



## ‘Gathering pace’

In my last blog of 2017, I mentioned that 2018 was likely to be a busy and pivotal year, a theme I continued in my last blog, and now we are into March I can definitely feel a number of significant issues gathering pace. This was certainly a theme of last week’s excellent LGA Fire Conference which had many really good sessions and tackled several of the important matters facing Fire Authorities and the Fire and Rescue Service, and that’s not just because I was one of the speakers!

Now the NFCC strategy is in place and we are finalising the annual action plan to take to council in April, significant projects are developing and picking up that pace I keep mentioning. Not least of which are the Community Risk Programme (CRP) and the Workforce Programme. The NFCC Central Programme Office (CPO) is really starting to focus on these themes as the National Operational Guidance programme moves into maintenance and business as usual. Both CRP and Workforce are foundation programmes that will support Fire and Rescue Services into the future. How we structure our organisations to mitigate and respond to risk in order to make our communities safer is our core reason for being. Closely aligned is how we develop the right leaders and a representative workforce to ensure the right people are in the right place at the right time, with the appropriate training and equipment to serve our communities in line with our risk assessments, which is paramount.

On the matter of our people, we saw at last week’s conference how wellbeing and a representative workforce must be priorities for us if we are to meet the needs of communities in a risk-based approach, hence Risk and Workforce being foundation programmes. Whilst talking about people I think sometimes people forget Chief Fire Officers are people too, trying to do the right thing. Some of the personal attacks I see on colleagues are unacceptable and should be confronted. I certainly will whenever I can.

Probably the next most important work streams are the evidenced-based risk and demand work we are progressing with the Home Office, linked to Fire and Rescue funding as we look forward to the next Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), followed by the NFCC Sustainability Project. For many years, NFCC and its predecessor CFOA have argued that Fire and Rescue Services should be funded for risk not demand; the English Minister has been good to his word and Home Office colleagues are working with us to evidence this fact.

Fire Authorities have not been protected at any time throughout the austerity years and I believe we are at a pivotal point in these discussions. I see and hear about Fire and Rescue Services who struggle with on-call availability during the day, who can meet the challenge of a single large incident but then struggle with ongoing reliefs or who would struggle to meet the challenges of two simultaneous large or protracted incidents. It is the resilience of services, in its broadest operational terms, that needs to be evidenced through this work. Organisational resilience is a key focus of the Sustainability Project, but focussed on NFCC. I believe NFCC has had a great first year but if we do not find the right model for sustainability and support for important work then the excellent start will be undone.

Three other matters that have been with us for a while now are also gathering pace. HMICFRS are heading into top gear as they finalise their Fire and Rescue inspection methodology. There has been some fantastic joint working for this to be developed and the pilots, starting with Suffolk this week, will finely tune the mechanisms. The Standards work is also coming to fruition; it has been recognised that a lot of the work that NFCC put into the strategy and annual plan were synonymous with standards, and if agreed by an independently chaired standards board that work could be adopted as standards for

England. So, this work and any areas that come out of the inspections will be managed through the NFCC CPO, and presented to the board for adoption as a standard. A sensible solution for all I believe.

The final piece of work that is really gathering pace is the Dame Judith Hackitt review of building regulations and fire safety. I mentioned in my last blog that NFCC stood ready to help in any way we could. The pleasing thing for me is that this has developed into actual and valuable work with NFCC represented on all six working groups to ensure the views of fire authorities and services are presented in all relevant areas. This enables us to cross reference and learn from each of the groups to help the review team maintain a consistent approach. But as these working groups look to the future we still have to deal with the present and maintain our vigilance over ACM clad buildings and other fire safety matters.

An issue that has arisen recently is that around the testing a fire door from Grenfell Tower – you will have seen the communications from NFCC. There is no evidence so far to suggest that this is a widespread and systematic issue, but we will work closely with government as they investigate further so we can all be confident about the extent of the work. It seems likely there may be a stronger role for fire and rescue in any future structure, but yet again this will need to come with the appropriate resourcing. A theme I am sure we will revisit many times over the rest of 2018 and beyond.

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