

Fire Standards Board

Fire Standards Review 2023-24

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Foreword

Independent Chair and Vice Chair of the Fire Standard Board

We are pleased to present the 2023/24 Fire Standards Board Review which highlights the Board's work and achievements over that period and looks forward to 2024/25.

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 the Fire Standards. Simply said, they have been created by the Service for the Service.

As explained in this review, we anticipate that the initial suite of Fire Standards will be published by the end of the second quarter of 2024, although other areas may emerge where a Standard may be required. This review underlines that, as we entered the final phase of creating the initial suite, this is not the end of the Board's work. Our attention now shifts more towards enhanced communication and engagement with services to ensure full and consistent implementation of the Standards and assessment of their benefits. It is also time to begin reviewing the published Standards to confirm they remain both current and relevant.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have been involved in developing and implementing the Standards. We would particularly wish to make known our appreciation for the work done by those who have recently left the Board - Councillor Nick Chard, who represented the Local Government Association, and Jonny Bugg, who represented the Home Office. Both contributed greatly. The Board would also like to recognise the invaluable contributions of Joy Flanagan and Paul Henbest who both left the Fire Standards Team at the end of 2023.



Suzanne McCarthy



Alison Sansome

Independent Chair and Vice Chair, Fire Standards Board

March 2024

The Fire Standards Board

In May 2016 the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, announced an ambitious fire reform programme aimed at making England’s fire and rescue services more effective, professional, and accountable.

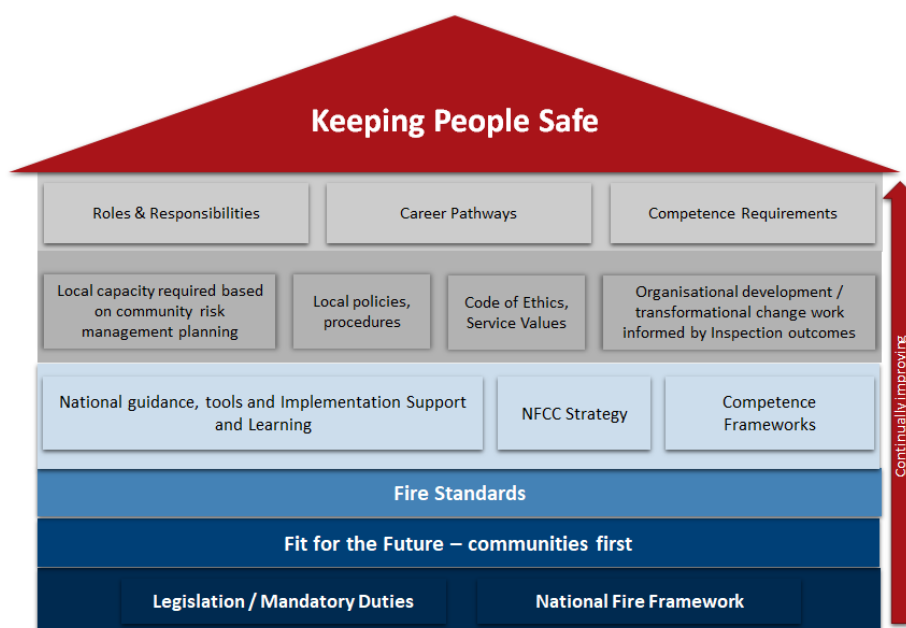
Included in this agenda together with the establishment of an inspection regime led by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) was the creation of the independent Fire Standards Board. This body was tasked with developing a coherent and comprehensive set of professional standards for the Service. It was given the role to oversee the identification, development, and maintenance of professional standards for the benefit of the profession, the services and the public served by them. It began operating in 2019, and, following the work necessary to identify what areas of service activity required standards and the process for producing them, the first Standards were published in February 2021.

The Board’s composition reflects its major stakeholders. In addition to the independent Chair and Vice-Chair, the Board includes the Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC); a representative each from the Local Government Association (LGA); the Association of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners (APCC); and the Home Office. All who attend do so as representatives not delegates. The list of 2023/24 Board members is at Annex A: Fire Standards Board Membership.

The NFCC provides both the Board’s executive support, led by the Fire Standards Team, and access to subject matter experts who lead on developing the different Standards. As neither the Fire Standards Board nor the Inspectorate are regulators, the responsibility for making sure that Standards are implemented and their benefits achieved falls to the services themselves and their employers, who are represented on the Board by the LGA and the APCC.

The following “house” pictorial shows how the Standards together with other elements contribute to achieving better outcomes for the public.

Fitting it all together



As the pictorial illustrates, the sector’s foundation is based on legislation and the National Fire Framework. The house is built layer by layer reflecting the aspirations of Fire and Rescue Services as outlined in the document, “Fit for the Future”, which was published jointly by NFCC, the LGA and Employers England. The Fire Standards state what good looks like for Fire and Rescue Services and actions required to achieve it. Providing further supporting information on the Fire Standards are NFCC products, guidance and tools to help Services achieve the Standards and thus meet the Fit for the Future aspirations. The top two layers of the house represent staff and local communities.

Fire Standards Board and the Inspectorate

The Inspectorate and the Fire Standards Board have agreed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which reflects their different roles and collaborative relationship. The Inspectorate does not audit the Standards, but in inspecting and reporting on the performance of the different Fire and Rescue Services will reference the Fire Standards, as appropriate. It is unfortunate that the Standards, HMICFRS inspections, and the associated inspection framework are sometimes seen as distinct and different activities with competing pressures for their resources, rather than complementary strands with shared aims for improvement. The Inspectorate has stated that services working to achieve the Standards are more likely to see improved inspection outcomes and we welcome this being increasingly reflected in inspection findings. The Fire Standard Board strongly believes that services should consider their improvement action plans holistically as it is likely the improvements required to achieve the outcomes of a Fire Standard may well correlate to areas for improvement identified through inspection.

The Inspectorate will only take into account those standards published at the start of an inspection cycle. Thus, it was important for the Board to have published the two leadership standards, Leading the Service and Leading and Developing People, by the end of December 2022 so that they could be included in the Inspectorate’s programme of inspections starting in January 2023. Both Standards were benchmarked against recognised leadership standards, but, as with all Fire Standards, were put into a context suitable for fire and rescue services. The Leading the Service Fire Standard was developed to clearly articulate the expectations of those who lead within services, particularly their behaviours, ethics and the activities required in an ever changing world. The Leading and Developing People Fire Standard concentrates on how services should attract and retain a competent workforce that is diverse, motivated, and engaged. That Standard also puts an emphasis on workforce development, health, and wellbeing. The NFCC Implementation Team has provided significant support in embedding these two Standards within services.

The Suite of Fire Standards

The development of a Standard is thorough and consultative. Starting with a scoping and planning stage, there then follows development work including peer review leading to the Board agreeing to a public consultation on the draft Standard. Consultation responses received are analysed, with the Fire Standards Team producing a full report for consideration by the Board which explains why proposed changes to the draft have been accepted or rejected. The Board will consider signing off the Standard for publication once it has reviewed and is satisfied both with the final draft Standard and the conclusions of the Quality Assurance Report which is focused on commenting on the Standard’s production process, noting any recommendations for possible improvements. Once approved, the Standard is launched with suitable communications together with an accompanying implementation tool. Thereafter information is continually gathered on the Standard’s impact. The process from start to finish takes on average six months to a year.

During the year the Board recognised that it was important to publish a statement on its website outlining the Board’s position with regards to the level of equality impact assessment undertaken when producing Fire Standards. The statement reads as follows:

“The Fire Standards are designed to be applicable to all fire and rescue services in England and for the wider benefit of local communities. Fire Standards are produced by the services for the services.

The Fire Standards Board is committed to listening and responding to a diversity of voices. Through its open consultation process, it welcomes views and feedback from those with differing backgrounds and experiences about its Fire Standards. With best endeavours, it considers all feedback as part of its development and approval process to ensure the standards will not directly or indirectly discriminate against a person or persons or negatively affect them.

Achieving the Fire Standards will support fire and rescue services in complying with their public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010, in particular that means their responsibility to; eliminate

discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The impact of this will benefit the fire sector and the wider community.”

At the time of this review, 16 Fire Standards have been published, which can be found on the Fire Standards Board website by following this link: <https://www.firestandards.org>. The expectation is that the initial suite will consist of around 20 Standards. The Board decided that several areas were better expressed not as separate Standards, but as cross-cutting themes reflected in the Standards, as appropriate. These cross-cutting themes are identified as: productivity, efficiency and effectiveness; environment and sustainability; equality, diversity, and inclusion; health and wellbeing; and organisational learning.

Standards should not be seen as silo documents as their relationships produce positive synergies needed to achieve improvements. Separately and together, they help drive improved quality of service to support the safety, health, and wellbeing of communities. They act to enhance professionalism through consistent application, improved competence and diminishment in organisational risk. They enable services to collaborate effectively with other services across borders or nationally. They ensure better and greater accountability assisting governing bodies and operational leaders in assessing local performance. The outcome of achieving the Standards is a more positive Service culture and working environment leading to increased public confidence which can only add to maintaining trust in and the upholding of the Service’s reputation.

Recognising that services can have very different demographics and geographies and challenges, the Standards are deliberately written to be principles based. Each begins with an outcome statement which states what good looks like. This is followed by what is required to achieve that outcome, the “how to” section. This directs services to the measures they must, should or may take to achieve the outcome. The Standard’s remaining sections are: expected benefits of achieving the Standard; legal requirements or mandatory duties; linked qualifications, accreditations or Fire Standards; and guidance and supporting information. That material is published separately by NFCC and contains any necessary further details.

Services are encouraged and expected to work towards achieving the Standard’s stated outcome through reflection and self-assessment and by avoiding simply treating Standards as a tick box compliance exercise. The Fire Standards Board anticipates that in many cases services may already be achieving much of what each Standard’s outcome requires, understanding that different services will have specific strengths and weaknesses. Each Fire Standard has a corresponding Gap Analysis Tool to support services with implementation. These tools help services assess how well they currently meet the outcome statement and to identify any additional actions required.

Whilst it is not mandatory for services to adopt the Fire Standards, the National Fire Framework makes clear that services are expected to pay due regard to them.

Progress and Achievements in 2023/24

In addition to the usual four meetings a year, the Board exceptionally met on two occasions during this period - the first in June to consider the Inspectorate's recommendations mentioned below and then again in September to discuss the need for a specific Finance Standard.

a) Production of Fire Standards

During the period of this review the Fire Standards Board published two standards and made progress on three others.

The Fire Control Fire Standard and Communication and Engagement Fire Standard were both launched in April 2023. The development of the Fire Control Standard was influenced by major incidents such as Grenfell and the Manchester Arena bombing. It addresses the fundamental and strategic role that Fire Control plays from initially receiving the first contact through to the very close of an incident. This Standard's development drew on the expertise and wide knowledge of Fire Control in all operational service activity including the NFCC Fire Control Team, the NFCC Lead for Fire Control, the Mobilising Officers Group and control specialists from a wide range of Fire and Rescue services. The intention is for this Standard to assist in creating better resilience, greater strategic awareness and interest in Fire Control, improved levels of recruitment and retention and professional development opportunities.

Since 2021, the NFCC Implementation Support Team has undertaken:

- Over 670 engagements directly relating to Fire Standards
- Over 430 face-to-face visits and workshops in Services
- 90 multi-service online Fire Standard implementation workshops
- Reached over 1100 fire service participants representing all 44 English Services

Recognising that accessible, and inclusive communication and engagement are fundamental in building a positive working environment and culture and key in keeping communities safe, the Communication and Engagement Fire Standard clarifies the importance of these areas in all aspects of a fire and rescue service. It aims to ensure fire and rescue services have defined approaches on how to strategically communicate to all stakeholders, both internally and externally. FirePRO, the membership body for communications professionals working in fire and rescue, developed the Standard on behalf of the Board, engaging with industry leaders both from the Chartered Institute for Public Relations and the Local Government Association.

During the year progress was also made on the production of several other Standards as described below.

While a Finance Standard was originally envisaged, advice given to the Board by both NFCC Finance Leads and the Home Office, made it reconsider if such a Standard was required. This led to its decision to commission instead the development of an Internal Governance and Assurance Fire Standard. This Standard is expected to be published at the beginning of 2024/25. The Board is considering whether and how to include certain financial elements in some already existing Standards.

Considering comments received on a proposed Procurement and Asset Management Fire Standard and subsequent discussions with interested stakeholders, it was decided that this Standard needed more clarity and focus. As a result, the content has been reconsidered and the Standard repositioned as the Procurement and Commercial Standard. The time needed for these conversations has understandably delayed the start of consultation on this Standard. It is hoped that the Board will be in position to consider approving this Standard sometime in late Spring or early Summer 2024/25.

Work on the provisionally titled Digital and Information Technology Fire Standard was initiated with a working group session to confirm the Standard's scope and to gather any related information to support early drafting work. Again, the Board is expecting to consider approval of this Standard in summer 2024.

b) Responding to HMICFRS' Spotlight Report on Culture and Values' Recommendations

In March 2023, HMICFRS published its Spotlight Report on Culture and Values. This contained three recommendations directed to the Fire Standards Board which referred to safeguarding measures, staff disclosures, complaints and grievances and misconduct. This led to the Board determining that to meet these recommendations moderate changes were needed to strengthen three Standards - Leading the Service, Leading and Developing People, and Safeguarding. The necessary changes were made by including additional guidance and supporting information, linked qualifications, and, in the case of the Safeguarding Fire Standard, additional material to reflect changes in primary legislation. The revised Standards are published on the Fire Standards Board website.

c) Working with Services and Stakeholders

The Fire Standards Board engaged with the Home Office's "*Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service: Building professionalism, boosting performance and strengthening governance*" white paper and considered the subsequent response provided by the Home Office to that consultation.

Considering how much focus is now on improving values and culture in the Fire and Rescue Service, the Fire Standards Board and the NFCC's Implementation Team have worked to focus the particular

attention of services on delivery of four specific Standards - Leading the Service, Leading and Developing People, the Code of Ethics Standard, and the Safeguarding Standard.

Further, during the period of this review the Fire Standard's website was updated and a number of new [short videos](#) were published featuring Fire Standard Board members explaining how the bodies they represent on the Board contribute to developing and delivering the Standards. A list of service visits and other events attended by the Chairs of the Fire Standards Board in 2023/24 aimed at increasing awareness of the Fire Standards and the work of the Board is at [Annex B](#).



“An enormous thank you from me for Friday. It was excellent to see the idea for an event we had some months ago brought to life. Thank you for your facilitation, advice, guidance and support. It all goes a very long way in our continued efforts to bring Fire Standards to life across our Service and help everyone understand the value working towards them will achieve. I was so pleased there was good representation from our Regional colleagues, and this is something we can definitely build on and strengthen in the future.

The NFCC Implementation Team is without doubt a valuable resource for Services and I'm keen to continue to strengthen our collaborative working approach as much as possible over coming months.”

*Tracy King
Assistant Director, Performance and Improvement
HMICFRS – Service Liaison Officer
Essex Fire and Rescue Service*

Future Plans

If the production of Standards mentioned above proceeds as expected, it is anticipated that the initial suite of Standards will be completed during 2024/25. In addition, the Fire Standards Board has three priorities for the coming year. First, to begin its scheduled review of published standards to ensure they remain relevant and current. Second, to concentrate through enhanced communications and engagement the successful incorporation of the Standards and gain insight into the benefits for services by their implementation. It is apparent from feedback that whilst some services are making excellent progress towards achieving the Fire Standards, there is more to do in supporting services in achieving this. Third, to be sensitive to the possibility that there may be other areas where Standards might be beneficial.

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, twitter.com/FireStandards and [linkedin](https://www.linkedin.com/company/firestandards).

Fire Standards Board

March 2024.

Annex A: Fire Standards Board Membership

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

The 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
- Yvette Bosworth and Suzie Daykin, Home Office
- Greg Brackenridge, Local Government Association
- Mark Hardingham, 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 2023/24:

- Service visit to Cornwall FRS - May 2023
- Service visit to Essex FRS - June
- LGA Fire Commissioners meeting - June
- Meeting with Andy Cooke and Roy Wilshire- June
- Meeting with Nick Ross, Chair of the NFCC Trustees - June
- Meeting with Roy Wilshire - July
- Emergency Services Show - September
- Meeting with the Fire Minister - September
- NFCC Autumn Conference – October
- Meeting with Alex Norris Shadow Fire Minister - October
- Service visit South Yorkshire FRS- October
- Humberside FRS- October
- HMICFRS Chief and Chairs Event – November
- HMICFRS Staff Event - November
- Service visit - Leicestershire FRS – November
- Meeting Roy Wilsher HMICFRS – December
- Meeting Alix Barlett HMICFRS – December
- Excellence in Fire Awards Lunch - December
- LGA Fire Conference – March 2024