

# MINUTES

**Date:** Monday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023  
**Time:** 15:15 – 17:30  
**Venue:** Virtually, via Microsoft Teams

<b>Attendees:</b>	Suzanne McCarthy (SMc) – Chair Alison Sansome (AS) – Vice-Chair Ben Adams (BA) - Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC) Jonny Bugg – Home Office (HO) Mark Hardingham – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Nick Brennan (NB) – NFCC Implementation Team Jushna Chowdhury (JC) – Home Office (HO) Eddie Smithwick – Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC) Helen Newton (HN) – NFCC Implementation Team Harry Palmer-Randle (HPS) Marshall Scott (MS) Tom Pinchbeck (TP)
<b>Fire Standards Team (FST):</b>	Joy Flanagan (JF) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Paul Henbest (PH) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Rachael Manton (RM) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST)
<b>Apologies</b>	Greg Brackenridge (GB) – Local Government Association (LGA)

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## 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. The Board consented to the meeting being recorded.

The Chair formally noted special thanks to Nick Chard (NC) for his valuable contribution throughout his time on the Board. She advised the Board that NC would be replaced by Cllr Greg Brackenridge (GB) but, due to needing to attend another meeting, he had sent his apologies.

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## Minutes of meeting and matters arising

Chair

Minutes of the meeting of 31<sup>st</sup> July 2023 were reviewed. The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

Minutes of the meeting of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023 were reviewed. The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

For matters arising, SMc advised the Board that all actions had either been completed or were on this meeting's agenda.

The Chair said that she would take this paper two parts, with the first focused on the Leading and Developing People and Leading the Service standards. She proposed that, should the Board be agreeable to the changes made to the standards as meeting the Inspectorate’s recommendations, these standards should be sent to HMICFRS.

JF summarised the proposed changes to the two standards. She said that these changes were developed as a result of working with the Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) and individuals who originally had worked on these standards as well as noting feedback from workshops.

JB was content with the changes proposed, feeling that they were minor and easily accommodated. JF advised that there were some comments made by Home Office officials as to whether some of the wording sat better in the “outcome” or “how to achieve” sections. The Fire Standards Team (FST) believed that it would be better for these comments to be picked up with the Home Office later. AS agreed with this approach and suggested that if more changes were sought beyond the scope of the HMICFRS response, these should be included in the periodic review of the standards. BA also confirmed he was content with the standards as amended.

SMc in summarising the discussion said the Board had agreed to the proposed changes to both the Leading and Developing People and the Leading the Service Fire Standards and that they would be shared with HMICFRS before being formally published on the FSB website.

**DECISION FSB-D057: FSB agreed the proposed changes to the Leadership and People Fire Standards as a result of the response to HMICFRS Culture Review.**

**ACTION FSB-A145 Amended standards to be sent to HMICFRS and then published on the FSB website.**

Moving on to consideration of the Safeguarding Fire Standard, JF summarised the changes being proposed. The main changes were in the “outcome” section. Some points had also been added in the “benefits” section. These were more focused on the measurement of the benefits, rather than the benefits themselves. MH commented that while he took the point about the inclusion of measures in the standard, the measures did refer to elements already referenced elsewhere in the standard.

JF also advised that there was some feedback from the Home Office that covered areas not in the original scope of the review, which would require SME feedback. JF proposed that those suggested changes should be addressed with the Home Office and the SMEs outside of the Board meeting, with the view to sending the final version of the standard to the Board for review before the end of October.

JB confirmed that the Home Office had some comments about the legislation on safeguarding but had nothing further to add presently.

MH was content with the proposed text and welcomed the opportunity to review any additional changes once they were agreed.

AS was also content to sign off the standard in principle, whilst recognising the need for the further comments to be addressed. BA was also in agreement.

JF further clarified that there were some Home Office comments recently received and therefore not included in the circulated document. These were mainly seeking greater clarity in the wording or language used and suggested that this would be followed up with the SMEs and the NFCC Safeguarding Team. The Board agreed.

**ACTION FSB-A146: FST to check with Safeguarding SMEs on the changes suggested by the Home Office. Once confirmed, a revised version to be shared with Board members for approval for publication.**

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#### Item 4 – Paper 2: Fire Standards Delivery Progress Report

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FST

SMc advised the Board that JF had handed in her notice and would be leaving the NFCC's employment after the December Board meeting. SMc and AS would be discussing support options with MH and the NFCC CEO, Susannah Hancock (SH).

**ACTION FSB-A147 FST to organise a meeting between SH and MH (NFCC) and FSB Chairs to discuss resourcing going forward after JF's departure.**

The Chair explained that the Board needed to decide how to use the executive resources for the next phase of work and that the paper contained several options. The paper gave an overview of the work both started or expected to start shortly, as well as additional work which had been added such as the Inspectorate's recommendations and the need to insert various elements that were originally suggested to be included in a stand-alone Finance Standard into existing standards.

JF advised the Board that the two Resources Fire Standards had not gone out for consultation. She explained that following September's Board meeting and the Board's decision not to have a stand-alone finance related Fire Standard, the FST had carried out a mapping exercise (page 5 of the paper) to identify where the various elements within the scope of the proposed Finance Standard would best sit within existing Fire Standards.

This piece of work had identified five standards that could potentially incorporate these key elements, which could be achieved using the FSB "exceptional review" process. Some changes had the potential to be significant, such as those proposed for the Leading the Service Fire Standard. If this becomes the case, then consultation would have to be considered which would require a longer time period to complete than more minor changes.

JF understood that Home Office officials had some concerns with the current versions of the Resource Fire Standards, but the FST had yet to receive their comments. The FST believed that ascertaining the sector's views was now required to move those standards forward. The FST was eager to receive any further comments the Home Office may have in order to initiate consultation as soon as possible.

JF suggested how best to achieve the remainder of the known workload referring specifically to the options starting on page 8 of the paper.

SMc asked JF to explain what she believed to be the best option moving forward. JF said she was in favour of option 3, (included in the appendix of the paper and summarised at the end of these minutes) as she believed there was time to initiate the scoping phase for the Digital and Information Technology Fire Standard before she left. She felt the other important focus would be to issue the two resources standards for consultation in order to achieve the agreed timeline of completion in the Spring 2024. This would then help with the completion of the initial suite of standards.

The implications of selecting this option to focus on completing the suite of Fire Standards, would result in both the exceptional review of the five standards (absorbing the elements from the previously proposed Finance Fire Standard), and initiating the periodic review of the already published standards, taking place in the next financial year.

JB wanted to seek reassurance from the Board, particularly MH, that the FSB would have the necessary resource in place to support whichever option was chosen. JB stressed that as the funding was flexible, rather than ring-fenced, he wanted to ensure that the FSB would be sufficiently supported by other programmes in the right way.

MH stressed that the work undertaken internally within the NFCC during the last eighteen months has been done to create resilience and capacity to complete work required. MH confirmed he was having conversations about continuity internally. MH also encouraged the Board to advise him if they ever felt that delivery from the NFCC was unsatisfactory.

When considering how to move forward, MH was inclined to agree with JF on option 3. MH felt that delivering all the standards in their initial form should be the aim, with business-as-usual activity including the reviews being a focus for next year. He added that there was potentially more flexibility with the timing of review work compared to the establishment of the initial suite of standards. MH expressed that one of the reasons the FSB stepped away from the Finance Fire Standard stemmed from the Board's belief that there was plenty of good guidance available in this area already, so the exceptional review may not be as pressing as first thought.

AS was pleased to hear MH's remarks about future resourcing from the NFCC's perspective. She was content for the Board to look at an order in which to approach the work. However, in her view the Digital and Information Technology Fire Standard was unlikely to be completed in the same timescales as some of the other standards. It might be that the FSB and FST needed to run some tasks in parallel to maximise progress. AS also stressed that while it felt right to pause work on periodic reviews, these were important and could not be delayed indefinitely.

BA felt that, given MH's assurances, he was inclined to agree with the option Board colleagues were aligning with. He was happy to be guided by FST colleagues as he felt that they had a more well-rounded view of their own resourcing capabilities. BA's preference was to have a slightly longer time to review the outcomes of the Finance Fire Standard mapping exercise and how this affected other standards.

SMc said she would respect whatever option the Board decided. She was, however, mindful that JF's departure would likely affect the speed in which standards were produced in the future.

The Board discussed the deadlines around reviewing and commenting on standards prior to issuing them for consultations, as JB commented that potentially these deadlines had sometimes been too short, leading to limited time for colleagues within the Home Office to

make comments. SMC did not agree that insufficient time had been given, and stressed that even when comments had been received after deadlines set, the FST had sought to address these comments where possible. SMC thought it might be prudent, however, to involve Home Office colleagues earlier in the process.

AS acknowledged that the last review timelines around the resources standards was very short, but noted that this was due to them being iterations of previous versions already circulated to the Board numerous times before, and therefore significant comments were not anticipated.

JF agreed with AS and added that there was a balance to be struck between making changes before or after consultation when those comments have been fed in after sharing multiple iterations with the Board and when wider views from services would also need to be considered. JF stressed that with the number of iterations these standards, she felt the most pragmatic way to progress them was considering input from the sector through the consultation.

JB partially agreed with JF, advising that in relation to the Finance Fire Standard, some people had not felt heard when previously providing feedback which may then have led to an appetite to review future draft standards more closely than before. He also stressed that the creation of the standards was a collaborative journey, so it was important to give SMEs as much time as possible to be involved. Moving forward, JB's preference was also option 3.

JF proposed that the FST work with the Home Office to address further comments made on the resources standards and discuss any revisions with the Chairs with the intention to open consultation as soon as possible on both.

**ACTION FSB-A148: FST to check comments from the Home Office before sending out the Resources Fire Standards for consultation.**

SMC summarised that the Board had unanimously supported option 3.

**DECISION FSB-D058: FSB agree that option 3 from Board Paper 2 should be the agreed timeline going forward for prioritisation of work within the FST.**

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## Item 5 – General Progress Update - Paper 3 – For Information

FST

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JF provided a summary of the paper for the Board.

She confirmed that the equalities impact assessment statement was now published on the website.

She further confirmed three new videos featuring several Board Members were also live on the website. These videos are designed to raise awareness and understanding about the role of the Fire Standards Board and the Fire Standards, including their importance for communities. All Board members were encouraged to view and share links to the videos throughout their respective networks.

A further video has been made by Kath Billing, Chief Fire Officer of Cornwall FRS to share the experience from within a service in relation to achieving Fire Standards. How best to share this content was being considered with the NFCC Communications Team.

With regards to ongoing engagement with services, JF added that real value was being derived from the Chairs visits to services. On these visits the Chairs had the opportunity to explain the benefit of standards to senior teams and other service personnel. These visits were a useful adjunct to the work done by the NFCC Implementation Support Team.

NB was grateful for the support, as more of the Implementation Support Team's engagement was at the practitioner level. The Chairs visits helped to cascade the message across the sector.

JB queried whether the feedback from the practitioner level would feed into the review of the standards. NB confirmed that it would, as the Implementation Support Team was already finding patterns and identifying lessons learned. NB was already reporting some data into the Home Office and would feed this into the FSB too.

AS agreed that this data could also help to further strengthen the standards as required, not just to help observe how the standards are currently being used.

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## **Item 6 – Any Other Business and date of next meeting**

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**FST**

The Board discussed how the devolved nations were approaching the Fire Standards.

NB reported that he had spoken with the Welsh services who were keen to see legislation linked to Fire Standards but relevant to them, versus that relevant to services in England, be available via the FSB website.

A discussion amongst the Board took place. Points were raised about the benefit of bringing consistency to service delivery more widely across the UK if the standards were being aligned to by services in devolved nations. However, it was also recognised that there were challenges associated with this, such as the possibility of the content of the standards being amended or diluted ultimately leading to different versions, should the devolved administrations reference their own legislation into the standards. It was noted that the Board had previously discussed these challenges. It was agreed that the Board remained open to working collaboratively and continue these conversations as part of ongoing dialogue with the devolved administrations.

JB updated the Board on forthcoming legislation confirming that multiple government departments are seeking to pass legislation and the process for gaining time on the house was very competitive. He added that there was no certainty when a general election would be called which also impacts on the legislation timetable.

JB also mentioned that there was clarity on the review of the National Fire and Rescue Framework, which he expected would be a substantial review. He believed it would be the biggest tool for demonstrating sector changes within fire and rescue. JB thought the FSB had achieved so much that this review would be an opportunity to put the FSB front and centre of a new version and establish expectations around areas such as collaboration and operational independence. JB stressed that the review of the fire framework would be classed as secondary legislation rather than primary.

AS welcomed the national framework review and was keen for the FSB to have early sight and involvement in that work. SMC agreed that the work of the FSB and the Fire Standards influenced the content of the revised framework.

JB also mentioned that outcomes from the final report on the Grenfell Tower Inquiry were expected in the coming months. He asked if any Board members were starting to plan for a response to those, particularly MH and the NFCC.

MH explained that while the NFCC was in the initial stages of preparing for the outcomes, they had not started scoping or planning for it in any detail. JB and MH agreed to take the conversation offline to start working on a collaborative approach.

### Meeting Closed

#### DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> December

12.00 – 16.00 hrs (in person)

**Location:** &meetings, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS

### APPENDIX

**Option 3 – complete two resources standards in progress and initiate the third and final standard as detailed below:**

<b>Work included for remainder of FY 23/24</b>	<b>Work not included FY 23/24</b>
Completion of two resources standards by March 2024	Exceptional review of 5 x standards to encompass finance activities
Initiating scoping work on Digital and Information Technology Fire Standard in November 2023 (potential to reach approval by March 2024 subject to drafting stages, peer review and consultation)	Periodic review of operational response and emergency response driving standards