

<b>Item Number</b>	Item 6 - Paper 3
<b>Title of Paper</b>	Fire Standards Board Delivery Plan 2025-26
<b>Decision or Information</b>	Decision
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	3 April 2025
<b>Presented by</b>	Fire Standards Team
<b>Attachments</b>	None

## Summary

With the initial suite of 19 Fire Standards published, this paper presents the proposed business plan for the Fire Standards Board for the 2025/26 financial year, considering additional comments from the December 2024 Board Meeting. The key aim is to continue to support continuous improvement in England's fire and rescue service.

The plan for 2025/26 has three objectives:

- Objective 1 – Fire Standards Selected for the 2025/26 Review Programme
- Objective 2 – Supporting Sector Improvement
- Objective 3 - Confirming the role of Fire Standards Board

There is flexibility built into this plan, which recognises the changing political landscape in which the team, and Board members, are operating in should any of the timing of activities or deliverables need to be moved or adjusted.

## Recommendation

- The Board is asked to agree the 2025/26 delivery plan for the Fire Standards Team presented in this paper.

## 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.

The Fire Standards Board recognises the importance of maintaining close links with other organisations driving continuous improvement, not least the HMICFRS, who have made explicit reference to Fire Standards in their 2025 Assessment Framework:

“The Fire Standards Board has been set up to oversee professional standards for FRSs in England, including how they are identified, organised, developed and maintained. All FRAs must implement the standards approved by the board, and in our inspections, we will assess how well they have been implemented.

FRAs are also required under the national framework to give due regard to our reports and recommendations, and to regularly publish an action plan detailing how our recommendations are being addressed.”

HMICFRS, January 2025

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.

To counter this and to ensure that the standards and the work surrounding them remains current and vital, it is proposed that the 2025/26 plan concentrates on delivering three objectives as outlined in this paper.

## **Objective 1 – Fire Standards Selected for the 2025/26 Review Programme**

Each of the Fire Standards are periodically reviewed to ensure they remained current and relevant. The Fire Standards due for review in 2025/26 are outlined in the graphic below, which illustrates the proposed review workplan.

## 2025/26 Fire Standard Review Process and activity timeline 2025/26

	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	
Misconduct review - stage 1	Misconduct Mapping - Stage 1														
Misconduct review - stage 2					Misconduct Engagement - Stage 2										
Misconduct review - stage 3 - TBC															
Periodic Review	Ops x2														
Periodic Review		ERD													
Periodic and Exceptional Review	CRMP					Ops Learning									
Periodic and Exceptional Review						Emergency Prep & Res									
Periodic Review		Code of Ethics													
Periodic Review		Prevention													
Periodic Review		Protection													
Periodic Review					Safeguarding										
Periodic Review							FI								
Periodic Review								Data Management							
Evaluation	Evaluation														
Benefits								Benefits Review & Amendments							
Benefits												Benefits Monitoring			
Embedding and Implementation	Embedding and Implementation														

### The Operational Learning Fire Standard

It is recommended that special consideration be given to revising the Operational Learning Fire Standard and consider whether it should be evolved to become the Organisational Learning Fire Standard. Organisational Learning has been recognised by Fire and Rescue Services as a key driver for change. Moreover, it is clear from initial analysis of the Operational Learning Fire Standard as part of the current scheduled review, that it could be beneficial to redesign this Fire Standard, to transform it into an Organisational Learning Fire Standard, or alternatively ensure that organisational learning is being captured as a cross-cutting theme throughout the suite of Fire Standards.

The Fire Standards Team will schedule this into the review cycle for 2025/26, with the support of the NFCC Organisational Learning team.

#### Output:

Quarter 1-4: Deliver the 2025-26 Fire Standard Review cycle as illustrated above and consider with the support of the Organisational Learning team whether a specific Organisational Learning Fire Standard is required.

### Objective 2 – Supporting Sector Improvement

This objective is concerned with the embedding and implementation of the Fire Standards through engagement and communication together with benefits management and evaluation to help strengthen the position of Fire Standards in supporting sector improvement. As part of this work 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 regional 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.

### Output:

Quarter 1-4: Continued attendance and support for fire sector events and visits to FRS.

## 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. The Ministerial Advisory Group has also made the following note:

“[Fire] Standards were recognised as critical in driving consistency and professionalism across the sector [and] that the Fire Standards Board’s work to define standards and their role in fostering cultural and operational improvements is ongoing”

The Fire Standards Board also recognises a further distinction in that the Home Office and HMICFRS have made recommendations that services develop professional standards units to address misconduct cases.

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.

The team will consider whether to include a definition of what a Fire Standard is to be published on the [www.firestandards.org](http://www.firestandards.org) website.

### Outputs:

Quarter 1-4: Engagement with groups including the representative bodies.

Quarter 2: The Fire Standards Team will present a definition a Fire Standard to the Board for approval and publication on the website.

## 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.

### Output:

Quarter 1: Head of Fire Standards and Implementation to join the NFCC Competencies Working Group and report updates to Fire Standard Board meetings.

## Evaluation Review and 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 Insight 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.

### Output:

Q1-4. Progress on the evaluation work will be shared in the form of a Board report and presentation at each Fire Standards Board meeting in 2025.

## 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 membership of the Minister's Advisory Group brings.

**Output:**

Q4: Review, and if required, revised Fire Standards Board Terms of Reference in light of new drivers within the sector.