

MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 20th December 2023
Time: 13:00
Venue: &meetings, 150 Minories, London, EC3N 1LS

Attendees:	Suzanne McCarthy (SMcC) – Chair Alison Sansome (AS) – Vice-Chair Ben Adams (BA) – Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC) – <i>Remotely</i> Greg Brackenridge (GB) – Local Government Association (LGA) Jonny Bugg (JB) – Home Office (HO) Mark Hardingham (MH) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)
In Attendance:	Jushna Chowdhury (JC) – Home Office (HO) Dan Daly (DD) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Lucy Ellender (LE) – Local Government Association (LGA) Harry Palmer-Randle (HPR) – Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC) Tom Pinchbeck (TP) – Home Office (HO)
Fire Standards Team (FST):	Joy Flanagan (JF) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Alex Parkin (AP) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST)
Apologies	Nick Brennan (NB) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Jenna Marsh (JM) – Home Office (HO) Marshall Scott (MS) – Local Government Association (LGA) Eddie Smithwick (ES) – Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC)

1. Introductions, apologies, and conflicts of interest

Chair

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and began by thanking Jonny Bugg (JB) and Joy Flanagan (JF) who were attending their final Fire Standards Board meeting.

SMcC advised that she had been appointed to the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors' Standards Steering Group.

There were no other declarations of interest or conflicts of interest.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Chair

Minutes of the meeting of 9th October 2023 were reviewed and were agreed as an accurate record.

SMcC advised the Board that all actions had been completed, with the exception of FSB-A148 which would be covered under agenda item 4, paper 1: Fire Standards Delivery Progress Report.

3. Home Office response to the White Paper

JB

JB began by advising the Board that he was leaving the Home Office to take on the role of Chief Executive Officer for the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner from 1st January 2024. Replacements for his role at the Home Office would be via a job share between Yvette Bosworth and Suzzie Daykin who are both experienced civil servants. They would take up the role from 15th January 2024.

ACTION FSB-A149: FST to arrange a meeting for the FSB Chairs with JB's replacements.

JB said that there would be some other reorganisation within the Home Office team, with Jenna Marsh (JM) swapping role/remit due to a colleague returning from maternity leave from 15th January 2024. TP and JC will remain in place.

On the Government's response to the White Paper on Fire Reform, JB said he was pleased to see the response published before he left. Under governance it would not be mandatory for Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) to move to a Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) model, despite this being the preferred option by Government. Support would be available for those who wished to move to that governance model. The concept of a Firefighters' Oath proved unpopular in the consultation and would not be taken forward. The proposal for a College of Fire and Rescue would be progressed, and TP thanked those involved in the consultation for their responses.

SMcC asked about timescales around a decision being taken as to what body would take forward the creation of the College of Fire and Rescue. TP stated that the intention for a decision about its creation would be taken as quickly as possible. There were, however, competing pressures with a spending review, new budget and a general election pending. There was no decision on a model as yet.

JB noted the emphasis on the people element contained in the White Paper following the various culture reports, and that attracting and recruiting the right people is key. Linked to the NFCC Culture Action Plan, he acknowledged that investment in leadership and making the profession open to all is important.

BA asked about operational independence for Chief Fire Officers. JB responded by saying the Fire and Rescue National Framework would be reviewed, and that the Home Office was talking to partners about the details of operational independence. Long term it would require primary legislation to enable this.

JB closed by advising that the National Joint Council (NJC) was running a self-led review to improve systems, processes, inclusivity, and transparency. The Board was also reminded that the HMICFRS misconduct thematic was currently underway with 10 Fire and Rescue Services.

4. Paper 1: Fire Standards Delivery Progress Report

FST

JF summarised the main points in the paper. She confirmed that the Internal Governance and Assurance Fire Standard was out for consultation. AP said that to date 28 responses had been received. SMcC asked if the Board was happy to extend the

consultation to 15th January 2024 in the hope that given more time more responses might be received.

DECISION FSB-D059: FSB agree to extend the Internal Governance and Assurance Fire Standard consultation to 15th January 2024

ACTION FSB-A150: FST to arrange an extension to Internal Governance and Assurance consultation deadline and advise the sector accordingly.

As to the Procurement and Asset Management Fire Standard, JF advised that this standard had not yet gone out to consultation following feedback received from Home Office's subject matter experts (SMEs). A meeting was being arranged for a group of Home Office and FRS SMEs to meet in January with the Chairs to work through the feedback with the aim of getting a version out to consultation as soon as possible. The Board was asked to note the impact on the delivery timeline of approximately six weeks.

SMcC asked MH for his view on involvement of Blue Light Commercial (BLC) in the drafting of the Procurement and Asset Management Fire Standard. MH felt there were enough voices with Home Office and FRS colleagues and that although NFCC intervention in suggesting BLC involvement was done in good faith, on reflection he would not be in favour of a commercial organisation being involved directly in the development of a Fire Standard. SMcC confirmed that BLC would be asked for technical advice only if engaged by the Board, but they were, of course, free to respond to the consultation.

BA asked JB what the Home Office's concerns exactly were with the draft Procurement and Asset Management Fire Standard. JB responded that in the Home Office's SMEs view it was not yet ready for consultation. JC added that the distinction between procurement and asset management did not seem to be clear enough as drafted. JB confirmed that he was happy for development of the standard to take longer in order to get the quality right.

JF reminded the Board that a standard is not a policy. JC acknowledged the latest response from the Home Office to the FST had not yet been received. MH thought that the Fire Standard should sit at a strategic level, and the danger of SME involvement could make it too technical. SMcC agreed and reminded the Board the priority was a standard's outcome statement and highlighted the difference between a standard and the guidance to support it. JB asked if there were lessons to be learned by the Board in these more technical Fire Standards which had seen greater Home Office involvement. MH added we could probably expect more feedback when we review current Fire Standards as FRSs had now had up to 3 years to implement the standards. AS agreed and highlighted the importance of these reviews. In the context of this discussion, SMcC added that NB, AP, and the FSB Chairs were planning to take a tactical and needs-based approach when considering their FRS 2024 visits.

SMcC stressed that final decisions about standards sat with the Board.

JF went on to update the Board on work being done in creating the Digital and IT Fire Standard. This had now started with Chief Fire Officer (CFO) Calum Faint as sponsor.

Moving to the Safeguarding Fire Standard, SMcC said that the NFCC Safeguarding Board had challenged the wording of one sentence. The Chairs and FST had met with NFCC safeguarding leads and provisionally agreed to revised wording which AP read

out. TP agreed the changes were sensible and MH added that the change in wording delivered the same outcome but improved clarity.

DECISION FSB-D060: FSB agreed with the proposed wording amendment to the Safeguarding Fire Standard.

ACTION FSB-A151: FST to arrange amendment to the Safeguarding Fire Standard's wording, show this change on the FSB website, confirm the change to the NFCC Safeguarding Board, and communicate generally to the sector.

5. Leadership and People Fire Standards – Implementation Support

FST

Huw Coates, Implementation Liaison Manager (ILM) from the NFCC Implementation Support Team (IST), joined the meeting remotely and shared a presentation on the team, its members, and the work being done to support FRSs specifically on the people and leadership related Fire Standards. Discussion then followed about the success and benefits of the team.

MH reminded the Board about the background to the creation of the Implementation Support Team. AP stressed the importance of relationships with FRSs. SMcC added she had seen real benefit to ILMs joining the FSB Chairs on service visits.

JF raised an issue of credibility when HMICFRS are perceived by services not to consider Fire Standards and how services were working to implement these when they inspected. In response SMcC stated the Chairs had recently spoken to Roy Wilsher, HMICFRS, on this subject and he had asked to be provided with any evidence of this found. JB wondered why an inspectorate would not refer to standards as part of their inspection regime. AS suggested that communication may be part of the issue here. MH said the Fire and Rescue National Framework and the current HMICFRS inspection regime pre-dated Fire Standards, along with those secondees from FRSs into HMICFRS who probably have not had to implement them. He thought that the next wave of secondees should be aligned better.

Huw stressed that the key message from the Implementation Support Team out to services was that Fire Standards were a good health check, and if services were doing them well there should be few perils from an HMICFRS inspection. GB stated that in the West Midlands the Fire Authority asked for Fire Standards reports to come to the Board so they could monitor from a governance and oversight perspective. He thought that if HMICFRS were not using them FRSs would shift their focus elsewhere. MH suggested a role for ILMs in showing Fire Authorities and governing bodies what works well with regard to Fire Standards and helping them as well as FRSs.

ACTION FSB-A152: Chairs, FST and ILMs to discuss how to raise awareness of Fire Standards with governing bodies and how to support them with oversight and monitoring.

Break 14:50 – 15:00hrs

6. Paper 2: General Progress Update

FST

JF gave an overview of the paper and described how previously FSB website hits were reported to the Board. However, as she explained this told a predictable story of increased engagement when a consultation is launched, new Fire Standard released, or other activity. She suggested that instead the Board may wish to consider closer alignment to data the IST and others may hold, considering benefits management.

AP then provided a brief overview of the data points the IST collect. MH gave three thoughts on data sources that could be useful to the Board; HMICFRS inspection reports, the NFCC refresh on performance data that Helen Newton, NFCC Head of Communications, is leading on, and the ILM qualitative and quantitative data and anecdotal intelligence. TP said that coming from a grant conditions and Measures of Success perspective an evidence revisit would be useful. SMcC mentioned a closer link to Alix Bartlett, HMICFRS, and their data which the FSB can tap into.

SMcC also suggested in other areas they put out an 'end of year report' of what has happened, any findings and learning. JB agreed this was a good idea for the Board and would help position Fire Standards in the minds of Government. He also suggested Richard Jolly, HMICFRS and ex Home Office as a good contact.

ACTION FSB-A153: Chairs and FST to discuss producing an end of year report for the Fire Standards Board.

It was suggested to invite Andy Cooke, HMICFRS, to a future FSB meeting. MH recommended March as it will be after next State of Fire report.

ACTION FSB-A154: FST to arrange invite to Andy Cooke, HMICFRS for March 2024 Board meeting.

ACTION FSB-A155: Chair and FST to meet to discuss with a view to taking an options paper on communication and engagement to the next Board meeting which would include the tapping into of data sources.

7. AOB and date of next meeting

FST

SMcC thanked JB and JF again.

ACTION FSB-A156: FST to arrange updates to the FSB's website with the departure of JB and the appointment of GB.

Meeting Closed

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Friday 8th March 2024

13:00 – 16:00 hrs

Location: Online