

MINUTES

Date: Thursday 30th March 2023

Time: 09:30hrs – 12:00hrs

Venue: Virtual (MS 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:	Nick Brennan (NB) – NFCC Implementation Team Jushna Chowdhury – Home Office Lucy Ellender – Local Government Association (LGA) Rebecca Johnson – Local Government Association (LGA) Jenna Marsh – Home Office Thomas Pinchbeck – Home Office Eddie Smithwick – Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC)
Fire Standards Team (FST):	Brenda Monks (BM) - NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Natasha Elia (NE) - NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Joy Flanagan (JF) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST)
Guest Attendees:	Paul Compton (PC) - Communications and Engagement Fire Standard Richard Edny (RE) - Communications and Engagement Fire Standard Nick Markwell (NM) – Fire Control Fire Standard Ben Norman (BN) – Fire Control Fire Standard Neil Odin (NO) – Communications and Engagement Fire Standard Clare Taylor (CT) – Fire Control Fire Standard
Apologies	None received

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

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. No conflicts of interest were expressed by Board members.

Minutes of meeting and matters arising**Chair**

Minutes of the meeting of 21st December 2022 were reviewed. The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

Item 3 – Paper 1 - Fire Standards Communication and Engagement Strategy and Planning**FST**

JF summarised the paper and reported that several engagement sessions were held throughout 2022 and a paper on the feedback gathered at these workshops had been brought to the Board at its previous meeting. Further analysis identified several themes to which the Fire Standards Team would respond through planned engagement. This approach was presented in the paper. JF asked the Board to consider the revised strategy as found at appendix B and the actions listed at appendix C.

JF said that feedback received from services on the subject of inspections would be shared with HMICFRS.

JF also said that should the Communications and Engagement Strategy presented be agreed by the Board, the FST would work closely with Board members' organisations and the NFCC Implementation and Communications teams to ensure there was a coordinated approach to effectively communicate with all.

NC noted the summary of responses and particularly the point made on the lack of strategic level awareness. He said that local authorities and MPs have little awareness of Fire Standards, and he would be pleased to work with the FST to address this. BA agreed with NC and added that differing audiences respond to various methods of engagement, and this should be considered when engaging local authorities, PFCCs or MPs.

JF responded that the FST would assess stakeholders, and the messaging to various audiences would be adapted to ensure the messaging used was relevant to each group. She also said that the language used to get messages across was important and this would be considered to gain strategic buy-in.

JB observed that standards were often picked up by specialists within services which could and did lead to silo implementation. He said that standards should be targeted and communicated to all those in services.

AS reminded the Board that the feedback received was given at one specific point in time. The NFCC had been working with services on understanding and achieving Fire Standards. Thus, the feedback provided when the workshops were held might not reflect of how things were currently. She welcomed a communications plan.

MH said that competing priorities and levels of resources were issues faced by many services. Securing a responsible person within the senior leadership team of every service to oversee the Leadership Standards achievement within their service, would be key. This would be alongside the involvement of Fire Authorities in holding officers to account in achieving the standards.

He added that the inspectorate had a large influence over what services prioritise. He suggested the Board needed to continue to ensure services understand the importance of Fire Standards both through the inspection framework and continued dialogue with HMICFRS. MH cautioned that the Board must consider how to avoid any unintended consequences which might impact services.

MH added that there was some work to do within the NFCC to link NFCC guidance and Fit for the Future to Fire Standards. MH also said that each Board member must find and take opportunities to talk about Fire Standards with their respective networks.

Decision FSB-D049: Board approved the Communications and Engagement Strategy and proposed actions.

Item 4 – Implementation Update, including update on Leadership and People Fire Standards

**FST and NFCC
Implementation Team**

NB presented a summary of findings, lessons learned and observations that were based on discussions with services on their implementation of Fire Standards.

He summarised that since the NFCC Implementation Team had been established, they had conducted 1,200 engagement sessions with services with 360 of those engagements directly related to a Fire Standard. NB said that 31 workshops on the first 11 published Fire Standards had taken place and were attended by mostly middle management practitioners from across every English fire and rescue service.

NB explained that most services had a defined process to implement Fire Standards. Evaluation of the engagements had been undertaken and the response from services was overwhelmingly positive. However, some felt that they would like to be provided with more definitive answers about how to implement Fire Standards. He added that this was not possible considering that each service operates as an individual organisation with differing risks, structures and priorities and the standards would need to be applied accordingly.

AS noted that some feedback focussed on the link between HMICFRS and Fire Standards. She added that during the recent External Reference Group meeting, HMI Roy Wilsher had made clear statements about the link between achieving the Fire Standards and achieving better inspection outcomes. The extent of that outcome would depend on how well the standards had been implemented. She reiterated that HMI Wilsher saw no conflict between standards and inspection.

AS also questioned whether the feedback relating to services wanting firm answers on how to implement Fire Standards related to leadership. She suggested that a different approach might be needed to support services in ensuring that the Leadership and People Fire Standards were successfully implemented and achieved. This would then help to support the achievement of other Fire Standards in the future.

MH reminded colleagues that the services have many competing priorities and therefore would likely seek more definitive answers from the NFCC Implementation Team to enable them to progress more quickly. However, he suggested that the approach taken to standards is likely to differ from one service to another. He added that whilst one of the NFCC's roles was to facilitate the FSB's development of Fire Standards, the NFCC cannot implement Fire Standards for services.

SMcC noted that that there was a view from leaders that the Leadership and People Fire Standards were aspirational. She questioned NB whether services were considering a different approach to implementing the Leading the Service and Leading and Developing People Fire Standards. NB replied that it was too early to provide a definitive answer, but, having engaged with each service, many understand that a different approach was necessary.

BA left the meeting.

Item 5 – Paper 2 – Fire Standards Phase Three Delivery Progress Report

FST

JF introduced the paper and summarised the progress on the standards currently in development. She confirmed that we are nearing the completion of delivery of Phase Two. The Third phase of Fire Standards would look at resources, including asset management, commercial and procurement and assurance and finance. It would also potentially include the subjects of digital and technology.

JF advised that there had been a delay in the discovery work on the resources related fire standards due to limited access to subject matter experts during the period of proposed industrial action. Nevertheless, several workshops were due to take place in April. Further information about a proposed way forward on these standards would be brought back to the Board in due course.

SMcC asked whether there were any other topics that might warrant a Fire Standard. JF said there had been discussions on whether a Fire Standard on incident command, JESIP or interoperability in general would be appropriate. She said that through discussions with subject matter experts within the NFCC, the feeling was that, while raising the profile of incident command within the standards would be appropriate, a dedicated Fire Standard on the topic would no. there was a consensus that incident command was one of many disciplines deployed when an incident takes place. The intention instead, would be to complete an exceptional review of the three operational response Fire Standards to consider whether incident command, JESIP or interoperability are covered adequately in those standards.

MH added that there were expected recommendations from the HMICFRS Culture and Values Spotlight Report, and these might impact new or existing Fire Standards.

NC and JB both agreed the Board should act swiftly on the recommendations laid out in the HMICFRS's Culture and Values Spotlight Report. JB added that the Grenfell Inquiry was due to be released in 2023 and was likely to carry recommendations relating to operational firefighting. There may be actions relating to Fire Standards and suggested the Board might prefer to review these together, when available.

SMcC invited JB to discuss any concerns he may have on a Fire Standard relating to finance. JB clarified that he would be content with a Fire Standard that dealt with specific fire related finance concerns as opposed to a standard that would replicate more generic CIPFA guidance.

He suggested that such a Fire Standard should focus on the fundamental management of a productive and efficient fire service. JF responded that the desire was to only produce Fire Standards that were necessary for services and pointed to what already existed. She proposed that productivity and efficiency were an outcome of having good asset, commercial and financial management structures in place. She said that until the discovery work took place, she did not know how many fire standards may be developed on these topics.

NC said that applying a fire context to CIPFA standards and guidance could be helpful for services. AS said that until the scoping work had been completed, the Board would not know what a Finance Fire Standard would entail. She noted that at various conferences there were finance sessions which suggested there was a range of information that was pertinent to the sector and could be drawn upon.

MH said there is a newly established NFCC Productivity and Efficiency Group which could be a good forum to discuss this topic. He suggested that a discussion on the Resources Fire Standards would be useful to add to the agenda for discussion at the next meeting of that Group.

FSB Action-A131: FST to contact NFCC's Productivity and Efficiency Group Chair, Sarah Gawley, to discuss producing a Resources Fire Standard at the Group's next meeting.

Item 6 – Communications and Engagement Fire Standard
Visitors: Neil Odin, Paul Compton and Richard Edny

FST

The Board welcomed visitors Neil Odin, Paul Compton and Richard Edny.

NO commented that he was pleased to bring the Communications and Engagement Fire Standard to the Board for approval. He added that it was an important and wide-reaching Fire Standard for the sector and would have a much broader impact than just on prevention.

PC said that the Communications and Engagement Fire Standard was a culmination of several years' work for FirePro. PC said that as the former chair of FirePro, he wished to help services meet a good standard in communications and engagement. There were, for example, many generalised standards relating to internal communications, public relations, and consultation, however these standards did not have a fire specific context applied to them.

To support this work, the FirePro team had engaged with services early on during the development phase which led to the extremely positive response and minimal feedback during the peer review and consultation stages of development. PC added that he was struck by how welcome the standard was amongst colleagues within services.

MH thanked NO, PC and RE for the work completed and praised the work of FirePro. He said that a Communications and Engagement Fire Standard would help initiate conversations about expectations from parent organisations, such as county councils, in relation to fire when often there were competing priorities.

FSB Decision-D050: The Board approved the Communications and Engagement Fire Standard for publication.

Item 7 – Fire Control Fire Standard:
Visitors: Ben Norman, Nick Markwell and Clare Taylor

FST

The Board welcomed visitors Ben Norman, Nick Markwell and Clare Taylor.

BN thanked the Fire Standards Team that made the process clear and easy to understand, and praised the level of engagement throughout the six months it took to develop the standard from start to finish. He applauded the level of fire control expertise within the NFCC that enabled the agility to move at such pace, and the structure of the sector through the Mobilising Officers Group (MOG) who also supported development through their wide network.

CT noted that having had the experience of developing National Operational Guidance (NOG), managing Fire Control teams, and developing a good network of peers provided a good start in developing the Fire Standard. She added that working within the NFCC to develop guidance on fire control, it was already understood where the additional support in this area was necessary; in areas such as succession planning and joint training with other blue light partners. This helped to steer the content of the Fire Control Fire Standard.

NM explained that the NFCC Fire Control Project had published seven NOG documents to date, but that the adoption of the guidance varied across the country. The introduction of this Fire Standard would bring a renewed focus to Fire Control and would support improved adoption of guidance.

MH said that the Fire Control Fire Standard, alongside guidance would bring about a clear focus on Fire Control. He added that there is an important role for the NFCC in supporting services with their implementation of the Fire Standard and NOG.

NC directed the Board to review point 6h of the Fire Control Fire Standard *“Provide fire control employees with effective systems and arrangements to: Increase emergency call management capacity”*. He said that many services now jointly work with others to increase capacity and asked whether the statement is reflective of this type of setup. This statement was echoed by BA prior to his leaving the meeting. NC also said that Fire Control can be a single point of failure and services must have adequate alternative provision. He queried whether this was also covered within the Fire Standard.

BN responded that the first point made by NC regarding capacity is referenced within the Fire Standard under the points on technological advancement and standardised training. MH added that he felt this matter was covered adequately within the Fire Standard. BN also responded to NC’s second point and said there was reference in the Fire Standard to business continuity, Operation Willowbeck and Multi-Agency Information Transfer which would support greater resilience.

FSB Decision-D051: The Board approved the Fire Control Fire Standard for publication.

Item 8 – Paper 3 – Fire Standards Approval: Fire Control and Communications and Engagement Fire Standards

FST

The Board approved the Fire Control and Communications and Engagement Fire Standards during discussions Item 7 and Item 8. No further comments were made.

Item 9 – Any Other Business

Chair

SMcC raised two items for discussion. Firstly, she said that both herself and AS had received a letter from the Minister regarding the professionalism chapter of the White Paper on Fire Reform. She said that the Minister would like to explore the proposal for a College of Fire and Rescue further, including the potential for a College of Fire to be merged with the College of Policing.

SMcC added that the Chairs and FST had attended meetings with the Home Office as part of their research carried out on this matter. She explained that she had been invited to attend a meeting on 5 April 2023 for further discussion. SMcC proposed that an agenda item be added to the 31 July Board Meeting to discuss further.

JB responded that no decision had been made on a proposed College of Fire, however the Minister was keen to move forward and to build on the success of the FSB and the NFCC. JB clarified that the Minister was open to discussions with all parties, and it should not be interpreted that a decision had been made about the structure.

NC said that the principles of a College of Fire was more important than the structure. He said that he would not want fire to transition into the College of Policing and would want fire to maintain its own identity. He agreed that it would be useful to debate this at the next Board meeting.

TP was invited to discuss the progress to date on the proposed College of Fire. He said that each Board member's organisation had been represented and engaged with throughout the research phase and in total the Home Office had spoken to over 220 people. He said that he would be pleased to give an update to the Board at the next meeting to provide a more in-depth playback of findings on this matter.

SMcC secondly stated that the HMICFRS's Spotlight Report on Culture and Values was due to be released later that evening and noted that there were recommendations that were directed to the Fire Standards Board. She said that once the Report had been officially released, she

proposed to write to the Board to suggest a course of action, adding that the Board must act swiftly in moving forward with the recommendations.

MH suggested an extraordinary Board meeting would be helpful to discuss the impact and subsequent actions resulting from the recommendations outlined in the Report.

NC said that he was in full support of all firefighters undergoing DBS checks, which might be referred to in the Report. He suggested that HR advice should be obtained as there may be contractual implications and supported further discussions on this subject.

JB said that some of the timescales outlined within the Report were expected to be restrictive, and potentially out of the control of the organisations involved, such as legislative changes. JB also said that it was positive that the FSB were recognised in having a role to play in supporting services with reform. JB added that the large number of expected recommendations was disappointing. All Board members agreed, and AS said that this was likely to show the serious nature of the matters in hand, but there was a risk that having too many recommendations might dilute their impact.

FSB Action-A132: TP to present an update at the next Board meeting on the progress being made to deliver a College of Fire.

FSB Action-A133: FST to arrange an exceptional Board meeting to discuss the FSB recommendations contained in the HMICFRS's Culture and Values Spotlight Report.

The next formal Board meeting is scheduled at 09.30hrs on Monday, 31st July 2023. However, as per FSB Action-A134, an exceptional Board meeting has been scheduled to take place on 13th June 2023.

