

MINUTES

Date: Thursday 12th December 2024

Time: 12:00 – 16:00

Venue: In person

Attendees:	Suzanne McCarthy (SMcC) – Chair Alison Sansome (AS) – Vice-Chair Ben Adams (BA) – Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) (Virtual) Jeanie Bell (JB) – Local Government Association (LGA) (Virtual) Mark Hardingham (MH) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Yvette Bosworth (YB) – Home Office
In Attendance:	Rebecca Johnson (RJ) – Local Government Association (LGA) Hannah Condon (HC) - Home Office (HO) (Virtual) Harry Palmer-Randle (HPR) – Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) Richard Martin (RM) - Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) Georgie Kelham (GK) – NFCC Analysis and Insight (A&I) Peter Leckie (PL) – NFCC (Virtual) Susannah Hancock (SH) – NFCC (Virtual)
Fire Standards Team (FST):	Natasha Elia (NE) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Nick Brennan (NB) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Kelly Klauks (KK) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST)

Item 1 - Introductions, apologies, and declarations of interest

Chair

SMcC welcomed members to the meeting. An introduction was provided for JB, the new LGA representative.

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 9th September 2024. These were accepted as a correct record.

Actions from previous meeting:

FSB - A152: FST to arrange the meetings between the Chairs, LGA, governing bodies, FST and ILMs to discuss how to raise awareness of Fire Standards with governing bodies and support them with oversight and monitoring. Action re-opened following General Election. SMcC

requested a separate meeting between FST, BA and JB to assess how FRAs can engage in ensuring implementation of the Fire Standards.

FSB-A165: SD to organise an introductory meeting between SMcC, AS and the Minister.
Completed – meeting took place on 6th December.

All other actions were closed.

Item 3 – Home Office Update

HO

YB provided the HO update, speaking of the new Minister's continued interest in culture and misconduct work, highlighted by the recent events in West Midlands FRS and a recently published report of historic racism in Gloucestershire FRS.

Following Grenfell Phase 2 recommendations, the report had been debated in the House of Lords and the House of Commons, leading to a commitment of a full response to those recommendations by March 2025.

The first Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) meeting took place 4th of December, with members of the FSB represented in the group including the Chair. Ministerial focus was on engagement with the whole sector and two substantive papers were tabled: a reform road map setting out the Government's proposals and the second on culture and integrity. Before the next meeting in March, members would be approached for priorities and views on the delivery of the reform road map and clarification with members on what a College of Fire could look like.

MH, SMcC and BA raised concerns around the membership of the group. It was highlighted the challenge of a tiered membership structure in reducing both the opportunity for associate members to engage, and potentially giving greater priority to representative bodies who were members of the main group.

SMcC noted that the HO highlighted the need for consistent terminology when speaking about standards, with a view to clarify the difference between professional, operational and FSB produced Fire Standards.

The FSB agreed that the first MAG was successful, and it was encouraging that the Minister intended work to be sector led, rather than imposed by Government.

RJ advised the LGA conference will be taking place 11th and 12th of March. SMcC requested an opportunity to speak in person at the meeting at Gateshead.

ACTION FSB-A168: RJ to confirm Fire Standards speaker slot at the LGA conference on 11th and 12th of March in Gateshead.

Item 4 – Paper 2 - NFCC Response to HMICFRS Misconduct Review

NB

NB provided a summary of the paper. The proposed delivery plan for the year was outlined and included three activities; a mapping exercise, continued implementation workshops and delivery of findings from the first two activities.

The Board members gave their views on the paper and endorsed the approach, while requesting the deadline of the mapping exercise be moved from the second quarter to the first financial quarter of 2025. NB proposed to deliver an interim update at the March Board meeting, to which the Board agreed.

SMcC requested FST input on resources and current work to produce results by Q1. NB advised there would be an impact to the current Fire Standards reviews, particularly those due to be reviewed within Q1 and which relate to Home Office grant deliverables. The Board accepted this impact.

SMcC noted there had also been discussions around the production of a potential standard on firefighter health and safety. She asked the Board members to give their views on considering such a standard.

MH advised that any Health and Safety Fire Standard should not be restricted to firefighters. It would be important to establish if health and safety aspects were sufficiently covered already elsewhere in the fire standards. MH also advised the Board that HMICFRS had noted in recent reporting that FRS's were performing well in health and safety areas, so there might be less of a demand for a specific fire standard on this topic.

AS observed that health and welfare was already a cross-cutting theme of the fire standards, however she suggested this topic should be considered during periodic reviews, to ensure sufficient coverage within the fire standards.

ACTION FSB-A169 – FST to update the mapping exercise delivery completion in the paper from Q2 to Q1 of 25/26.

ACTION FSB-A170 – FST to bring the interim findings from the mapping exercise on Misconduct to the next FSB meeting in March.

ACTION FSB-A171 – FST to share the review findings with the Inspectorate, to ensure alignment of views.

ACTION FSB-A172 – FST to highlight health and wellbeing areas as a topic of consideration, when reviewing standards.

DECISION FSB-D066 – The Board accepted that those fire standards due to be reviewed within Q1 of 2025/26 may be slowed down in order to prioritise the Misconduct mapping exercise.

SH left.

Item 5 – Paper 1 - Fire Standards Progress Update and Chairs' Report

NB

NB provided a summary of the paper.

The Fire Standards reviews were ongoing with FRS CFOs on the NFCC Steering Group invited to review the Leading the Service Fire Standard at a workshop in January. Workshops with SME groups for the Community Risk Management Planning (CRMP) and Leading and Developing People Fire Standards took place in November.

The changes to the CRMP Fire Standard were more extensive and may result in requiring a full consultation. Reviews on the Operational Competence and the Operational Preparedness Fire Standards had taken place, the results of which had been shared with the Board prior to the meeting. As the Board had not had time to review the proposals, SMcC requested that Board members provide their response in early January.

Suggested changes to each of these Fire Standards under review would be shared with the Board in January.

NB proposed that work on the Operational Learning Fire Standard be delayed to consider expanding the Standard to Organisational Learning. FST would need to engage fully with the relevant NFCC specialists to understand the impact on services.

SMcC requested that changes to individual fire standards be communicated clearly to services. NB advised that changes to individual fire standards would be communicated as they happen, and a wider communication exercise would take place on completion of the existing reviews.

NB fed back on the meetings between HMICFRS Portfolio Director, Richard Jolly, SMcC and AS. This had led to further positive discussions on the alignment of the HMICFRS's Characteristics of Good Performance with the suite of fire standards. The FST intended to maintain communications and engagement with HMICFRS including scheduling further meetings between R Jolly and the Chairs in addition to seeking links on both the Fire Standards and HMICFRS websites demonstrating positive and consistent interpretation.

ACTION FSB-A173 - Board members to provide feedback on the recommended changes as well as a view on the level of change, and therefore the review approach required, on the Operational Competence and Operational Preparedness Fire Standard by 28 January 2025.

ACTION FSB-A174 – Following completion of each revised Fire Standard, wider communications to be provided to FRS's explaining the relevant combined changes.

DECISION FSB-D067 - The Board agreed to delay the periodic review of the Operational Learning Fire Standard until the necessary discussions had taken place with subject matter experts.

Item 6 – Paper 3 – Fire Standards Board Strategy 2025-26

NB

NB summarised the draft paper, which was divided into three areas; a fire standards review programme, supporting sector improvement, and confirmation of the ongoing role of the FSB.

MH agreed that the delivery plan should include reference to the wider reform plans, including the College of Fire, the definition of a standard and that timelines and resources should remain flexible to respond to events. MH advised that the sector had and would continue to have long

standing challenges relating to the development of competency frameworks. He expressed caution to clarify the role of FSB in that area.

SMcC highlighted the requirement for the wider sector to understand what a standard was and how standards were defined. To show benefit, it would be important to be able to share all the evaluation data gathered from workshops with the services.

YB said that there were still areas of uncertainty within the reform plan and therefore the need to remain flexible was important. She said work, including horizon scanning, was ongoing in the Home Office to clarify direction.

YB asked whether greater representation of the FBU or HMICFRS on the FSB was appropriate. MH and SMcC both commented in response that representative bodies may have different agendas to those on the board, although open communication with such bodies was recognised as important for the successful implementation of Fire Standards. AS noted, that representative bodies had the opportunity to respond and input to consultations on fire standards, which on occasions they had done.

MH left.

Item 7 - NFCC's approach to Data Collection and Evaluation

GK

GK delivered a presentation on behalf of the NFCC A&I team outlining the approach to evaluating Fire Standards and NFCC products which would be conducted throughout 2025/26, with a view to embedding this as business as usual in future years. The approach was based on good evaluation practice using various evidence sources, including inspection reporting from HMICFRS, covering characteristics of good performance and publicly available Home Office data.

NB explained that the work would underpin and support the Fire Standards Board's strategy (item 6) and expected to regularly report on progress at Board and NFCC Improvement Committee, commencing from the March 2025 Board meeting.

There was wide support from the FSB for this work.

ACTION FBS-A175 – FST to bring progress update on the evaluation of fire standards to the March FSB meeting.

Item 8 - Fire Standards and Competencies

PL

PL delivered a presentation outlining the NFCC's proposed competency work, subject to the approval of the NFCC Chiefs Council. The Board had been asked to support the work and potentially contribute to a future governance role due to the important links between Fire Standards and employee competency.

The NFCC was outlining a project around the work. Scoping requirements were in process and the aim for the next financial year would be to revise the existing NFCC competency methodology and establish a strategic competency engagement group from the sector. FSB would be invited to participate in this work, to support the methodology and contribute to governance. Further future work would need to consider ownership and management of the competencies, including a competency framework methodology aimed at those designing competencies in FRS's.

Given the timescale and complexity of the work, it would take approximately 12 months to agree competency principles. Individual competency frameworks for aspects of FRSs, combined with the overarching competency frameworks, would then be developed over the coming years.

BA questioned the role that the FSB would play in this work. PL explained that the Fire Standards would be referenced and referred to within the framework, and that the FSB would be key stakeholders in ensuring fire standards would not be misrepresented.

NB highlighted the importance of supporting the work around competency from a governance perspective, advising that Fire Standards were important to continuous improvement. He said that the proposal was being taken through NFCC Chief's Council for inclusion in the business plan for the next financial year at which point it would be factored into the business case for the grant agreement.

SMcC questioned what Stakeholder engagement the NFCC had considered. PL advised the function of the Competence Engagement Group would be for all stakeholders to present the work being done in their corresponding areas around competence.

AS noted, that the current Fire Standards refer to 'appropriately skilled people carrying out roles aligned to the standard,'. However, there was little guidance out there, as to what was meant, when referring to 'appropriately skilled,' noting there was a visible gap in that area.

Updates concerning this work within the NFCC were requested from the FST, as and when available.

Item 9 - AOB and date of next meeting

Chair

There was no AOB.

SMcC thanked the attendees for their attendance and closed the meeting.

Meeting Closed

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

17th March 2025

MINUTES

Location: Virtual

Teams