FIRE STANDARDS BOARD

# MINUTES

**Date:** **02 October 2025**
**Time:** **14:00 – 16:00**
**Venue:** **Virtual (MS Teams)**

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| **Attendees:** | Suzanne McCarthy (SMcC) – Chair<br>Alison Sansome (AS) – Vice-Chair<br>Ben Adams (BA) – Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC)<br>Yvette Bosworth (YB) – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)<br>Phil Garrigan (PG) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) |
| **Observers In Attendance:** | Hannah Condon (HC) - MHCLG<br>Rebecca Johnson (RJ) – Local Government Association (LGA)<br>Susannah Hancock (SH) – NFCC<br>Richard Martin (RM) - APCC<br>Abigail Hopewell (AH) - NFCC |
| **Fire Standards Team (FST):** | Nick Brennan (NB) – NFCC<br>Natasha Elia (NE) – NFCC |

| **Item 1 - Introductions, apologies, and declarations of interest** | **Chair** |
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SMcC welcomed Board members to the meeting.

The Board noted that Cllr. Jeannie Bell (JB), Local Government Association (LGA) representative, had stood down from her role and were awaiting the announcement of a new LGA representative.

SMcC stated two declarations of interest. The first in her capacity as the Chair Designate for the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants' Regulatory Board commencing in December 2025 and the second as a Standard Investigation Panellist for the Independent Press Standards Organisation.

There were no other declarations of interest.

| **Item 2 - Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising** | **Chair** |
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There were no corrections or amendments of the minutes of the meeting of 18 June 2025. These were accepted as a correct record.

Actions from previous meeting:

**ACTION FSB-A177: MHCLG to organise meetings with the FSB Chairs in between MAG meetings.** Update: Meetings took place in June, September and November 2025. SMcC requested this action remain open for further meetings to be noted as scheduled.

**Action FSB A185: FST to provide a formal response to MHCLG queries on the proposed amendments to the Prevention Fire Standard. Once MHCLG have confirmed their agreement, the FST to re-circulated the Prevention Fire Standard for final approval.** Update: A formal response was provided to MHCLG colleagues, and the Prevention Fire Standard was re-circulated to the Board. The Prevention Fire Standard was approved and re-published in October 2025. This action is now closed.

**Action FSB-A186: FST to review and propose additional amendments to the Leading and Developing People Fire Standard to then share with members for approval before starting consultation.** Update: The Board agreed to consider further work on the handling of misconduct and therefore a consultation on the two Leadership standards was paused whilst this work continued. This action remains open.

**FSB-A187: FST to incorporate comments from MHCLG on the Annual Chairs Review and Delivery Plan for 2025/26. SMcC and AS to approve.** This action has been completed and is now closed.

All other actions were closed.

| **Item 3 – MHCLG General Update** | **YB** |
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YB provided an update on MHCLG matters. She said that she had not yet met with new Minister Dixon but would prioritise this to explore what of the previous Minister's work would be taken forward.

Following the change of Minister, YB confirmed that the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) meeting scheduled for October would take place in November.

YB said the College of Fire and Rescue Task and Finish group meetings were useful and were providing valuable insight. There were five further meetings scheduled where she expected the Group would get into more detail. A public consultation on the College of Fire and Rescue was expected to take place in February 2026. The Culture Task and Finish group was in the process of agreeing a culture vision statement. YB said that the College would take precedent and as a result, work on culture would temporarily slow in order to focus Departmental resources.

SMcC queried how the definition of a standard would be addressed within the work described by YB. YB said that she had shared the previous concerns raised by the Board on the multiple definitions of a standard and would discuss this with the Minister as a matter of priority. YB added that more work would need to be done on this subject, but she confirmed it would be an important part of the consultation, which was expected to take place in February. YB said that

she would arrange formal meetings to discuss this topic with both the Fire Standards Board and the Fire Brigades Union.

AS observed that the current Fire Standards describe a cultural outcome that led to a positive culture. She felt that some of the cultural work discussed within the Culture Task and Finish group replicated existing published material, although she acknowledged that there was a desire to gain buy-in through collective development. She thought there may be a need to realign fire standards with the emerging vision statement.

BA said that he hoped the new Minister would continue to place importance on Operational Independence for fire and rescue services and the expansion of the role of the firefighter. YB said that Operational Independence was programmed for next year supported by the work in progress to update the National Framework. She added that discussions were in progress on the role of the firefighter, but it was too early to provide more information.

| **Item 4 – Paper 1 - Fire Standards Approval Papers** | **FST** |
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Following their periodic reviews, the revised Fire Investigation, Emergency Response Driver (ERD) and Community Risk Management Planning (CRMP) Fire Standards were presented to the Board for approval.

The Board suggested that the original Fire Standards that were to be replaced should be archived and dated and that all those that responded to consultations on the CRMP and ERD Fire Standards be contacted to thank them for their feedback.

The Board approved the revisions and agreed to re-publish the three standards.

PG said that the Board may wish to consider the relevance of the ERD Fire Standard in the future, bearing in mind that it was a technical standard. NB responded that the FST had taken this into consideration when reviewing the standard and had raised it to a more strategic level. Some Board members said that the standard could be considered an outlier, but all agreed that it was legislation driven and remained relevant.

**Action FSB-A188: FSB Team to archive and date the original Fire Investigation, CRMP and ERD Fire Standards and contact all those that responded to the consultation to thank them for their feedback.**

**Decision FSB-D070: Revisions to the Fire Investigation, CRMP and ERD Fire Standards were approved following their periodic review.**

| **Item 5 – Paper 2 – FSB Delivery Plan Mid-Year Review** | **FST** |
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NB summarised the paper.

YB said that the data driven evaluation was helpful and would support work on the College of Fire and Rescue and wider sector improvements. She also said that the FSB contribution made

by SMcC and AS through MAG and the relevant Task and Finish Groups had been valuable and should be seen as a success.

Misconduct and Code of Ethics

NB summarised the work completed to date to address gaps identified in Fire Standards against HMICFRS's misconduct thematic recommendations. He told the Board that he had met with PG, SH, AH and NE to discuss their concerns around the level of detail within the standards. AH suggested that as the Code of Ethics Fire Standard was focussed on behaviours, the Board could consider strengthening reference to the management of poor behaviour in that standard.

NB said that the FST developed some additional proposed changes to the Code of Ethics Fire Standard alongside the two Leadership Fire Standards which were then presented to a PCL working group, the Professional Standards Network. The group provided limited and conflicting views on the proposals and therefore NB requested further views of the Board on the following options:

1. The sector is engaged through a broader consultation
2. Chiefs Council is engaged directly by the Board via a paper or presentation
3. The Fire Standards Board decides and directs the FST accordingly

PG added there may be a need to have a broader consultation with services on the necessity of a standalone Fire Standard.

SH said the Board should question which option would have the greatest impact. A standalone Fire Standard would give the topic greater profile and prominence. She would want stakeholder views on this.

AS reminded the Board that the Fire Standards were principle based. If there was a requirement to detail what a service or individual must do, the Fire Standards were not the right vehicle, and this would be better as guidance. She added that it was important that good conduct and culture were given due focus. The sector and the Board should be encouraging services to create good cultures with one component being the proper handling of misconduct. A Misconduct Fire Standard would focus on the negative, and the Board should be focussing on the positive. AS said that the standards could be strengthened and more explicit. However, the Board should be mindful not to put organisational requirements into an ethical standard on individual behaviours.

RJ said that LGA would need to put this forward to members for discussion, but their view was that misconduct should be expanded into existing standards. This was echoed by YB and BA. RJ added that greater importance should be on clearly communicating the changes and how they came about.

PG agreed with AS comments but would want to be assured that the concerns raised by inspectors were addressed, either within the standard or, if too detailed, within guidance. He noted some of the key areas of concern:

1. *Interpretation and development of Professional Standards Functions*
2. *Requirements for an Independent reporting line*
3. *Consideration for the utilisation of independent investigations for complex disciplinary matters*

AH thanked PG for the clarity on his concerns. She said that anecdotally there was no appetite for a standalone standard on misconduct. She said that if services were not paying attention to a standard, then there may be a different issue regarding the embedding of standards and how services are being held to account. She said that interconnectivity between the standards should be made clear, so they are not seen in isolation.

AS said that some services, particularly those who had not embraced fire standards, required more granularity than a standard could offer. PG agreed that the level of granularity he sought may sit better within guidance. However, he wanted assurance that the recommendations were responded to and acted upon.

NB suggested a solution to address PG's concerns by designing a tailored assurance workshop including an outline of NFCC's supporting toolkits and guidance, which would be delivered to individual FRS by the Implementation team in conjunction with members of PCL and PG. PG agreed that a supporting toolkit which offered workshops with Chiefs would be helpful, but added that the recommendations must be reinforced through the standards.

**FSB Action-A189: FST to work with NFCC (AH) to develop an assurance workshop to support fire and rescue services with misconduct.**

**FSB Action-A190: FST to present the proposed changes to the Leading and Developing People, Leading the Service and Code of Ethics Fire Standards for decision at the next Board meeting**.

| **Item 6 – Paper 3 – Fire Standards Board Progress and Chairs Report** | **FST** |
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<u>Evaluation</u>

NB summarised the work completed on evaluation of Fire Standards. He said that the next steps would be to:

a) share the findings to date within the NFCC to ratify the methodology; and
b) then to cross-reference and triangulate the work with HMICFRS's data and other data available.

The work to date allows the Board to map the HMICFRS's Characteristics of Good Performance to specific Fire Standards, then to elements within those Fire Standards and finally to data sources which could determine whether a service is achieving that Fire Standard. He added that there were challenges with this approach, namely that this was an input rather than an outcomes-based method and there was little evidence to demonstrate causation and causality. There was more work to be done in this space.

| **Item 9 - AOB and date of next meeting** | **Chair** |
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Artificial Intelligence

SMcC raised that many of the organisations that she worked with had developed policies on the use of AI. She asked the Board to consider whether AI should be included within Fire Standards or whether it should be considered as a standalone Fire Standard.

YB said that it was worth exploring, but added that the Board must be clear on the problem it was trying to solve and the outcome it was trying to achieve.

SH said that the NFCC Digital, Data and Technology team were doing a lot in this space. She suggested the FST worked with the DDAT team to establish what work was being done to support services with AI.

NB said that it was a worthy discussion and suggested exploration should be incorporated into the 2026/27 business plan along with considerations on health and wellbeing.

**FSB Action-FSBA191: FST to work with NFCC DDAT team to establish how services were currently being supported with the introduction of AI. Findings to be presented to the Board.**

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

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**Meeting Closed**
**Date of Next Meeting**
4 December 2025
In person

Friends House,
173-177 Euston Rd.,
London
NW1 2BJ