

Fire Standards Board

Fire Standards Annual Review 2025-26

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Foreword

Independent Chair and Vice Chair of the Fire Standard Board

We are pleased to present the 2025-26 Fire Standards Board Review which highlights the Board's work and achievements over the period and looks forward to 2026-27.

As independent Chairs of the Board, we have had the privilege of working with the sector and its stakeholders. England's fire and rescue service has a vital role in keeping communities safe, and we are honoured to play a part in helping the service achieve a better outcome for the public through the creation of a suite of Fire Standards. Importantly, the Board has seen the value throughout of being actively consultative in its approach to developing and maintaining the Fire Standards. Simply said, they have been created by the service for the service.

The work of the Board continues, and we are conscious of our role in supporting the continuing improvement agenda. This includes offering our support to government in the development of a new College of Fire and Rescue and in other key initiatives including the development of staff competencies and recognising the potential role of Fire Standards in contributing to additional measures to support the health, safety and wellbeing of firefighters and their support staff.

It is also important to recognise that the Fire Standards Board does not work in isolation, but with other wider sector bodies. In this regard, we would particularly like to recognise the Inspectorate's important work and note that Fire Standards are specifically referenced in the HMICFRS's Inspection Framework for 2025 to 2027. The Inspectorate has made it clear that embedding the Fire Standards will put a service in a strong position to achieve a good inspection outcome.

The data the Inspectorate collects helps the Fire Standard Board better understand the impact the Standards have on the Service as a whole and on individual services. Working with National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) colleagues enables us to successfully support embedding the Fire Standards within individual services and, by so doing, provide them with the assurance that they will achieve inspection outcomes.

The Fire Standards Board website, which includes our previous annual reviews, outlines relevant background and work of the Fire Standards Board, whereas this review provides a summary of the Board's work during 2025-26 and our ambition for 2026 and beyond.

The Board could not do its work without the assistance of the NFCC secretariat function as delivered by the Fire Standards team. It in turn receives invaluable support from the NFCC Implementation Liaison Managers (referred to in this Review as the Implementation team) who work closely with services to help them identify the challenges they face and support them with delivery of improvements. The Fire Standards are an important vehicle for improvement in the sector, and the Implementation team heavily draws on them. The Implementation team also gathers evidence from their Fire Standard Implementation workshops and uses this to analyse

demand for specific Fire Standards and underpinning NFCC products, such as the NFCC Leadership Framework and Supervisory Leadership Development Programme.

The Board is looking forward to contributing to meeting the sector's challenges within the changing landscape including the prospects of greater devolved powers in local government and a College of Fire and Rescue.



Suzanne McCarthy

Independent Chair and Vice Chair, Fire Standards Board
May 2026



Alison Sansome

2025-26 Progress and Achievements

Fire Standards

Each Fire Standard has a three-year review cycle starting from the date of its publication. The purpose of this periodic review process is to ensure that each Fire Standard remains relevant, accurate and current.

In accordance with the Fire Standards review cycle, the following Fire Standards were reviewed during 2025-26., with all changes made clearly shown on the www.firestandards.org website:

- Community Risk Management Planning
- Data Management
- Emergency Response Driver
- Fire Investigation
- Prevention
- Protection
- Operational Competence
- Operational Preparedness
- Safeguarding

Organisational Learning Fire Standard

The Fire Standards Board, upon reaching the periodic review period for the Operational Learning Fire Standard, engaged with the NFCC Organisational Learning Board and the National Operational Learning User Group (NOLUG) to understand how learning has evolved across the sector. This engagement highlighted that operational learning is critical to effective delivery. It also identified a shift towards broader, organisation-wide approach to learning, aimed at improving the effectiveness of the organisation as whole, including operational delivery.

The Fire Standards team undertook research using the NFCC Strategic Improvement Model (SIM) and engagement with the following NFCC groups, committees and Boards to recommend the most appropriate option to present to the Fire Standards Board for decision:

- NOLUG
- Operational Preparedness, Response and Resilience Committee (OPRR)
- Organisational Learning (OL) Board
- Improvement Committee

The following three options were presented to these groups:

- Expand the existing Operational Learning Fire Standard to include Organisational Learning
- Review the Operational Learning Fire Standard as it is to ensure it still meets sector needs (as Organisational Learning is covered in other Standards)
- Review the existing Operational Learning Fire Standard as is, and create a new Organisational Learning Fire Standard as an addition to the full suite

The analysis demonstrated that 70% of references in the SIM were related to organisational learning and 30% to operational learning, suggesting additional demand for professional materials to support organisational learning. This aligned to the feedback received through engagement with the sector and correlated with the NFCC Annual Plan for 2025/26, specifically the following member and corporate strategic objectives:

- Prioritise activity using evidence and learning from services
- Use data and analysis to prepare for new risks and exploit new opportunities, demonstrating the economic and social value of fire and rescue services

Furthermore, the approach also supported the 2025/26 Strategic Priority agreed at Chiefs Council “Continuous Improvement through Standards, Research, Learning and Guidance”.

Following feedback from the NFCC Organisational Learning team, supported by governance oversight from the Organisational Learning Board under the Chair of CFO Stewart Nicholson, the Organisational Learning Lead, a new Organisational Learning Fire Standard was developed.

The design of this new Fire Standard took an iterative approach with drafting support from Organisational Learning subject matter expertise during a round of workshops followed by peer review from external participants from the world of academia and fire. The completed draft was shared with the Organisational Learning Board who were content to submit it for consultation in March 2026, with a view to publication of the completed Fire Standard in summer 2026.

When this Fire Standard is published, the Operational Learning Fire Standard will be withdrawn, as the new Fire Standard will capture that standard's underpinning operational, non-operational and corporate learning. Fire Standards which reference Organisational Learning will also be reviewed to assess whether these remain appropriate.

Working with Stakeholders

The Board has engaged with many partners in the sector including HMICFRS, the NFCC and the Local Government Association (LGA), and has attended events and presented information about Fire Standards to various audiences. The Chair and Vice Chair were also welcomed by several fire and rescue services and were able to use those opportunities to better understand how those Services engaged with the Fire Standards to support service improvement. The Chairs witnessed both the challenges and successes met by these services, and we thank the hosts for their time and generosity.

Following the December 2025 Board meeting, the Fire Standards Board wrote to the following representative bodies proposing closer engagement with their respective organisations in the development and review of the Fire Standards:

- Fire Brigades Union
- Fire and Rescue Services Association
- Fire Leaders Association
- Fire Officers Association
- GMB Union
- Unison

This resulted in the Fire Standards team receiving helpful input during the process of periodic reviews of Fire Standards in 2026. Comments were provided to the FSB on the following Fire Standards:

- Organisational Learning
- Leading the Service/Leading and Developing People (as part of the FSB response to the handling of misconduct (see pg. 8)

A list of service visits and other events attended by the Chairs in 2025-26 is at [Annex B.](#)

In conjunction with service visits, the Implementation team during the period April 2025 to March 2026 delivered 45 Fire Standard workshops and Leadership Thematic regional workshops which were attended by over 680 participants from 43 English FRS. A breakdown of workshops is at [Annex C.](#) The workshops demonstrate the role of Fire Standards as a framework for service self-assurance in delivering its core activities.

2026 and Beyond: Looking Forward

The Fire Standards Board will continue to maintain and develop the suite of Fire Standards where appropriate. To support this, it will undertake a gap analysis to assess whether areas such as artificial intelligence (AI) are fully covered and to consider the need for a standard on health, safety and wellbeing. Ongoing activities will also include focused communications and engagement with services and partners in the sector. In addition, the Board will be involved in the work described in the following sections.

In line with the review cycle, in 2026-27 the FSB expects to review the following standards:

- Code of Ethics
- Emergency Preparedness and Resilience
- Fire Control
- Communications and Engagement
- Digital and Cyber

Research and development of new standards will be carefully balanced against ongoing review activity to ensure the quality of outputs remains high.

College of Fire and Rescue

The Fire Standards Board has been an active voice on the Ministerial Advisory Group and Task and Finish Groups for the College of Fire and Rescue, and Culture, and will continue to participate in these groups in 2026. The Board recognises the importance of the College of Fire and Rescue as a critical driver for sector reform, including how it will impact on leadership and culture, competencies and training, health, safety and wellbeing and data, research and intelligence. It is recognised that standards will be an important pillar of the College.

The National Fire Framework

The Fire Standard Board understanding that The MHCLG is committed as a priority to publishing a revised National Fire Framework by the end of 2026. The framework will set out the importance of the Fire Standards in driving continuous improvement. The Board will be engaging with this work.

Competencies

There is increasing focus on employee competence in the sector, not least following recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, but also a push from employers and the National Joint Council (NJC). NFCC is leading on delivering work in this space by developing a competency framework methodology and using this to design relevant competencies for operational and non-operational staff in the sector. The Fire Standards Board supports this work, recognising the important link between Fire Standards, which outline the overall corporate competency of a Fire and Rescue Service, and how competencies underpin this at the level of the individual employee.

MHCLG, and members of the Ministerial Advisory Group, have also expressed a wider need for operational and training standards, which NFCC is responding to with the introduction of relevant competencies and new training packages (for both response and non-operational activity). The Fire Standards Board is keen to explore how it can continue to support this work.

Throughout 2026 regular progress on the NFCC's work on competencies will be presented to the Fire Standards Board. As they are developed, competencies will be cross referenced to relevant Fire Standards on the www.firestandards.org website because this will demonstrate the link between professional corporate competence of the Fire Standards and competence at an individual level.

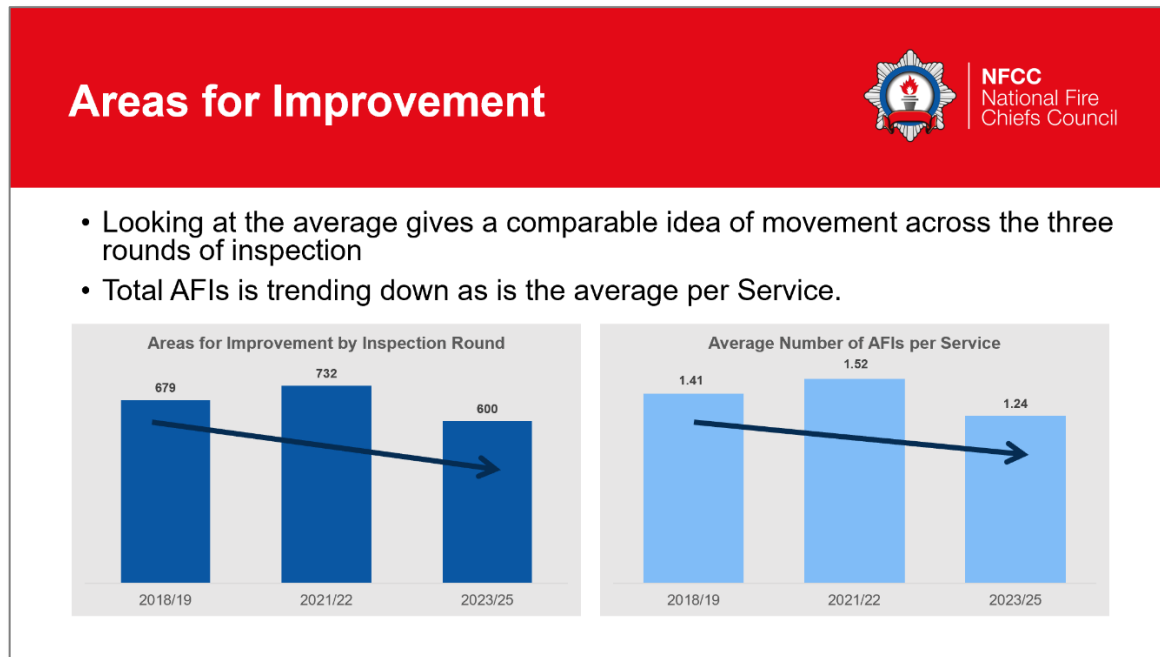
Benefits and Evaluation

The Fire Standards Board continues to work with NFCC colleagues in using an evaluation methodology to identify the measurable benefits in adopting Fire Standards.

The methodology is underpinned by evidence of improvement in Fire and Rescue Services as indicated by HMICFRS inspection outcomes and evidenced from organisational learning. This is then

cross referenced against published Fire Standards. The initial analysis shows a possible correlation between a downward trend identified in areas highlighted for improvement in functional areas following the release of a new Fire Standard, as illustrated in the image below:

HMICFRS Areas for Improvement Trends¹



The three pillars show that there are overall reductions in AFIs across all three. However, considering the first round of inspections, which ran from 2018-19, was likely more of a baseline exercise, the change in inspection rounds 2 (2021-22) to 3 (2023-25) is more interesting in the context of Fire Standards, with reductions in AFIs across the pillars as shown below:

- Effectiveness: -25%
- Efficiency: -20%
- People: -9%

In 2026, the NFCC will prepare quarterly evaluation updates focused on different functional areas, beginning with Prevention intelligence. This increase in the sharing of data will be supported over time with new dashboards and reporting. This data can be used to support service improvement by demonstrating trends, success factors, and improvements in those individual services which embed the Fire Standards.

NFCC is introducing wider datasets to cross reference HMICFRS's characteristics of good to specific Fire Standards and third-party datasets such as the FRS's staff survey, MHCLG responses and intelligence from the NFCC Academic Collaboration and External Reference Group (ACER) with

¹ This is taken from NFCC Analysis and Insight data based on HMICFRS's published Inspection Reports.

trends from the Organisational Learning team. The evaluation data will be presented at the NFCC Strategic Risk and Improvement Committee and subsequently to Chiefs Council. This same dataset will also be presented to each Fire Standard Board meeting to update the Board on progress.

Self-assurance through Fire Standards

The Implementation team uses the Fire Standards as the main quality assurance vehicle within an FRS to support that service with self-assurance. To support this, the Fire Standards Team has updated the Implementation Gap Analysis Tool to refer to progress, rather than merely compliance. There is now a greater focus on self-assurance to support services in mapping an individual Fire Standard within the context of the HMG's Three Lines of Defence methodology. This is illustrated in the table below using as an example one of the criteria for the Code of Ethics Fire Standard:

The gap analysis tool can be used by services to measure how confident they are in meeting each Fire Standard and, where they are not, to take remedial action.

Three Lines of Defence Method Example

Criteria	Priority	Impact	First Line	Second Line	Third Line
1. Proactively adopt the Core Code and be able to demonstrate that the service is fully committed to fulfilling it;	High	High	- Organisational Values and Behaviours - Adopting the Employee Code of Conduct - Integrated into HR Policies and Procedures	- Values and Behaviours Working Group - Quarterly reporting to Senior Management - Annual reporting to Fire Authority	- External Culture Review - Externally consultancy led annual staff survey

The Implementation team has an expanding group of workshop materials to support, challenge and engage service functional areas to assist with improving their self-assurance. These are built around the relevant Fire Standard and its application against the three lines of defence with current topic areas including operational response, protection and organisational learning. The team is also designing materials to deliver in other areas in 2026-27, including in support of handling misconduct, as described below.

Improving Conduct and Behaviour

The Fire Standards Team has worked with partners in NFCC and the wider sector to strengthen the Leading and Developing People, Leading the Service and Code of Ethics Fire Standards respectively to ensure that they provide adequate coverage to improve the way in which misconduct is specifically managed within FRS.

The updates to these Fire Standards are being supported by NFCC Conduct workshops, which the Implementation team piloted at the beginning of 2026. These workshops target HR professionals and strategic managers within individual services to challenge approaches applied to improve conduct and reduce misconduct, using the Fire Standards as a self-assurance mechanism.

The workshops, and the underpinning Leading and Developing People Fire Standard and supporting NFCC products including Listen and Learn training, the Leadership Framework and Leadership courses, all focus on supporting services to proactively improve their ability to drive good conduct, by creating a working environment where such conduct can flourish, rather than only focusing on reacting to misconduct.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing

This year, NFCC has established a new Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee under the Chair of CFO Craig Parkin. This Committee is supported by NFCC Hub leads from People, Culture and Leadership (PCL) and Operational Response (ORFC). The Fire Standards Team intends to work with this Committee initially to understand the needs of the Government and the sector in considering the value of introducing a Health, Safety and Wellbeing Fire Standard. To help the Board in considering the need for, and content of, such a standard, the team will be undertaking a feasibility study.

How to find out more

You can find out about all the activities of the Fire Standards Board through the following channels www.firestandards.org, [Fire Standards Connect group](#) and [linkedin](#).

Fire Standards Board

June 2026.

Annex A: Fire Standards Board Membership

The Board has a Chair and Vice Chair, both independent from Government and fire and rescue.

The current membership of the Fire Standards Board is as follows:

- Suzanne McCarthy, Independent Chair
- Alison Sansome, Independent Vice-Chair
- Ben Adams, Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Staffordshire, representing Association of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners
- Suzie Daykin, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
- Amanda Evans, Local Government Association
- Phil Garrigan, National Fire Chiefs Council

Annex B: Stakeholder Engagement

The following list shows service visits and other events attended by the Chairs of the Fire Standards Board in 2025-26.

- Meeting with HMI Roy Wilsher – 3rd June 2025
- Culture and Integrity Task and Finish Group – 4th June 2025
- College of Fire and Rescue Task and Finish Group – 10th June 2025
- London Assembly Fire Committee – 1st July 2025
- College of Fire and Rescue Task and Finish Group – 24th July 2025
- College of Fire and Rescue Task and Finish Group – 12th August 2025
- Culture and Integrity Task and Finish Group – 3rd September 2025
- Meeting with HMI Roy Wilsher – 5th September 2025
- College of Fire and Rescue Task and Finish Group – 9th September 2025
- Service visit to Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service – 12th September 2025
- Meeting with MHCLG – 20th November 2025
- Meeting with Minister Samantha Dixon – 25th November 2025
- MAGFRR – 27th November 2025
- College of Fire Task and Finish Group – 11 December 2025
- Meeting with HMI Roy Wilsher – 23 December 2025
- HMICFRS External Reference Group Meeting – 24 February 2026
- College of Fire and Rescue Service Task and Finish Group – 25 February 2026

Annex C: Fire Standard Workshops 2025-26

The following table outlines the weekly Fire Standard workshops by date, topic and attendance for 2025-26.

Engagements April 2025 - April 2026	Participant Numbers	Service Numbers
Fire Standard enquiries and engagements	685	47
Thematic Leadership Fire Standards – Regional workshop x 9 • Communications and Engagement • Code of Ethics x 2 • Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion x 2 • Organisational Learning	70	13
Fire Standards Implementation workshops x 36: • Emergency Preparedness and Resilience x3 • Data Management x5 • Fire Investigation x3 • Core Code of Ethics • Communications and Engagement x4 • Fire Control x3 • Procurement and Commercial x3 • Digital and Cyber x3 • Internal Governance and Assurance x3 • CRMP x3 • Protection x 3 • Operational Preparedness and Operational Competence x2	615	47 (plus Guernsey, Jersey, and the Isle of Man)