

MINUTES

Date: Friday 8th March 2024

Time: 13:00

Venue: MS Teams

Attendees:	Suzanne McCarthy (SMcC) – Chair Alison Sansome (AS) – Vice-Chair Ben Adams (BA) – Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC) Yvette Bosworth (YB) – Home Office Greg Brackenridge (GB) – Local Government Association (LGA) Mark Hardingham (MH) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)
In Attendance:	Jushna Chowdhury (JC) – Home Office (HO) Harry Palmer-Randle (HPR) – Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC) Tom Pinchbeck (TP) – Home Office (HO) Marshall Scott (MS) – Local Government Association (LGA)
Guest Attendees:	Susannah Hancock (SH) – NFCC Chief Executive Officer Luke Malton (LM) – Devon and Somerset FRS Corporate Procurement Manager (<i>Item 4 only</i>) Paul Illman (PI) – NFCC Implementation Support Team
Fire Standards Team (FST):	Nick Brennan (NB) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Alex Parkin (AP) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST)
Apologies	Eddie Smithwick (ES) – Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC)

1. Introductions, apologies, and declarations of interest

Chair

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and introduced Yvette Bosworth (YB) representing the Home Office. It was explained that YB job shares with Suzie Daykin (SD) and at least one of them will be attending Board meetings.

Apologies were received from Eddie Smithwick (ES).

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Chair

There were no corrections or amendments of the minutes of the meeting on 20th December 2023. These were accepted as a correct record.

Actions from previous meeting:

FSB - A153: The Chairs and the Fire Standards Team (FST) to discuss producing an end of year report. This action has been completed and the draft document was discussed at agenda item 5.

FSB - A156: The FST to update the website by removing Jonny Bugg and Nick Chard. This has been completed.

ACTION FSB - A157: Update the FSB website with photographs and biographies of YB and SD.

3. Fire Standards Progress Update

NB

Paper 1 – For information

Paper 2 – For information

NB advised that in response to actions for the FSB in the HMICFRS spotlight report on values and culture in fire and rescue, three Fire Standards were revised and published in January 2024. Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) were informed of these revisions.

The Internal Governance and Assurance Fire Standard had gone out for consultation before Christmas and 32 responses were received. The first post-consultation workshop had been held with SME colleagues who had helped write the draft Standard. Most of the comments were positive, and a second review workshop was planned for the week following the Board Meeting. Thereafter the revised standard would be shared with the Board with a request to proceed to the quality assurance stage, before seeking final approval from the Board to publish.

It was anticipated that the draft of the Digital and Information Technology Fire Standard would be shared with Board members during the week following the Board meeting. At that time the Board will be asked if it is content for consultation to begin on the Standard. The SME drafting group had suggested revising the title of the Standard to 'Digital and Cyber Security Fire Standard' which they felt to be a more appropriate description of the Standard's content and purpose. TP thanked the Fire Standards Team for including the Home Office in the SME workshops and said that this had helped with the drafting.

It was further reported that following the advice of the SME drafting group, the asset management sections of the Procurement and Commercial Fire Standard had been removed. NB proposed that the Board agree to a mapping exercise being undertaken to determine which Fire Standards may be most appropriate for incorporating any required elements of asset management. He suggested that this exercise could be done in parallel with the exercise agreed at the previous Board meeting to map the finance elements to other existing Standards. It was explained, that conducting such an exercise would extend the delivery timeline.

In discussion, YB agreed that the proposal to conduct such an analysis would be more helpful than creating a new Standard and encouraged a realistic timeline for this work. NB explained that during the exceptional Board Meeting in September 2023 it was agreed that the Fire Standards Team would not produce a standalone finance Fire Standard but would instead explore whether to combine asset management with procurement. This idea had subsequently been rejected. SMcC said that the intention was not to create an asset management Standard, but rather to examine the elements of asset management and to map these to existing Standards. AS also supported the gap analysis work and thought it helpful to complete the work in parallel with other work where appropriate.

DECISION FSB - D061: The Board agreed that a mapping exercise should be done against existing Fire Standards to see where elements of asset management could be absorbed and that this would form part of an exceptional review process.

It was also reported that SMcC had met Richard Jolly who is the new Portfolio Director at HMICFRS and had a very positive conversation particularly about how the Board and the Inspectorate can work together to improve services. SMcC is speaking at a HMICFRS event on positive practice on the 29th April hosted by Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service.

Further, as a result of an invitation from the Welsh Senedd regarding their Inquiry on Equality and Social Justice, the Chairs had produced a written submission and AS would also be giving verbal evidence to the inquiry on behalf of the Board. The Chairs had previously met with Welsh Fire and Rescue Services which had indicated that they would like a Welsh version of the Fire Standards. However, it had been made clear that content of the Standards reflected English legislation and could not be altered. MH explained that while Wales did not have an inspectorate, they do have an inspector, Dan Stephens, who acts as both the Welsh Fire and Rescue advisor and inspector.

4. Fire Standard approval for consultation: Procurement and Commercial Paper 3 – For decision

SH / LM

LM joined the meeting.

It was explained that joint workshops with SMEs and the Home Office had resulted in the revision of the draft Standard presented to the Board. SMcC had attended the workshop and found it a very constructive and useful event.

SH was invited to introduce the draft Standard which was recommended be considered for consultation. She explained the revised structure of the NFCC National Strategic Commercial Hub (NSCB) and how Blue Light Commercial (BLC) supported the NSCB. She said that a draft of the Standard was circulated to the NSCB, which provided feedback that had been incorporated into the draft. LM advised that the previous draft was difficult to follow with references to asset management, finance and other processes, which were good content but not appropriate for this Standard. The SME group redrafted the Standard to cover the wider public sector and government commercial standards, staffing requirements to deliver procurement activity and the commercial lifecycle.

In discussion BA, while content for the draft to go out to consultation, asked if there was any reference to any national procurement entities. LM advised that the draft included collaboration at local, regional and national levels, and that there was a close partnership with Blue Light Commercial (BLC) across fire and rescue now that the procurement hub had moved under the governance of the NSCB. NB confirmed that BLC was listed under the guidance and supporting information section of the Fire Standard. YB commented that the collaboration had been very positive with impressive feedback. MH echoed this, and thanked LM and colleagues for steering this work through partners. MH said that he thought that the Standard looked good, and the Board agreed it should now go out for consultation.

DECISION FSB - D062: The Board approved the Standard to be circulated for a 6-week consultation.

ACTION FSB - A158: FST to launch consultation on the draft Procurement and Commercial Fire Standard.

LM departed from the meeting.

5. Fire Standards Board Annual Review 2023/24
Paper 4 - For decision

NB/TP

SMcC and NB presented the draft Fire Standards Board Annual Review 2023/24 for comment. NB highlighted suggested changes proposed by the Home Office to include some data to demonstrate levels of engagement activity and quotations from services. TP reiterated that the review would provide evidence of the impact of the Fire Standards, which the Home Office would be able to share with the Minister.

SMcC said that due to the Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC) inquiry taking place during the week following the Board meeting, the team may need to share a draft with the Home Office for submission to the HASC, with the intention of publishing the finalised version later.

MH suggested a change in tone in the section of the review discussing the inspectorate to make it clear that inspections and Standards are closely linked. MH agreed to draft alternative wording for this section.

ACTION FSB - A159: MH to share draft wording for the FSB Annual Review section relating to HMICFRS.

DECISION FSB - D063: The Board agreed to delegate sign-off of the final version of the Annual Review to the Chairs.

ACTION FSB - A160: FST to publish the Annual Review on FSB website and via other appropriate channels once complete.

The Chair reported that AS and herself had recently become aware that the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC) was holding an inquiry into the culture of Fire and Rescue Services and during the first session there were statements made about the lack of national fire standards. It was agreed that this misinformation should be challenged and further agreed that the Chairs should write to the Chair of the Committee to explain the role of the Fire Standards Board and giving details about the Fire Standards.

YB explained that the Home Office had also only very recently been made aware of this inquiry. She advised that the Minister was going to be giving evidence to a later session and that details about the Fire Standards had been included in his briefing pack. MH advised that he believed this inquiry had been called much earlier than expected. MH said that he personally would not be giving evidence, but that three NFCC lead officers would be.

ACTION FSB - A161: Chairs to write to the Chair of the HASC Committee on culture of Fire and Rescue, outlining the role of the Fire Standards Board.

6. Regional Fire Standards Workshop – Implementation Support

NB /PI

Verbal update and presentation on the recent Fire Standards assurance day

PI joined the meeting.

PI from the NFCC Implementation Support team was invited to give a presentation about a regional Fire Standards workshop he delivered at Essex Fire and Rescue Service in January. He said that this was a full day workshop with four services from the region attending. NFCC was represented by three colleagues: PI, AP, and Adreena Parkin-Coates from the Protection team.

In preparation for the workshop PI had undertaken an evaluation of the Essex FRS's approach to embedding Fire Standards, which indicated an inconsistent approach to evidence gathering, incomplete gap analysis and varied levels of assurance.

As these were issues that the team recognised from other engagements with services, PI took the opportunity to develop a workshop day to explore them. The first half of the day focused on the Leading the Service Fire Standard and on exploring how to analyse the outcome statement, linking it to other standards to highlight service strategy and demonstrating how underlying NFCC products, guidance and toolkits could support the embedding of a Fire Standard.

PI explained that the Implementation team was looking at wider approaches to support services in embedding the Fire Standards, and the second half of the day took an innovative World Café approach providing advice on embedding several Fire Standards. The team introduced the HM Government self-assurance methodology, *3 lines of defence*, as one example assurance model. PI also described the further advice given in the workshop to incorporate findings from self-assurance and evaluation into existing action plans within a service. The team advised services against writing specific Fire Standard action plans separate to existing improvement plans, as this could reduce efficiency by duplicating work.

SMcC and NB thanked PI. MH said the Board's main priority had always been how to embed these Standards in services and the presentation demonstrated the crucial role of the Implementation Support Team in delivering this. SMcC, AS and YB reiterated how important it was to ensure FRS were supported in embedding these standards and thanked PI for his hard work. SMcC observed that local government fire authorities (including PFCCs) were ultimately responsible for holding FRS to account in ensuring that Standards were being implemented. BA agreed that more could be done by these fire authorities.

7. AOB and date of next meeting

Chair

SMcC thanked NB and AP for their hard work since assuming their respective positions after Joy Flangan and Paul Henbest departed from the Fire Standards Team at the end of 2023.

There was no other business.

SMcC confirmed the next meeting was scheduled to be in person on 10th June 2024.

Meeting Closed

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

10th June 2024

Location: In Person