

Fire Standards Board

Fire Standards Review 2024-25

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Foreword

Independent Chair and Vice Chair of the Fire Standard Board

We are pleased to present the 2024/25 Fire Standards Board Review which highlights the Board's work and achievements over the period and looks forward to 2025/26.

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 and maintaining the Fire Standards. Simply said, they have been created by the service for the service.

With the publication of the Internal Governance and Assurance, Procurement and Commercial, and Digital and Cyber Fire Standards at the end of the second quarter of 2024, the initial suite of 19 Fire Standards was completed.

However, the work of the Board continues. Our attention has shifted towards enhanced communication and engagement with services to ensure full and consistent implementation of the Standards and assessment of their benefits. We thank the services that invited us to visit them in 2024/25 and witness how they are implementing Fire Standards.

It is also important to recognise that the Fire Standards Board does not work in isolation of the other bodies operating in the wider sector. We would particularly like to recognise the Inspectorate's important work and share our appreciation that Fire Standards are specifically referenced in the HMICFRS's Inspection Framework for 2025 to 2027. We will continue to work with NFCC colleagues to support fire and rescue services in embedding the Fire Standards and by so doing provide them with the assurance that they are meeting inspection requirements.

The Board is looking forward to rising to the sector's challenges and the changing landscape including the prospects of greater devolved powers in local government and a college of fire and rescue.

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 Mark Hardingham, the outgoing Chair of the NFCC, and warmly welcome his replacement, Phil Garrigan, to the Board. We would also like to express our gratitude to the members of the Fire Standard Team who have supported the Board so ably during the past year.



Suzanne McCarthy

Independent Chair and Vice Chair, Fire Standards Board

March 2025



Alison Sansome

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.

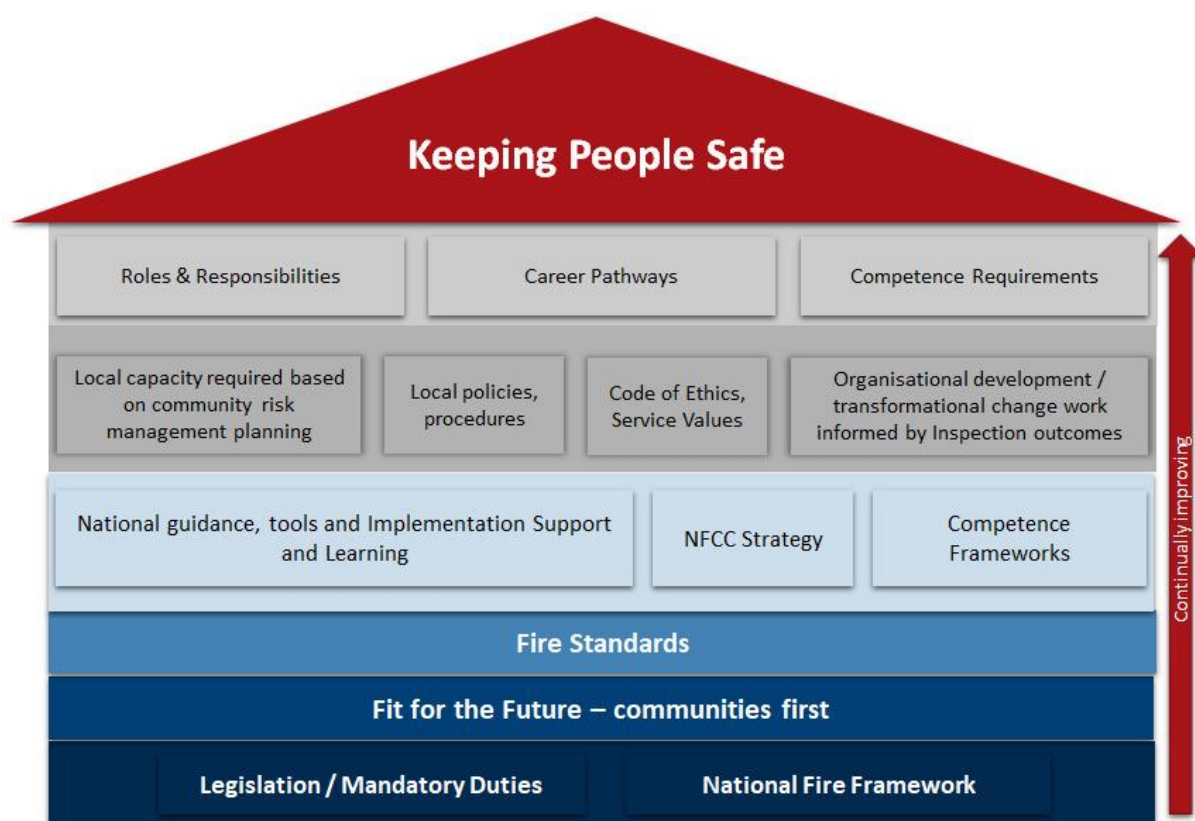
Included in this agenda, together with the establishment of an inspection regime led by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), was the creation of an independent Fire Standards Board. This body was tasked with developing a coherent and comprehensive set of professional standards for the service. It was given the role of overseeing the identification, development, and maintenance of professional fire 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 fire standards and the process for producing them, the first Fire Standards were published in February 2021. The initial suite of 19 Fire Standards was completed in 2024.

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) and respective representatives from the Local Government Association (LGA), the Association of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners (APCC) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). All who attend do so as representatives not delegates. The list of current 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 Fire Standards. As neither the Fire Standards Board nor the Inspectorate are regulators, the responsibility for making sure that Fire 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 Fire 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](#)"¹, which was published jointly by NFCC, the LGA and Employers England. The top two layers of the house represent staff and local communities.

The Fire Standards state what good looks like for fire and rescue services and the actions required to achieve it. NFCC products, guidance and tools provide support to services to help them achieve the Standards and thus meet the Fit for the Future aspirations.

Fire Standards Board and the Inspectorate

The Inspectorate and the Fire Standards Board share a close, constructive relationship while maintaining their respective independence as reflected in their different roles. The Inspectorate does not audit the Fire Standards, but in inspecting and reporting on the performance of fire and rescue services will reference the Fire Standards, as appropriate, and draw attention to Fire Standards in their reports and assessment framework. The Inspectorate's *State of Fire Report 2023* makes this clear in the statement that "Our inspection framework is designed to have due regard to

¹ <https://nfcc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Fit-for-the-Future-Refreshed-June-2024.pdf>

the standards as part of our inspections and will continue to do so. This means that those services that have adopted and implemented the standards will find themselves better set up for our inspections.”

The Inspectorate also referenced the importance of Fire Standards in its various periodic spotlight and thematic reports such as illustrated by recommendation 20 in their recent report, *Values and culture in fire and rescue services, 2023* which says, “By 1 June 2023, chief fire officers should have plans in place to ensure they meet the Fire Standards Board’s leading the service standard and its leading and developing people standard”. Furthermore, the *2025-27 Inspection Framework* also made explicit reference to Fire Standards in saying that:

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

The Inspectorate’s *State of Fire Report 2023* also directly recommended that fire and rescue service leaders take a more strategic approach to service improvements. This indicated the overwhelming importance to services of embedding the two leadership Standards, Leading the Service and Leading and Developing People, which should also assist services in meeting the recommendations in HMICFRS’s thematic report, *Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services, 2024*.

The leadership Standards were benchmarked against similar standards used in other sectors, including NHS England and the Chartered Management Institute Professional Standards. However, as with all Fire Standards, they were put into a context suitable for fire and rescue services. The Leading the Service Fire Standard was developed to clearly articulate the expectations on 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 places emphasis on workforce development, health, and wellbeing. The NFCC Implementation Team has provided significant support in embedding these two Standards within services.

The Development of Fire Standards

The development of a Standard starts with a scoping and planning stage. This is followed by development work which includes peer review and leads to the Board deciding if the draft standard should go out to public consultation. 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 only consider signing

off the Standard for publication once it has reviewed the report and is satisfied both with the final draft Standard and the conclusions of a Quality Assurance Report, which advises on to what extent the Standard's production has followed the agreed process. Once approved, the Standard is launched with suitable communications and support from the NFCC Implementation Team. Thereafter information is continually gathered on the Standard's impact. The process from start to finish takes on average six months to a year.

At the time of this review, the initial suite of 19 Fire Standards has been published, which can be found on the Fire Standards Board website: <https://www.firestandards.org>. While this completes the originally envisioned suite of Fire Standards, the Board will consider creating new standalone standards if appropriate.

The Board decided that several areas were better expressed not as separate Standards, but as cross-cutting themes reflected in the totality of Standards. These cross-cutting themes are:

- productivity, efficiency and effectiveness;
- environment and sustainability;
- equality, diversity, and inclusion;
- health and wellbeing; and
- organisational learning.

Standards are not silo documents as their relationships to each other produce positive synergies needed to achieve improvements. Separately and together, they help drive better quality of service to support the safety, health, and wellbeing of communities. They act to enhance professionalism through consistent application, enhanced 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, geographies and challenges, the Fire 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 Fire 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 which is published separately by NFCC.

Services are encouraged and expected to work towards achieving the Fire Standard's outcome through continual reflection and self-assessment and by avoiding simply treating Fire Standards as a tick box compliance exercise. The Board anticipates that in many cases services may already be achieving much of what each Fire Standard's outcome requires.

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 2024/25

During the period of this review the Fire Standards Board published three fire standards and made progress on reviewing five of the initial suite.

The Board has also engaged with the NFCC Analysis and Insights team to evaluate the impact of Fire Standards on the sector. This work has commenced and will be ongoing throughout 2025/26.

Publication of New Standards

Three Fire Standards were published in 2024, bringing the initial suite of fire standards to 19.

- June 2024: Internal Governance and Assurance Fire Standard
- September 2024: Procurement and Commercial Fire Standard
- September 2024: Digital and Cyber Fire Standard

The Implementation team is rolling out a series of Fire Standards workshops to support the embedding of these fire standards, and to date 80 FRS personnel have participated in a workshop, representing 28 English fire and rescue services and 3 services from devolved administrations.

Review of Fire Standards

Periodic and Exceptional Reviews

Each Fire Standard on publication is given a review date being three years from the date of publication. The periodic review process has as its aim to confirm that the Fire Standard being reviewed remains relevant, accurate and current. The first fire standards published have now reached their first periodic review date and reviews are now taking place for the following Fire Standards:

1. Operational Competence
2. Operational Preparedness
3. Community Risk Management Planning (CRMP)*

* The CRMP periodic review has been combined with an exception review, discussed below.

The reviews listed below were started in summer 2024 and are in the process of being considered by subject matter experts, who have been asked to advise and suggest any amendments. Including the three Fire Standards listed above, the other nine Fire Standards due for review in 2025/26 are:

1. Emergency Response Driving
2. Operational Learning
3. Code of Ethics
4. Prevention
5. Protection
6. Safeguarding
7. Fire Investigation
8. Data Management
9. Emergency Preparedness and Resilience

Exception Reviews

An exception review of a Fire Standard may be required if changes need to be considered for a Fire Standard outside of its periodic review cycle. There are currently five Fire Standards subject to an exception review as the Board felt that elements of finance and asset management needed to be inserted into existing fire standards and were cross-cutting themes. As a result, the Fire Standards Team is currently undertaking a mapping exercise to consider where changes to the following Fire Standards should be made:

1. Leading the Service
2. Leading and Developing People
3. Community Risk Management Planning
4. Data Management
5. Emergency Preparedness and Resilience

Responding to the HMICFRS Thematic Review

In August 2024, HMICFRS published its thematic report on *Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services*. This contained 15 recommendations directed to services to improve their handling of misconduct. The recommendations asked services to consider activities already in the two Leadership and Code of Ethics Fire Standards.

Leadership Thematic Workshops

The Implementation team adapted the existing Thematic Leadership Fire Standards workshops delivered to groups of regional services by changing the focus of the workshops to make misconduct a key element. The Fire Standard lead for each service is invited to attend each session accompanied by the appropriate thematic lead and service sponsor for the leadership fire standards.

Workshop Themes

Theme	Session
Introduction to the Leadership Fire Standards	Session 1
Service Improvement/Organisational Learning	Session 2
Workforce Planning • Talent Management • Recruitment • Training	Session 3
Communication and Engagement	Session 4
Leadership and Code of Ethics	Session 5
Wellbeing, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	Session 6

The workshops are an opportunity for participating services to exchange ideas and information about approaches to embedding these Fire Standards, how NFCC products and tools can support this and to share other techniques and processes adopted. Each workshop is organised to allow time to develop strategies and plans to be delivered after each workshop to help embed learning from that theme and to make continuing progress.

Since July 2023, the team has delivered 15 leadership thematic workshops to 150 participants from different 33 FRS and is continuing to roll these out in 2025.

Since 2021, the NFCC Implementation Support Team has undertaken:

- Over 870 engagements directly relating to Fire Standards
- Over 700 face-to-face visits and workshops in services
- 130 multi-service online Fire Standard implementation workshops
- Reached over 1500 fire service participants representing all 44 English services

Working with Services and Stakeholders

The Board has engaged with many partners in the sector including HMICFRS, the NFCC and the LGA, has attended events and presented information about Fire Standards to a wider audience. The Chair and Vice Chair were also welcomed to several fire and rescue services to witness how these Services engaged with Fire Standards and embedded them to support their continuous improvement. The Chairs were able to witness both the challenges and successes in these services, and we thank the hosts for their time and generosity.

A list of service visits and other events attended by the Chairs in 2024/25 is at [Annex B](#).

Future Plans

There is work to do to ensure that Fire Standards are fully embedded and continue to be current and relevant. Without the ongoing oversight and engagement of the 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 decline, which would be a backwards step for the sector.

The Board will continue to work to assist in the implementation of the Fire Standards through engagement and communication together with benefits management and evaluation of how Fire Standards support sector improvement. 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 Government to reduce individual surveys to FRS through unified 'big data' collections and evaluation of third-party data, for example from Home Office returns, incident recording and HMICFRS. 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 sector.

The Board will continue to reach out to others engaged in the sector, including representative bodies, and will remain an active participant in such important initiatives as the Ministerial Advisory Group for Fire and Rescue Reform and the task and finish groups it has established. In so doing the Board hopes to create a wider understanding of the role of Fire Standards in delivering greater professionalism of the fire and rescue service.

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](#).

Fire Standards Board

April 2025.

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, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
- Jeanie Bell, Local Government Association
- Phil Garrigan, 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 2024.

- LGA Fire Conference – 12th & 13th March 2024
- HMICFRS Misconduct Thematic External Reference Group (ERG) – 18th March 2024
- Service Visit – Cheshire FRS – 3rd April 2024
- Speaker at NFCC Spring Conference – 22nd & 23rd April 2024
- Emergency Services Times webinar on culture and whistleblowing – 25th April 2024
- HMICFRS Positive Practice Masterclass – 29th April 2024
- Greater Manchester FRS Visit – 2nd September 2024
- Warwickshire FRS Visit – 16th September 2024
- West Sussex FRS Visit – 23rd September 2024
- Nottinghamshire FRS Visit – 30th September 2024
- Speaker at Greater London Assembly Fire Committee – 24th October 2024
- Speaker at NFCC Autumn Conference – 14th-16th October 2024
- Meeting with Richard Jolley (HMICFRS) – 5th November 2024
- Meeting with Minister Dame Diana Johnson – 2nd December 2024
- Ministerial Advisory Group for Fire and Rescue Reform (Home Office) – 4th December 2024
- Meeting with Roy Wilsher (HMICFRS) – 10th December 2024