

MINUTES

Date: Monday 10th June 2024
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 and Crime Commissioners (APCC) (Virtual) Greg Brackenridge (GB) – Local Government Association (LGA) (Virtual) Mark Hardingham (MH) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Suzie Dakin (SD) – Home Office
In Attendance:	Jushna Chowdhury (JC) – Home Office (HO) Harry Palmer-Randle (HPR) – Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC)
Guest Attendees:	Andy Cooke (AC) – His Majesty’s Inspectorate for Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS)
Fire Standards Team (FST):	Natasha Elia (NE) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Nick Brennan (NB) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST)
Apologies	Alex Parkin (AP) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Anvir Bhandal (AB) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Eddie Smithwick (ES) – Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC) Thomas Pinchbeck (TP) - Home Office (HO)

Item 1 - Introductions, apologies, and declarations of interest

Chair

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and introduced Suzie Dakin (SD) representing the Home Office and who jobshares with Yvette Bosworth (YB) who attended the previous meeting.

The Chair also welcomed back Natasha Elia (NE) who returned to her role following maternity leave. The Chair warmly thanked Alex Parkin who had covered the role.

Apologies were received from Eddie Smithwick (ES) and Thomas Pinchbeck (TP)

There were no declarations of interest.

Item 2 - Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Chair

There were no corrections or amendments of the minutes of the meeting on 8th March 2024. These were accepted as a correct record.

Actions from previous meeting:

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

FSB - A157: Update the FSB website with photographs and biographies of YB, SD and GB. Biographies of YB and SD had been completed. GB was reminded to share his biography and photograph.

Item 3 – Response to HMICFRS State of Fire Report

Chair

SMcC directed the Board to the letter sent on their behalf to HMICFRS in response to the 2024 State of Fire Report. She also thanked guest speaker, Andy Cooke (AC) in attendance, for ensuring the State of Fire report made reference to Fire Standards.

Item 4 – Guest Speaker - Andy Cooke - HMICFRS

AC

SMcC introduced guest speaker AC.

AC thanked the Board for their continued work and noted that the work HMICFRS and FSB delivered was complementary and was helping to progress the sector. He summarised that services that took a holistic approach, drawing upon the support of wider organisations such as NFCC, FSB and HMICFRS, tended to achieve better inspection outcomes.

AC summarised the six national recommendations since the establishment of HMICFRS and said he was pleased that the first recommendation, to deliver a programme of work for Community Risk Management Planning which includes the CRMP Fire Standard and sixth recommendation – the delivery of a Code of Ethics Fire Standard and Core Code of Ethics, – had been achieved and therefore closed. Three of the remaining national recommendations were still open and were equally important; Recommendation 3 – the Home Office to review and determine the roles of FRS and those who work in them; Recommendation 4 - concerning pay negotiations and the grey book; and Recommendation 5 – operational independence of CFOs

Within the 2024 State of Fire Report, HMICFRS went on to suggest that a legal requirement to respond to HMICFRS inspection reports should be placed upon services. It would allow fire and rescue authorities, mayors, county councils and police, fire and crime commissioners, to request that HMICFRS inspects services in their areas. AC said this in his view would provide greater transparency and drive timely improvements.

AC said that there were still many issues relating to culture, poor workforce planning and supporting and developing staff. He highlighted that many of these issues stemmed from ineffective leaders with poor strategic oversight. He said that some services were highly innovative and leading the way, and that these services had strong and effective leadership and were better at supporting their staff, responding to recommendations, delivering change and making improvements to their service. SD responded that it would be useful to have a collective conversation with those leaders who were doing well with the aim of them supporting those services who were not.

AC said that leaders of the future were not being equipped with the right tools and skills. MH said that there were many leadership programmes available now and that it was good practice

for leaders to coach and be coached. He said that there was a bigger appetite to bring in experience from outside of the sector and that 40% of Chief Fire Officers appointed within the last two years had come from a non-fire service background.

The College of Policing was well established and therefore AC continued to recommend a College of Police and Fire. He clarified that efficiencies would be found through the merger of back-office functions. He recommended that there should be different leaders for the strategic oversight of Fire and Policing respectively.

AC noted the continued issues around recruiting and retaining on-call firefighters which resulted in poor response times. MH responded that there were some services that were being innovative in the way in which they attract, recruit and retain on-call firefighters. However, more needed to be done. He added that it was unaffordable for the sector to not make improvements in this area, and there was an acceptance that the current process was not working.

AC agreed and said that it was important that good practice was picked up and shared. He added that there was a wider societal issue of a lack of volunteers, such as the reduction of special constables within policing. SD also responded and said that the Home Office was committed to ensuring communities were safe through the delivery of on-call firefighters and that they had funded NFCC to deliver changes to the on-call process for those services impacted. She added that she would arrange a discussion with wider organisations to investigate options for further support.

SMcC asked AC whether he thought any further Fire Standards might be useful for the sector. AC responded that the suite of Fire Standards published and those in progress were complementary and the Board should be mindful of not producing too many as not to overwhelm the sector. MH added that any additional Fire Standards should be done by exception, although he could foresee a potential Fire Standard on misconduct considering the HMICFRS's report on the subject, due to be released in July 2024. SMcC said that the topic of misconduct could be strengthened in the relevant Fire Standards, but this would need to be reviewed in line with the review process.

MH said there was a big gap in research and development across the sector. He had considered the characteristics of successful services such as organisational and leadership stability, the role of Fire Authorities and the appetite and acceptance of change. MH said that he was fully supportive of a review of leadership at the next round of inspections.

BA said that in his experience, there have been positive and negative contributions and relationships with representative bodies which have led to mixed outcomes. These negative contributions however, had caused significant delay to the modernisation of the sector.

GB raised a concern about the proposal to give the inspectorate regulatory powers. AC responded that regulatory powers should be used as a deterrent and seldom used.

In relation to a College of Policing and Fire, GB said that the LGA was in favour of two separate colleges, as opposed to one which would host both fire and policing. He added that services and authorities were working to improve poor culture within the sector, although he acknowledged that there was still more work to be done. GB also said that the one-year funding model was unhelpful for medium to long term planning.

GB queried whether a change of government would have an impact on the White Paper's proposals. AC replied that HMICFRS was committed to working with any future government to ensure the delivery of the proposals.

SD asked how those services who have been put into the Engaged Process were supported. AC said that HMICFRS was keen to ensure those services had the right support from the sector and when a service was initially put into the Process, those supporting organisations (Home Office, LGA, APCC, NFCC etc.) were drawn together to provide their experience, knowledge and expertise. This, however, was reliant upon the goodwill of those organisations. APCC had also worked with HMICFRS to create a hints and tips guidance document for those in the Process.

SMcC added that FSB had been in touch with services that required additional support. NB said that the NFCC Implementation Team had also engaged with services that needed support and any opportunity for the HMICFRS to sign post such services towards the additional strategic level support available through the Implementation Team would be welcomed. MH said that cultural issues required long term planning to resolve and those supporting organisations, including HMICFRS should be mindful of that. AC agreed and said HMICFRS wished to see long term processes, policies and sustainable plans in place, rather than short term fixes.

AC left the meeting.

Item 5 – Paper 1 - Internal Governance and Assurance Fire Standard Approval

NB

NB acknowledged the difficult journey in developing the Internal Governance and Assurance Fire Standard and thanked all those who were involved. He said that NFCC Improvement Committee Chair and West Sussex CFO, Sabrina Cohen-Hatton, wished to thank the Board and were pleased to present the Fire Standard for approval for publication.

SMcC directed the Board to the Quality Assurance report for the Internal Governance and Assurance Fire Standard that had been shared with Board members outside of the Board meeting. She asked the Board if it was content for the Fire Standard to be published. She observed that the QA report raised some important issues. She suggested that considering the recommendations made in the report, it would be useful and timely for the Fire Standard Development process be reviewed to ensure that it remained robust and useful, to support the maintenance review process.

NB responded that there may be steps in the process that are no longer needed and therefore the FST would review the development process as part of the review of the asset management and finance standards which was in progress.

LE said that the LGA had recently published a framework on improvement and assurance and although this was a lengthy document the FST should be aware of potential linkages.

SMcC thanked LE and advised that the FST would review the framework and advise the Board of any changes subsequently needed to the Fire Standard. The Fire Standard would still be published, should the Board approve.

The Board approved the publication of the Internal Governance and Assurance Fire Standard as presented.

ACTION FSB – A162 – FST to review the processes in which new Fire Standards are developed and existing ones are maintained.

ACTION FSB – A163 – FST to review the LGA Improvement and Assurance Framework and advise the Board of any changes needed to the Internal Governance and Assurance Fire Standard.

DECISION FSB – D064: The Board approved the publication of the Internal Governance and Assurance Fire Standard.

Item 6 – Paper 2 - Fire Standards Progress Update and Chairs’ Report

NB

NB summarised the progress of the Fire Standards in production. He said that the Procurement and Commercial Fire Standard consultation had closed, and the feedback was due to be reviewed. He said that Fire Standard was on track to be published in the summer.

NB also said the Digital and Cyber Security Fire Standard consultation was due to close on 17 June and had already received 23 responses. This Fire Standard was also on track.

NB directed the Board to Appendix 2 which outlined a review of the two Fire Standards which the Board had agreed not to progress: Asset Management and Finance against the already published Fire Standards. SD asked how partners would be involved in the work. NB responded that partners would be included in discussions regarding any amendments along with subject matter experts.

NB said that Fire Standards remain central to the work of the NFCC Implementation Team, who continued to deliver regular workshops to support services to embed individual Fire Standards and align to wider self-assurance strategies. This year, members of the team had met demand amongst their services to host regional Fire Standards networking workshops. This supported service leads in engaging with each other to share good practice and raise awareness of different implementation approaches.

NB said that those FRS that have change managers tended to be more successful at implementing Fire Standards as they often see inspections and Fire Standards as holistic change management. The vehicle to get services to understand this was through the supporting organisations such as FSB, HMICFRS and NFCC sharing the same messages.

NB added that he would like to share how National Operational Guidance implementation support was provided at the next meeting.

1. AOB and date of next meeting

Chair

There was no other business.

SMcC confirmed the next meeting was scheduled for 9th September 2024.

Meeting Closed

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

9th September 2024

Location: Online