards

SMcC thanked CWW for her input.

A short discussion followed where it was clarified that attendance at the sessions was mainly middle to senior managers. CWW added that one service attended as a team which she felt indicated a good leadership approach and style by having the core team on the call together.

AS queried the statement from services about review dates and CWW confirmed that stating the intended review date on publication would perhaps help with confidence that should services find challenges with the standards once published, there was the opportunity to provide further feedback for review.

There was consensus that communication was key and finding a simple way to clearly explain the relationships between Fire Standards and other core elements of the continuous improvement landscape was important. MH added that communications was a responsibility for all in cascading messages through respective organisations. He added that a workshop targeting senior leaders to discuss how services are managing standards after publication may be useful at some point.

Action FSB-A124: FST to work with colleagues within the NFCC to consider development of a simple infographic or diagram to help show the relationship between Fire Standards, HMICFRS and other core components of continuous development.

JF explained that the normal process of evaluating consultation responses would take place for the Leadership and People Fire Standards and further revised versions of the draft standards would be shared with the Board via email following the normal development process.

Item 6 Paper 2 – Fire Standards Phase Two and Three Delivery Progress

FST

Report

for decision

JF introduced the paper and summarised progress on the standards currently in development.

She confirmed that the Data Management Fire Standard had been published but formal launch activities had been held back slightly due to both the change in Government Minister and the impact of the period of national mourning for the Queen.

The Board reviewed the amendments made to the Protection and Prevention Fire Standards, which was due to feedback received from services, and the subsequent publication of the Fire investigation Fire Standard. The Board approved both for publication.

Decision FSB-D045: The Board approved the revisions to the Protection and Prevention Fire Standards, the FST team to facilitate their publication on the website and inform services.

JF explained that there had not been the usual level of consultation responses on the Leadership and People Fire Standards, despite their being an extended consultation period due to the summer leave period. The responses received to date were:

- 27 responses on Leading the Service
- 22 responses on Leading and Developing People

It was noted that the additional engagement activity as discussed earlier in the meeting with CWW had seen large numbers of services engaged with these standards. It was proposed that many may have felt their contributions had already been given and therefore have not replied formally to the consultation. JF confirmed that a small number of services had indicated they would still like to submit responses and a meeting had been arranged with the London Fire Brigade to discuss their feedback.

JF asked the Board if they were happy to close the consultation at this stage and proceed with completing the development process which would be in line with the agree timeline. The Board agreed.

Decision FSB-D046: Consultation on the Leadership and People Fire Standards to close as planned on 9th September 2022 and the development process should continue in line with agreed timeline.

Item 7 Paper 3 – General Progress Report
for information

FST

JF asked the Board to note this paper was provided for information and not for decision as indicated in the header of the paper.

SMcC summarised the key points in the paper and invited the Board to comment. None were raised.

Item 8 Visitor
Marie Langtry (NFCC) – FSB Website

FST

ML joined the meeting and provided a short demonstration of the refreshed FSB Website which is due to launch in the next month.

SMcC thanked ML for the demonstration and invited the Board to comment. None were raised.

Item 9 – Any Other Business

Chair

She reminded the Board that the next meeting is scheduled for 21st December 2022 from 12.00hrs to include lunch before the start of the meeting at 13.00hrs.

SMcC confirmed that the next meeting had been re-arranged to ensure all Board members could attend in person.

It was intended that the meeting would run for approximately three hours, after which the Board may like to come together in a more social setting to celebrate the impending festivities.

The venue was confirmed as Etc Venues, Avonmouth House, 6 Avonmouth Street, London, SE1 6NX.

Future meeting dates are being planned approximately quarterly with the next meeting booked for 09.30hrs on Thursday 30th March 2023.