

MINUTES

Date: Thursday 2 April 2020
Time: 11:00-13:00
Venue: Virtual Meeting - Microsoft Teams

Attendees: Suzanne McCarthy (SMC) – Chair
Alison Sansome (AS) – Vice-Chair
Jonny Bugg (JB) – Home Office
Nick Chard (NC1) – Local Government Association (LGA)
Susan Ellison-Bunce (SEB) – NFCC Central Programme Office (CPO)
Roy Wilsher (RW) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC)

In Attendance: Sadie Bryant (SB) – NFCC Central Programme Office (CPO)
Nick Collins (NC2) - NFCC Central Programme Office (CPO)
Joy Flanagan (JF) – NFCC Central Programme Office (CPO)
Charles Loft (CL) – Local Government Association (LGA) items 5 & 6 only.
Eddie Smithwick (ES) - Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC)

Apologies Julia Mulligan (JM) - Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC)

Introductions, welcome and apologies

Chair

The Chair welcomed attendees to the fifth meeting of the Fire Standards Board.

As this was a virtual meeting for the Board in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was agreed that the Chair would invite each Board member by name to ask any questions or make comments after each substantive item had been introduced by the Executive. The Executive would then respond following this initial exchange of views and response, the subject would be opened to general discussion.

Apologies were received from Julia Mulligan (APCC).

There were no conflicts of interest.

Minutes and actions from the last meeting – 2 November 2020 and matters arising

Chair

The draft minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting on 2 November 2020.

All actions were recorded as having been completed or were added to this meeting's agenda.

Item 3 - Paper One – Impact of COVID-19

Chair

The Board considered and noted the points raised in the paper about the impact on the development of Fire Standards as a result of the current UK wide lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Board members acknowledged that the current situation was also impacting the work of their respective organisations.

The Board recognised that due to the current situation and pressures this imposed on Fire and Rescue Services, unavoidable delays, because of the availability of staff within the fire and rescue services to engage with both development work and consultations had to be expected. However, it was acknowledged that work could continue to be progressed in many of the areas proposed as part of phase 1 of the delivery plan (discussed as part of agenda item 4) considering the work being done now within existing programme and by project managers.

The Board urged the CPO to continue with business as usual as best as possible, especially in relation to recruitment activity.

Item 4 – Paper Two - Fire Standards Delivery Plan

CPO

The proposed delivery plan and timeline for an initial phase of Fire Standards development was presented with accompanying appendices (listed below).

- Appendix A – The Activity Framework is designed to provide the structure by which Fire Standards would be planned. This had been presented to the previous meeting.
- Appendix B – The Analysis Findings Report which provided the Board with the evidence on which the inclusion of priorities for the first phase of Fire Standards had been based.
- Appendix C – The proposed Fire Standards delivery plan showing the areas of activity where Fire Standards would be developed as part of Phase 1 of work and a provisional timeline for each Fire Standard or group of Fire Standards.

As part of the Fire Standards development process, the stages of governance to be applied to each area of work were explained to the Board. These stages were also shown on the timeline associated with each area of activity.

Activity Framework

In discussion the following issues were raised.

RW queried an entry on the Activity Framework (Appendix A) regarding differentiating between operational and non-operational employees.

JF responded by explaining that in engagement activity with services to date, the differentiation in this context was accepted. In addition, some Fire Standards may only be relevant to one or another group, although some will be relevant to all. Also, this wording aligned to that used in National Operational Guidance (NOG) so was consistent with that body of national guidance.

RW also queried whether Fire Safety Audit activity was captured in the right place. It was agreed that this would be clarified when work on scoping the Fire Standards for Protection is initiated.

Analysis Report and Priorities

SEB highlighted the importance of Appendix B – the Analysis Findings Report - in determining the priorities for the Fire Standards Board. Taking note of the evidence summarised in the report meant that the Fire Standards, proposed to be developed as part of phase one, were aligned to the NFCC strategy, the requirements of the Home Office, and the developing Fit for the Future work which aims to set out a longer term vision for the fire and rescue services based on continuous improvement.

SEB emphasised that the delivery timetable shown in Appendix C was an estimate. As the scoping stage in each area is completed, the timetables for the latter stages ending in approval could be clarified. The timeline would be kept under review and updated as necessary.

SEB added that the current timeline was based on some assumptions, in terms of resource availability and potential limitations on engagement and consultation, in light of the current lockdown across the UK because of COVID-19. Subject matter expertise from within services across the country was needed to inform the development stages of Fire Standards. Services needed to engage with consultations to allow Fire Standards to be refined and finalised as a result of those consultations. It is anticipated that both of these aspects would be compromised by services whose workforces, by necessity, had to be focused on supporting their communities and health colleagues in dealing with the current exceptional circumstances.

RW supported these observations by SEB.

Delivery Plan and Timeline

NC1 commended the CPO for the work done to date and the plan presented, but had concerns about the timelines proposed for Fire Standards being finalised and approved, especially where some relatively fast progress was expected to be made in areas such as the pilot - Emergency Response Driving and operational response Fire Standards. He re-emphasised the importance of producing a set of Fire Standards quickly in the areas of ethics and leadership. He asked whether the timescales proposed could be reduced.

ES, on behalf of JM, agreed with this view and especially in relation to Fire Standards that touched on recommendations made by HMICFRS.

JB also agreed with these views and was keen to see progress in areas directly related to the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower incident review and those made by HMICFRS. He did, however, accept the challenges posed by the current situation and the impact of COVID-19 on developing Fire Standards.

In terms of the Activity Framework, AS welcomed the baselining of this document. With regards to Appendix C - the delivery plan, she also agreed that it would be useful to review the timescales proposed to see if any Fire Standards included in phase 1 could be produced more quickly. AS also asked, what needed to be done to resolve the current issue surrounding the legislation to make progress on the Emergency Response Driving Fire Standard.

JF responded to these comments regarding the delivery timelines by explaining that timescales for stages two and three in each area were only estimates. She confirmed that following the scoping work (stage one), the timescales could be more clearly defined for the other two stages of standards development and that this could result in some of the Fire Standards listed in phase 1 being completed earlier than currently shown.

How fast individual Fire Standards could be completed had to depend, as the Board recognised, on resource and workload planning and the need to avoid overloading services with multiple Fire Standards both for consultation and then implementation within a short timescale.

JF stressed that given the learning from the pilot (especially relating to a requirement for at least an eight-week consultation period and avoiding holiday periods where possible), the timelines suggested had to be realistic. There was however potential for some timelines to be reduced and certain Fire Standards to be developed more quickly.

Ethics and Behaviours

NC1 asked for information on what was preventing progress on producing Fire Standards on ethics more quickly. He queried why a Code of Ethics might be difficult to achieve considering that many suitable codes were already available, could be referenced or adapted such as the NOLAN principles. If Board members could be made aware of the potential challenges preventing progress in this area then the NFCC, Home Office and LGA could contribute in getting them resolved and shortening the timescales.

JF responded by explaining that many services had already done good work in establishing service values and behaviours. In addition, county services were expected to follow the ethical codes laid down by their local authority. Therefore, rather than produce a single national code of ethics which

may overlap or compromise what was already in place, the proposed approach aimed to establish a Fire Standard that sets out what was expected of services. It would focus on services being required to have an ethical code, behavioural standards and / or service values and importantly how they integrate these into their respective organisations so that their staff were aware of them and acted in accordance with them. This approach of setting out expectations, but allowing flexibility in how services comply, was more likely to result in the positive culture change required.

RW acknowledged the points made and supported this approach to the development of a Fire Standard on Ethics and Codes of Practice.

Leadership

A discussion about Fire Standards associated with aspects of leadership followed. It was stressed that work in this area has begun and that the scoping work was likely to result in potentially more than one Fire Standard being required on this subject.

JF explained that there were differing aspects of leadership that needed to be reflected by the Fire Standards. For example, one Fire Standard would focus on what was expected of those leading services at a strategic level as distinct to another Fire Standard concentrating on how services develop leaders of the future through identifying talent, good people management and succession planning reflecting the points made in HMICFFRS' inspection reports and Annual State of Fire Report.

NC1 responded by explaining that his concern was more focused on aspects of managerial leadership. He felt that improvements could be made in the area of operational staff managerial leadership support and training with this being provided to such persons earlier in their careers.

JF in response explained that the Leadership Project within the People Programme will pick up aspects of managerial leadership. There is work underway considering career pathways and how managerial leadership training could be introduced earlier in the career pathway for operational employees. The Leadership Project is being led by CFO Becci Bryant and the CPO would be working with that project team in scoping the Fire Standards in this area with the results in due course being brought back to the Board.

Operational Response (NOG)

SEB clarified that whilst the timeline for all three NOG standards was the same, operational preparedness and operational learning were likely to be less complex and challenging for services to implement and therefore it might be possible for stages two and three of those standards to be reduced considerably. However, more work would be required in respect of the operational competence Fire Standard, so its timeline as presented was more realistic.

While NC2 reaffirmed his belief that Fire Standards for operational response and ethics could be produced more quickly, he recognised that engagement by services in the process of creating Fire Standards was vital. He saw the priority for the CPO being the production of professional quality assured Fire Standards and noted that this would take time. The result would be Fire Standards which were a credit to the Board and which would raise the profile and importance of Fire Standards within services.

He acknowledged the current pressures on services in responding to the COVID-19 crisis and the direct impact that this would have on their ability to engage. He also stressed the impact of implementing Fire Standards, especially the suite of NOG, would have on services and cautioned that this should not be under-estimated.

SEB and NC2 proposed that the CPO review the timelines for the standards relating to operational response, ethics and leadership and are committed to bringing draft Fire Standards in those areas to the next Board meeting.

JB stated the priorities for the Home Office were around risk, protection, ethics and leadership because they will be aligned to the recommendations from Grenfell and the HMICFRS' findings.

SMC concluded the discussion by asking Board members if they agreed in principle with the proposed delivery plan in terms of the areas Fire Standards would be developed as part of phrase 1. The Board agreed.

SMC then proposed that the CPO be tasked with reviewing the timescales and refining the timelines for review by the Board and proposed a meeting in early June for this purpose. The Board agreed. Consideration will be given at that meeting as to how often the Board should meet during this initial period of work. SMC stressed that it was important that the Board recognised, notwithstanding the current situation, that energy was put behind the development of standards and the importance of some standards being published reasonably soon.

In conclusion of the discussion, the Board:

- Noted the Activity Framework baselined version 1 (Appendix A)
- Noted the NFCC's analysis of evidence to determine priorities (Appendix B)
- Reviewed the proposed delivery plan, timeline and delivery process (Appendix C). The areas of activity where Fire Standards development would be focussed as part of Phase 1 were accepted by the Board.

The Executive noted the comments made in discussion and would reflect these in its continuing work. The Board would be advised of progress in developing these standards at its next meeting, the date of which the Board agreed should be brought forward.

Action: FSB/A027 – The CPO to review the delivery timelines based on completed scoping work with the results being presented at the next meeting to Board for consideration.

Action: FSB/A028 – The CPO to prioritise draft Fire Standards for operational response and ethics and bring the results to the next Board meeting.

Action: FSB/A029 – The meeting planned for July to be brought forward to early June. CPO to establish and confirm the date. At this meeting the Board would give further consideration to the frequency of meetings needed at this time and the best process for being kept updated with the development of standards.

Item 5 – Paper Three – Fire Standard Pilot Learning Progress Report

CPO

The progress and learning from the pilot process to date were presented to the Board with accompanying appendices (listed below).

- Appendix A – The ERD Pilot learning progress report provided the Board with the progress made on developing the ERD Fire Standard.
- Appendix B – Revised draft ERD Standard

JF confirmed that the consultation on the proposed ERD Standard was successful. The results and feedback were detailed in the report. The draft Fire Standard was accepted by services with only a few minor edits as shown in Appendix B.

However, the consultation had highlighted a major concern with the Department for Transport's proposed legislation which was linked to the training and competency framework which underpins the Fire Standard.

The issue concerns the proposal from the Department for Transport to specify a training time of 10 days minimum for emergency response driving for all fire and rescue services. The consultation identified major concerns from many services in terms of the impact of this measure on both costs and the lack of availability of on-call staff for training for continuous periods.

The NFCC was liaising with the Department for Transport but was now seeking support from the Home Office in finding a resolution.

Because of the Department of Transport's current position, it was recommended that the Board was to place this Fire Standard on hold. This was agreed.

Decision: FSB/D012: To place the approval of the Emergency Driver Training Fire Standards on hold.

JB explained that now he was aware of the problem he would pursue the matter. He said that the Home Office was in discussion with the Department for Transport about other aspects of emergency response driving.

Action: FSB/A030 – The CPO to brief JB and provide contact details for the NFCC ERD lead so that he can discuss the Board’s concerns with those at the Department for Transport

- Appendix C – NOG Proposals

The proposed approach for the development of Fire Standards for operational response was presented to the Board. This reflected some of the discussion regarding NOG at agenda item 4.

After further discussion, the Board approved the proposals and an update and draft Fire Standards would be brought to the next Board meeting.

Decision FSB/D013: The proposed approach for the development of Fire Standards for operational response, ethics and leadership was approved.

Item 6 – Paper Four – HMICFRS MoU

Chair

The Chair presented the draft Memorandum of Understanding that has been developed with the HMICFRS and approved by Sir Tom Windsor.

It outlined how the Board would work with the HMICFRS moving forward and was shared with the Board for information.

AOB

Chair

There were no items for AOB.

The meeting ended at 13.00hrs.

Next Meeting: Target date is early June for another virtual meeting

Actions & Decisions

Action Log				
ID	Date	Action	Action Owner	Due Date
FSB/A027	2 April 2020	The CPO to review the delivery timelines based on completed scoping work with the results being presented at the next meeting to Board for consideration.	CPO	4 June 2020
FSB/A028	2 April 2020	The CPO to prioritise draft Fire Standards for operational response and ethics and bring the results to the next Board meeting.	CPO	4 June 2020
FSB/A029	2 April 2020	The meeting planned for July to be brought forward to early June. CPO to establish and confirm the date. At this meeting the Board would give further consideration to the frequency of meetings needed at this time and the best process for being kept updated with the development of standards.	CPO	4 June 2020
FSB/A030	2 April 2020	The CPO to brief JB and provide contact details for the NFCC ERD lead so that he can discuss the Board's concerns with those at the Department for Transport.	CPO	4 June 2020

Decision Log		
ID	Date	Decision
FSB/D012	2 April 2020	To place the approval of the Emergency Driver Training Fire Standards on hold.
FSB/D013	2 April 2020	The proposed approach for the development of Fire Standards for operational response, ethics and leadership was approved.