

Item Number	Item 6 – Paper 3
Title of Paper	Fire Standards Board Strategy 2025-26
Decision or Information	For discussion
Date of Meeting	12th December 2024
Presented by	Fire Standards Team
Attachments	None

Summary

With the initial suite of 19 Fire Standards published, this paper presents the proposed business strategy for the Fire Standards Board for the 2025/26 financial year, where the key aim is to continue to support continuous improvement in England’s fire and rescue service.

The Board is asked to consider the contents of this paper and confirm if it is content or otherwise with the direction suggested for the 2025/26 strategy. The discussion will influence the draft strategy which will be presented for approval at the next Board meeting.

Background

The Fire Standards Board was created as part of the previous Government’s 2016 Fire Reform Programme. Its remit is to identify, develop and maintain professional standards for England’s Fire and Rescue Services. The standards respond to the need articulated in the 2018 Fire Framework, published by the Home Office, which called for “a coherent and comprehensive set of professional standards across all areas of fire and rescue services’ work” and that “all fire and rescue authorities must implement the standards approved through this work”.

The Fire Standards Board has satisfied the first part stated in the Fire Framework statement, having successfully achieved the publication of the initial suite of 19 Standards. Through the efforts of the Fire Standards Team, supported by NFCC’s Implementation Team, considerable progress has been made to achieve the statement’s second part.

However, there is still work to do to ensure that Fire Standards are fully embedded and continue to be kept current and relevant. Without the ongoing oversight and engagement of the Fire Standards Board, with its important sector wide representation, there is real danger that Fire Standards and the professionalism they are intended to bring to the sector will not be fully realised or could fall into disuse, which would be a backwards step for the sector.

strengthen the position of Fire Standards in supporting sector improvement. As part of this specific consideration of the relationship and linkages between Fire Standards and the developing competency frameworks will be necessary.

Embedding and Implementation

The Fire Standards Chairs will continue their communication and engagement programme which is built around raising awareness of fire standards through visits to services, particularly those who would welcome and benefit from independent input and at events such as NFCC and LGA Conferences and the HMICFRS Positive Practice Masterclass. The relevant member of the NFCC Implementation Team will accompany the Chairs on service visits. This will help services and Implementation Team staff to forge stronger relationships and allow the team to learn firsthand how services are progressing with their own strategies to embed fire standards.

Working with Others to Understand the Professional Standards

There is not a single definition of professional standards and this potentially results in a lack of clarity and conflicting messaging by different bodies. For example, we have heard assertions by some that there are currently no professional standards in fire. Descriptions of competency, guidance and operational readiness have sometimes been described as professional standards.

In 2025/26 the Chairs and the FST plan to reach out to others, for example the trade unions, to see how the suite of fire standards may support them in reaching their goals, whilst not undermining the purpose and role of the standards.

Complementing the NFCC's work on Competency Frameworks

Due to demand from across the sector, NFCC is proposing to deliver work starting in 2025/26 to reform FRS competence and associated frameworks to address inconsistencies in current frameworks, support modernisation, enhance operational readiness as well as to demonstrate assurance across the sector. The suite of Fire Standards should be recognised as a key driver of this work. The Fire Standards Board will be able to support the NFCC by seeking to align the standards with the competency frameworks. This meeting will be hearing from Peter Leckie who is leading on this work for the NFCC.

Benefits Review and Amendment; Benefits Monitoring

In addition to the completion of the initial suite of fire standards, the supporting products and guidance developed by NFCC have reached a level of maturity. The NFCC is now seeking to consolidate its work in continuous improvement by ensuring the products supporting fire standards can be fully embedded and lead to the realisation of benefits. To this end, NFCC intends to engage in a strategic evaluation of both its products and measurable benefits.

The Fire Standards Team intends to engage in this wider exercise, which also recognises the work NFCC is delivering with HMICFRS and the Home Office, to reduce individual surveys to FRS through

unified 'big data' collections. The Fire Standards Team will be engaging during 2025/26 with the NFCC Digital Team and Analysis and Insights Team to ensure that the evaluation needs of the Fire Standards Board are also addressed in this work. By bringing this data together with qualitative insights, the Board will seek to recognise and demonstrate the impact, and benefit, that Fire Standards have had on the service.

Objective 3 - Confirming the role of Fire Standards Board

The role and purpose of the Fire Standards Board remains key to ensure that Fire Standards are universally recognised, understood and engaged with across the fire sector to ensure that they are embedded in each service and support continuous improvement. Without the continued governance and oversight of the Board this is unlikely to happen, therefore the Board expects to remain in place to secure the continuing understanding and consolidate the benefits of this work. During 2025/26 the Board will continue to consider how its role should evolve considering the context in which professional standards operate. In addition to continuous improvement and inspection reports there are several high-profile drivers in the sector, including decisions on:

- Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 Recommendations
- College of Fire
- Competency Framework

Governance structures are forming to monitor progress of these and other drivers in the sector. The Fire Standards Board has a role to play in advising on the approach, structure and governance of any of these and other sector developments. Specifically, the Board welcomes the important opportunity that the recent invitation to the Minister's Advisory Group will bring.

Conclusion

The Board is asked to consider the contents of this paper and comment on the direction of the proposed strategy.