

MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 18th June 2025

Time: 14:00 – 16:00

Venue: Virtual (MS Teams)

Attendees:	Suzanne McCarthy (SMcC) – Chair Alison Sansome (AS) – Vice-Chair Ben Adams (BA) – Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) Yvette Bosworth (YB) – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Cllr. Jeannie Bell (JB) - Local Government Association (LGA)
In Attendance:	Hannah Condon (HC) - Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Rebecca Johnson (RJ) – Local Government Association (LGA) Susannah Hancock (SH) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Georgie Kelham (GK) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Richard Martin (RM) - Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC)
Fire Standards Team (FST):	Nick Brennan (NB) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST) Natasha Elia (NE) – NFCC Fire Standards Team (FST)

Item 1 - Introductions, apologies, and declarations of interest

Chair

SMcC welcomed Board members to the meeting.

Phil Garrigan (PG) – National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) sent his apologies.

There were no declarations of interest.

Item 2 - Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Chair

There were no corrections or amendments of the minutes of the meeting on 3rd April 2025. These were accepted as a correct record.

Actions from previous meeting:

FSB-A174: Following completion of each revised Fire Standard, wider communications to be provided to FRS's explaining the relevant combined changes.

Update: The Board agreed this action should be considered as business as usual and should be closed. A communications plan was included within item 5, paper 1, following the review of the Prevention Fire Standard. This action was closed.

ACTION FSB-A176: YB to arrange a meeting between Minister Norris and the FSB Chairs.

Update: SD to discuss with Minister's office.

ACTION FSB-A177: MHCLG to organise meetings with the FSB Chairs in between MAG meetings.

Update: An initial meeting took place in June. SMcC requested this action remained open for further meetings to be scheduled.

ACTION FSB-A178: MHCLG officials to review the Fire Standards Board plan for 2025/26 and suggest additional wording covering the subjects of sector improvement and MAG support.

Update: MHCLG provided wording on 11th June. FST incorporated the wording. This action was closed.

ACTION FSB-A179: FST to amend the business plan to explicitly reflect increased engagement with the fire authorities.

Update: the business plan was updated to reflect engagement with authorities. This action was closed.

ACTION FSB-A180: NB to give a presentation of the Leadership thematic Fire Standard workshops including misconduct to the policy team in MHCLG.

Update: NB confirmed that a meeting had been scheduled on 1 July 2025.

ACTION FSB-A181: FST to complete activity 1 from the FSB Response to the HMICFRS Misconduct Review

Update: See Item 7 Paper 2. This action was closed.

ACTION FSB-A182: FST to revise the Progress Paper to include the correct dates for MAG and FBU meetings.

Update: April 2025 progress paper updated. This action was closed.

ACTION FSB-A183: Evaluation update to be brought to the June FSB meeting.

Update: See Item 6. This action was closed.

ACTION FSB-A184: MHCLG officials to provide additional wording for the Fire Standards annual review, to emphasise the evaluation work and to further clarify the FSB role in helping to deliver the reform.

Update: MHCLG provided wording on 11th June 2025. FST to incorporate the wording and to circulate and place on the website.

All other actions were closed.

Item 3 – MHCLG General Update

SD/YB

Following the recent announcement about the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), SD updated the Board accordingly. Fire had not been referenced in the review, but its budget allocation would be handled through MHCLG. She said that there was a 3.1% increase to local government spending compared to 2024/25, although she could not yet confirm how this would impact fire and rescue authorities until the department was allocated funding, which was expected in autumn 2025.

SD talked about the machinery of government changes, advising that the Fire team began reporting to MHCLG ministers from 1st April. Minister Alex Norris was highly engaged in setting the future vision for fire, with previous experience as shadow Fire Minister. The Fire team was now part of a Buildings, Resilience and Fire group, which SD explained gave it a position of greater prominence to be more influential in reflecting the needs of the fire sector.

The objective of the next Ministerial Advisory group (MAG) was to crystallise the Government's programme for Fire and Rescue reform. The outcome of that meeting may have implications on the organisation of the Fire team to ensure priority workstreams were resourced adequately.

Item 4 – Chairs' Update on MAG Task and Finish Groups

FST

SD provided an update following the second MAG meeting, with the next meeting scheduled for 25 June, which would be first meeting in a plenary format at MHCLG. The group, together with core MAG members, would include representative bodies and various staff networks to enable the Minister to hear a broad range of perspectives.

The meeting would include emerging reform priorities and devolution. The Minister had shared four reform priorities which would be explored:

1. National framework
2. A college of fire and rescue
3. Productivity and effectiveness
4. Increasing accountability

Culture Task and Finish Group

AS summarised her experience at the MAG Task and Finish plenary group on Culture. She said that the meeting was presented to the group as the first of several activities and was experimental in nature. She said that members of the group were seeking clarity on how they would operate and she expected that this would be teased out over the next few meetings.

AS said there was an opportunity to gain visibility and further traction for all the work the member organisations were delivering on culture. Attending organisations had submitted a helpful mapping exercise, but she added there was further work to be done to add value.

The group discussed the importance of positive language and identifying a culture the sector would want to see, rather than focusing on the negative. She also said that if the group was to produce anything which would support MAG, they may need to meet more often or look at smaller and more focused activities.

BA also attended the same meeting and questioned whether the group was delivering for the government or the sector and that whatever was produced should enable the government to hold the sector to account. There was already a plethora of standards and guidance on misconduct. He believed there should be a focus on the well-being of employees, particularly senior officers. He said that operational independence and devolution were important and that, without having these in place, there would be additional complexity and resource implications

meaning he would not be able to hold his Chief Fire Officer to account in the same way as a Police Chief.

SD said she would like the group to agree an understanding of what the sector wanted in order to build a positive culture and identify what needed to change to achieve this. The next steps were to define a work plan to test with the sector.

College of Fire and Rescue Task and Finish Group

SD said the objective of this T&G was to deliver a full policy proposition to the Minister for consideration. The group would operate up to, during and beyond a public consultation expected to take place later in the year, and there would be several meetings over the summer period to discuss research, data, standards and other functions. All information gathered would be fed into a public consultation. Key organisations, including the Fire Standards Board, would also be engaged with individually.

SD said that more clarity was needed on what research and data analysis a college could do to add value. There were a broad range of views on the definition of a standard and it was important to clarify this term.

SMcC said that, while form follows function, the form of the college would also help to influence how it functioned. It was important to recognise a college was not likely to be able to do everything at once and funding would define activities.

BA questioned what the introduction of a college of fire and rescue could mean for fire standards and the Board. SD said that there was uncertainty as they were in a discovery process to establish how a college could build on the work of the Board.

AS left the meeting.

Item 5 – Paper 1 – Prevention

FST

NB gave an overview of the proposed amendments to the Prevention Fire Standard.

The Board approved the proposed amendments and agreed that they did not warrant further consultation with the wider sector and therefore could be published.

SD raised a query about referring to guidance which supported non-statutory prevention work. Reference to non-statutory work dated back to when the Prevention Fire Standard was published in 2021, and it was agreed that a definition of prevention activities would be produced to create a distinction between those activities that were non-statutory and statutory. NB said that the Prevention Fire Standard had been brought in line with the full suite of fire standards, with each listed underpinning guidance regardless of statutory and non-statutory requirements and therefore it may be appropriate to update the Prevention Fire Standard's glossary to reflect this.

SD also queried why the removal of references to Fire Investigation due to the introduction of a Fire Investigation Fire Standard had not similarly been applied to Safeguarding, given the

introduction of the Safeguarding Fire Standard. NB said he understood that safeguarding remained within the standard because it was an integral part of prevention work, whereas Fire Investigation related to wider functions including operational response and protection as well as prevention.

Action FSB A185: FST to provide formal response to MHCLG queries on the proposed amendments to the Prevention Fire Standard. Once MHCLG have confirmed their agreement, the FST re-circulated the Prevention Fire Standard for final approval.

Item 6 – Evaluation

GK

GK presented progress on her impact evaluation of the fire standards. She reminded the Board that the objective was to establish various data sources, map those to HMICFRS inspection outcomes and identify to what degree services had embedded fire standards.

On reviewing the fire standards, she found there were 60 expected changes across the 19 outcome statements identified, which could be evidenced using 12 data sources. She explained that HMICFRS inspection rounds were comparable within each round, but not over time. This meant that an accurate picture of change was not possible using just this data. She found, however, that outcomes could be evidenced by looking at KPI's related to six key themes:

- Financial stability
- Culture/wellbeing
- Skills gained
- KPI's met
- Knowledge increased
- Partnership working

GK said that she had established seven data sets which could support the mapping of service progress over time. The next steps would be to start the mapping exercise and establish statistical service performance over time with findings cross referenced with the NFCC to identify any cultural factors. GK said she would report progress in September. She added that it may be challenging to see progress over time, for example it may take years to see significant improvements in well-being.

SD asked how the data would be used to feed back into the work of the Board so that it can see the effectiveness of standards and how they could be improved. She also asked how the information that would be gathered could be used to benefit HMICFRS. NB responded that it was an evolving process, but the data would be used to improve what we do and that the evaluation work for the Board was a first step in widening the evaluation methodology to all NFCC activity. GK added that she would be attending the NFCC Digital, Data and Technology (DDAT) conference delivering a joint platform on evaluation with HMICFRS.

Item 7 - Chairs's report and progress paper

GK

NB gave a summary of the paper starting with the proposed amendments to include references to the handling of misconduct in the Leading the Service and Leading and Developing People Fire Standards.

JB noted the proposed change on page ten which used the term “competent”. She thought that this term may cause confusion as it was also used to describe a grade of firefighter. SMcC suggested the term be retained and see if this was commented on by consultees.

SD noted that following the coroner’s inquest looking into the death of Chief Fire Officer Wayne Brown, there were recommendations to support leaders in difficult circumstances and there may be opportunity to include something about support to leaders. This was supported by the Board. SH said that PG was working with Fire Commission Chair Wendy Maples to bring key partners together to commit to providing support to senior leaders.

The group discussed item 23 of the To Achieve This Fire Standard section of the Leading and Developing People Fire Standard. JB said that welfare support should be available to those who were going through the process of the handling of misconduct. SMcC suggested welfare matters should be moved to a separate item and expanded so that welfare support would be provided to all those involved in the handling of misconduct. AS suggested that this should be broadened out to encompass all disciplinary and grievance processes, not just the handling of misconduct.

SD suggested an additional item relating to the provision of welfare support to those managing and delivering transformation within an organisation. NB suggested this might be addressed through robust underpinning guidance from the NFCC People, Culture and Leadership Hub.

Action FSB-A186: FST to review and propose additional amendments to the Leading and Developing People Fire Standard to then share with members for approval before starting consultation.

Decision FSB-D069: The Board agreed the proposed amendments to the Leading and Developing people Fire Standard and Leading the Service Fire Standard would require consultation.

Item 9 - AOB and date of next meeting

Chair

SMcC asked the Board that delegated authority be given to the Chairs to approve the Chairs’ Annual Review and the Fire Standards Board’s Delivery Plan for 2025/26 following consideration of additional suggestions from MHCLG. The Board agreed.

FSB-A187: FST to incorporate comments from MHCLG on the Annual Chairs Review and Delivery Plan for 2025/26. SMcC and AS to approve.

SMcC thanked the members for their attendance and closed the meeting.

Meeting Closed
Date of Next Meeting
17 September 2025
Virtual