

# MINUTES

**Date:** Monday 9 September 2024

**Time:** 10:00-13:00

**Venue:** Virtual

<b>Attendees:</b>	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
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Lucy Ellender (LE) – Local Government Association (LGA) Kevin Finch (KF) – Home Office Harry Palmer-Randle (HPR) – Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC)
<b>Fire Standards Team (FST):</b>	Natasha Elia (NE) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Nick Brennan (NB) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST)
<b>Apologies</b>	Eddie Smithwick (ES) – Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC) Hannah Condon (HC) – Home Office

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## Item 1 - Introductions, apologies, and declarations of interest

Chair

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Eddie Smithwick (ES) and Hannah Condon (HC).

There were no declarations of interest.

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## Item 2 - Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Chair

There were no corrections or amendments of the minutes of the meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> June 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 paused until the general election had passed. SMcC requested that this action be re-opened as the election results had since been announced.

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.

FSB-A162: FST to review the processes in which new Fire Standards are developed and existing ones are maintained. This action was closed at the meeting following the discussion during item 4.

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. The board awaited advice from subject matter experts and therefore the action remained open.

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### **Item 3 – Paper 1 - Fire Standards Progress Update and Chairs’ Report**

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**Chair**

NB said that the Digital and Cyber and Procurement and Commercial Fire Standards were due to be published following the meeting.

NB also provided further detail on the exceptional reviews of Fire Standards that were underway. Following the decision to discontinue work on Finance and Asset Management Fire Standards and instead, bring elements of these into already published fire standards, further analysis had been completed. Those fire standards that had been identified as requiring a potential amendment had been colour coded in the Board papers to show the degree of change and the governance process that could follow. He said that some amendments may require consultation.

NB said that the exceptional reviews of the Leading the Service and Leading and Developing People Fire Standards had commenced and NFCC lead officer for Leadership and People, Wayne Bowcock, and NFCC People, Culture and Leadership Executive, Rob MacDougall, had been engaged and agreed to support the work.

NB also said that the Fire Standards team had already engaged with the NFCC Leads in areas responsible for the Operational Competency, Operational Preparedness, Operational Learning Fire Standards, and the Community Risk Management Planning Fire Standard. The periodic review of these four Fire Standards was due to commence towards the end of the calendar year.

SMcC said that she was pleased that the initial suite of fire standards was complete and thought this was a great achievement. She thanked all those involved and acknowledged this had been a collective effort, to ensure the suite had been delivered to time and budget.

AS extended gratitude to everybody who had been involved but observed there was more work for the Board to do, on embedding the fire standards and realising their benefits.

BA congratulated the Board on the success. He also thanked NB for a recent engagement session that the NFCC Implementation Team held at the Police and Crime Commissioners Office on fire standards. BA said he had received great feedback, and the team were highly appreciative of the information provided.

SD said that the delivery of the full suite of standards was a remarkable achievement, and it was important to note that the appreciation of the standards from the sector was proof of the

support for them. SD asked if evaluation of the workshops held by the Implementation team would be factored into the future work of the Fire Standards Board.

NB said that much of the evaluation of these workshops to date had been quantitative. Future workshops would showcase case studies gathered from services. Evaluation of the workshops would continue but would be widened to evaluate how services were implementing fire standards and the products that aligned to them. This approach was designed to give more intelligent data that could support identifying and building trends and the work of the Board in the future. NB said that he was keen to address all the good work that the Fire Standards and Implementation team had done, which could not yet be evidenced through data collection. He added that the Board had generated work for services by the delivery of fire standards and it was important to support services with embedding those.

MH reflected on the journey undertaken by the Board to deliver fire standards and said that services had benefited from the rigour of the work undertaken. He reflected on the future of the Fire Standards Board, considering the proposed College of Fire and the learning and recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry (GTI) Phase 2 report, adding it was the right time to reflect on fire standards through the lens of the Grenfell Inquiry. Whilst the function of the Fire Standards Board was under consideration, the Board must continue to deliver in the way that it had been commissioned to deliver.

SMcC said that the Board must evaluate and review benefits and concentrate on embedding the fire standards. She added that she was not against the creation of more standards, should they be deemed necessary and helpful to services. She asserted that she did not wish the Board to lose momentum, and it must continue to drive improvement.

AS discussed, the Chairs visit to Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service and said the service were doing some interesting work. She said that they had discussed a collaborative approach to engaging with services to understand what impact fire standards had on them.

SD asked what impact the workshops were having on services and how this work impacted inspection outcomes. She said that she was keen to understand what evidence was collected to enable the Home Office to demonstrate how the Fire Standards Board, Implementation Team and HMICFRS's collective approach supported service improvement. NB responded that almost two years ago, services had not heard of Fire Standards nor the Implementation Team and now he considered them to be at the forefront of services engaging with the NFCC on their improvement journey. He added that regular engagement with the Implementation Team and HMICFRS Service Liaison Leads, and assistant portfolio directors was in place, to discuss how services could be supported. NB said a combination of quantitative and qualitative data was collected at workshops.

AS said that the Chairs, through their service visits, had been able to directly assess how services have engaged with the Implementation Team and what impact this had on their improvement journey. She said that the service visits were a helpful way to encourage further engagement with the Implementation Team. AS added that the HMICFRS "characteristics of good performance" did not align with Fire Standards "Desired Outcome" statements and that services had provided feedback that this was causing confusion. AS welcomed support from the Home Office in working towards aligning these.

NB said that there was a culture of task and finish within the fire sector, and he was supporting services into moving into a more outcome-based culture. He also said that HMICFRS could

support Fire Standards more, as feedback from services have indicated that Fire Standards were not mentioned during inspections. He added that senior HMICFRS leaders had talked about Fire Standards through their engagements but practitioners within services did not see evidence of this during inspections. NB asked SD to discuss this further with HMICFRS.

BA said that it would be helpful for the Home Office to continue to push HMICFRS for recognition of the Fire Standards.

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#### **Item 4 – Paper 2 – Fire Standards Development Process Review**

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**AC**

NB introduced the paper. He said that this paper was in response to the independent quality assurance review of the Internal Governance and Assurance Fire Standard.

SMcC explained that the proposed new amendments to the annual review within stage 4 of the process was an obligation of the NFCC. She asked MH to confirm that the NFCC was content with this amendment.

MH said that he was happy with that amendment. However, the NFCC could not complete that work on its own and would rely on others for support. He said that authorities would seek assurance of the delivery and outcomes derived from standards in a variety of ways and that there was an opportunity, given the constituent parts of this board, to support in understanding what evidence could be provided. It would be useful to gather the perspective of authorities as well as services.

**ACTION FSB-A164** – FST to amend the Process Review paper to state that evaluation will be provided by the NFCC and will include information collected from various sources of intelligence, including local government.

**DECISION FSB-D065:** The Board approved the amendments to the Fire Standards Development Process document, subject to the revisions found in Action FSB-A164

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#### **Item 5 – Home Office Update**

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**NB**

SD said that the new Minister, Dame Diana Johnson, was responsible for both policing and fire and was clear in her meetings with stakeholders that she would have an active focus on fire. It was acknowledged that the Minister's portfolio was broad, and there would be pressures on her time. However, she had made it clear she wanted time for her fire portfolio. SD said that the Minister had specific interests in culture and organisational integrity through her previous role as Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee.

SD said that they were still in early discussions with the Minister and the Home Secretary about their ambitions for the future of Fire and Rescue Services. They were currently assessing the intentions of the previous government and what work had already commenced to ensure that no decisions were rushed.

SD said that collaboration was a key point, and the new government were keen to formally work with all fire and rescue stakeholders to inform policy and establish national standards. She said that conversations had already been established with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) prior to the election on the establishment of national standards. It appeared that the FBU definition

of national standards related to the operational activity and working practices of front-line firefighters as opposed to the wider framework of the Fire Standards published by the Fire Standards Board.

SD surmised that Ministers would be keen to establish a national advisory group to discuss and inform fire policies which would be separate from a College of Fire. SD also said that there was more of a certainty that a College of Fire would be established, given the recent publication of the GTI Report. She said that setting up a College of Fire would take money and time, and therefore the immediate ask of her team was to establish what could be delivered in the spirit of the manifesto.

SD said that it was important that SMcC and AS had the opportunity to meet with the Minister as part of her introductory meetings, and said her team would be arranging those shortly.

SD reiterated that the more evidence her team could collect on the impact of the Fire Standards and the outcome of the work of the NFCC Implementation Team would help support and inform the strategic direction of the Fire Standards Board.

SD also said that within the GTI Report, there was a recommendation which merges all fire safety functions into one government department. She said that this proposed change may have implications on the board's relationship and interaction with the Home Office. SD said that it was too early to give any further information on this, but she would continue to keep the board abreast of developments.

SMcC requested that an advisory board should be brought together; the Fire Standards Board should have representation on it or there should be a mechanism which it could feed into.

BA thanked SD for the update and expressed caution regarding a national advisory board to ensure that it did not slow progress and reform. SD responded that the Board was expected to be an informal body which provides Ministers with full perspective of the sector and not something cumbersome.

BA also said that the Minister had spoken about blue light resource sharing and collaboration opportunities. BA said he had experience of issues with emergency service collaboration and would like to see Home Office work through these. SD responded that she had not yet formed a view on this, but it was something to be thought about.

GB agreed that collaboration of emergency services could be improved. He also welcomed a national body whereby stakeholders were involved in discussions on progress within the sector.

MH reflected that regulation and culture go hand in hand. He said that if people act with dishonesty, they will find ways to work around regulations and therefore this would need to be considered. He also said that leadership and governance were heavily mentioned within the GTI report which should remain in focus.

MH also said there would be a crisis in confidence within services if those within the sector were not talking more about the positive work and progress taking place. MH said he was pleased with the HMICFRS's Misconduct thematic report which was well balanced in sharing good and poor practice.

NB added that the Board and the Home Office should be cognisant of the term "standards" meaning different things to different people. He said with the introduction of a College of Fire,

the response to recommendations from the GTI and HMICFRS Misconduct reports, it must be made clear by all what is meant by standards when they were being referred to.

**Action FSB-A165:** SD to organise an introductory meeting between SMcC, AS and Minister.

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## Item 6 – Paper 3 – NFCC Response to HMICFRS Misconduct Review

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**NB**

MH introduced the paper.

MH said that the HMICFRS's Misconduct thematic report set out a series of recommendations which services would work through. He summarised the paper and the options presented in it, saying that he believed the Board should commission work to review the options in more detail and with the perspectives of a broad set of stakeholders, including those underrepresented groups. He added that there was an opportunity to look outside of the sector to bring a more informed proposal back to the Board on how misconduct should be set out in the context of Fire Standards.

NB responded that this was a new piece of work, and should this be commissioned by the Board, he would strongly recommend that this be delivered as part of the 2025/26 work plan or for the board to consider asking for additional resources. He continued that it was possible that whilst undertaking the already planned work to review Fire Standards in line with the discontinuation of the Finance and Asset Management Fire Standards, the Fire Standards Team may recognise gaps in misconduct.

SMcC recommended that should the Board wish to commence this work, then a delivery plan should be brought to the December Board meeting.

GB welcomed the points raised and requested that the LGA workforce team be engaged in this work.

BA suggested that the first steps should be to assess existing standards to identify how misconduct and complaints were referred to.

AS said, she was in favour of carrying out exploration on this subject quickly, as this work could inform future work of the Board and longer terms plans. She suggested the exploration could be carried out this year, but the work could be delivered later. Should more resources be required to support this, AS said the Board could discuss this.

MH agreed that a phased approach sounded sensible, although services would already be working through the recommendations from the thematic report and therefore progress would already have been made. He said he would rather adequate time was given, and resources were in place to get the work done properly.

SD supported the proposal to start work on this topic and agreed with AS suggestion to start work soon, as this was a priority for the Minister. However, she also agreed with MH that a conclusion should not be rushed. She said there were many strands across the sector to improve conduct and integrity and it was important for the Board to contribute.

SMcC suggested that should the Board wish to gain momentum on this matter, the Fire Standards Team could start preliminary work and continue engagement with the Board as necessary via emails prior to the next Board meeting in December.

AS said that although the HMICFRS thematic report did not specifically allocate recommendations to the Board, she asked whether it would be a useful exercise to identify areas which could be strengthened based on the report. SMcC agreed.

NB responded that a lot of what the Board had discussed on this topic was already reflected in work that was ongoing. He said that the ongoing Fire Standards workshops held with services would be the ideal vehicle for supporting services with considering areas of misconduct and identifying any gaps within existing standards. He stressed that the wider strategic piece, however, would be more appropriate to take place within the next business planning cycle in 2025/26. He said that the plans for that cycle were currently being drafted but would not be delivered until the next financial year. He added that the important work was engaging with services, and this was already taking place and included a leadership thematic group. By the nature of that work, misconduct would be discussed. Within these workshops, NFCC colleagues within the People Culture and Leadership Hub were already engaged and this work was part of their current business plan. By commencing work on this now, evidence collected throughout those workshops would be missed, the methodology put in place to obtain that information would not be utilised and the departments that would be important to engage with may not have availability, as this work would not be built into their plans for the year. He asked the group to consider over the short term, to use the methods that were already established to gather intelligence on next steps.

SMcC summarised what had been discussed. She proposed that work was ongoing through workshops with services that would discuss the topic of misconduct. In parallel, an annual plan would be brought to the Board in December outlining future work. She asked the Board to agree to this proposal. The Board agreed.

**Action FSB-A166:** FST to add LGA Workforce team to stakeholder database for engagement on misconduct.

**Action FSB-A167:** FST to develop and share plans for how the Fire Standards Board would approach the topic of misconduct at the Board meeting in December 2024.

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## 1. AOB and date of next meeting

Chair

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There was no other business.

**Meeting Closed**

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

12<sup>th</sup> December 2024

**Location:** In person

&Meetings, 150 Minories, London, EC3N 1LS