



The jigsaw coming together

It was May 2016 when the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, laid out her thoughts on reform for the Fire and Rescue Service in England. As a reminder, the three pillars of this programme were Accountability & Transparency, Efficiency & Collaboration and Workforce Reform.

Within these broad headlines were plans for the formation of HMICFRS, Police & Crime Commissioner to provide governance for FRSs, where a local case was made, a national website, increased publication of statistics, a revised English Fire Framework, blue light collaboration, closer procurement, a more diverse and flexible workforce, an on-call national campaign and the development of professional standards. An English based set of reforms that has seen extensive NFCC involvement. Alongside this we have developed the National Fire Chiefs Council which ensures we have the United Kingdom FRSs linked in many things from National Operational Guidance to dealing with the aftermath of Grenfell.

But back to the 2016 speech, it is interesting to see how many of the issues that were listed are now either in place or very close to being realised. Perhaps the biggest of these is the introduction, or should I say re-introduction, of the Inspectorate into the English fire and rescue landscape. It has been many years since English fire and rescue services have been subject to inspection, when they were last carried out in the early 2000s it was mainly by ex-chief fire officers. The current version of inspection sees independent Inspectors supported by staff with sector and non-sector experience.

Tranche one has been completed and colleagues will be learning the outcomes soon. Whilst it is for each of the services to determine their response to their inspection, the NFCC will be looking for themes and trends to aid learning and understanding. But also to ensure the methodology and communications between all involved benefits everyone, but particularly the public and communities we serve. Both fire and rescue services and HMICFRS are finding their way in this new environment but I am optimistic for the benefits it can bring. At the moment, although there are judgement criteria, good still looks like whatever good is locally and compared to the integrated risk management plan. The evolution of standards should help all involved and it was great for me to be involved in selecting the independent chair and vice chair of the Fire Standards Board. We had some excellent applications and following due diligence we should be able to announce the successful candidates in the next few weeks.

Looking at other predicted reforms, we now have Police and Crime Commissioners as fire authorities, adding to an already complex pattern of governance in England and the UK. But it is not only English government that have made changes to governance and scrutiny arrangements, but as we heard from the Welsh Cabinet Secretary for fire and rescue services at our conference, he intends to consult on proposals that reform these and funding arrangements for the three Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities.

We have closer procurement, a new English Framework, an on-call campaign and the more frequent publication of statistics, with a Fire England website in development. Although closer procurement is working well I believe we can get better at buying things together and collaboration.

The more regular publication of statistics is also a great benefit to us all, although as I wrote in my last blog, we as fire and rescue services and NFCC need to get better at turning our data into evidence to support objectives such as our submission to the next spending review.

It has been said many times that fire and rescue has had no protection from austerity and with the [latest statistics](#) showing a possible upward trend in fires and a 23% drop in firefighter numbers we have some

evidence to support the spending review case to the Treasury, but with much more to be done analysing risk data. The issues may seem obvious to us, but we have to demonstrate our concerns and NFCC is working hard with Home Office colleagues to provide a case for Fire to sit alongside all other areas of public spending including Health and the Police.

Moving away from the 2016 speech there are many other initiatives being developed that should assist NFCC, Fire and Rescue Authorities and our communities. One of these is communications, hopefully you will have seen our [first NFCC newsletter](#) which is part of our commitment to keep you informed and will be supported by more up-to-date and frequent communication from the NFCC committees.

Following another successful NFCC conference in Cardiff last month we know how important it is to keep people informed and spread notable practice to help us all improve and provide a consistent approach to service delivery. Talking of learning and consistent approaches, it was great to see the UKRO competition located in Cardiff as well so we could view the continued professionalism of the staff we lead. Similar professionalism was on show at the latest Breathing Apparatus national competition. Congratulations to all who took part in both events.

Operational and other learning will be underpinned by the formal launch of the [NFCC National Operational Learning platform](#), linked back into the NFCC Central Programme Office and National Operational Guidance it will help us learn from incidents and other events to develop better guidance. This will be closely linked to research, including our latest work on health and wellbeing. Mental health and research into firefighter cancer are top priorities for NFCC. I understand the Fire Brigades Union also has resources to investigate possible workplace links to firefighter cancer. I know Chris Davies, our health and safety lead is making an approach to the FBU to work together on this important subject, but I also wanted to make that offer publicly so we have a joined-up approach to an issue close to all our hearts.

Carrying on the consistent theme, I strive to ensure I represent the Fire and Rescue Services in the best way I can and that means talking to many of stakeholders and visiting colleagues. So, in the run up to the end of the year I fly to Edinburgh to meet HMI Scotland, we have NFCC council, I am attending the AFSA and APCC/NPCC conferences, speaking at both, and will be visiting East Sussex, Greater Manchester, Buckinghamshire, Cornwall and Merseyside Fire and Rescue Services to help me with balanced understanding of the issues you are all facing. Another step toward consistency is the bringing together of the fire policy units in the Home Office. By the beginning of 2019 we will have English fire policy in a single Home Office department under one Director, which mirror arrangements in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.



One of the privileges of being the Chair of NFCC is having the opportunity to represent the organisation and sometimes the fire and rescue service as a whole at different events.

I was honoured to take the salute at the Firefighters Memorial Trust Remembrance Service and Parade on 9th September this year. I also attended the FBU Centenary Commemorative event and was impressed by the service. But perhaps the greatest honour and privilege for me this year will be to lay a wreath on behalf of the civilian services at Remembrance Sunday which is on 11th

November this year, exactly 100 years since the end of World War One; a true time for reflection.

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