



‘Big data and other things’

The title to this blog indicates the importance of data in today’s world with Fire and Rescue being no exception. Avid readers of my blog (there must be one or two) will recognise the similarity of the title to my blog this time last year. But, I think it just highlights how important data will be in future, especially when I think about how many meetings I attend – with their related workstreams – that have data as a central theme.

Not least of these is preparation for the proposed Comprehensive Spending Review next year. As we work with Home Office colleagues to form part of that department’s submission to the Treasury, which will include sustainable funding for Fire and Rescue, clear data that supports an evidence case for our submission is a must. Linking this to our work on risk and demand will help make the case for funding. Although a point of difficulty for us is the fact that with 15 years of localism in Fire & Rescue, some of the required data has simply not been collected or analysed as we would wish. Something that HMICFRS are discovering as they look to consider local performance and possible benchmarking, as at the moment, the only measure of ‘good’ for an FRS is a comparison against their own IRMP as there is a lack of national standards.

Another issue with the CSR that is particular to our bid for sustainable funding, is that although policy for Fire in England comes under the Home Office, funding still comes from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the local precept. To complicate matters further, funding for colleagues in the other countries of the United Kingdom is different again, with Scotland even having some different income tax arrangements now.

Getting the data issue right is also important for many other workstreams NFCC either leads or is heavily involved in – such as the Community Risk Programme; the ongoing response to building safety post Grenfell; a proposed review of the social and economic cost of fire; any review of the Incident Recording System; and our own NFCC digital programme. If we add in workforce data returns, it is vital that we have a common approach to data in all these areas to avoid extra work, duplication and – even worse – differing data sets. I spoke with Shantha Dickinson, our data lead, when I visited Hampshire in early August about these issues and links through the Central Programme Office and the Finance and Workforce Committees are paramount.

Whilst mentioning the NFCC Central Programme Office, it is great to see them starting to fire on all cylinders following the transition from being the National Operational Guidance programme team – although maintaining the operational guidance is still a big part of their role. The CPO’s role also includes supporting the English Standards Board; of course, much of NFCC’s annual plan will hopefully be adopted as standards to help everyone. The advert for an independent Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Board is now live and we have asked for expressions of interest to chair the very important consultation forum, that will serve a similar role to the Operational Guidance Group to ensure stakeholders are engaged in the development of standards, and NFCC work where appropriate.

Progress is also good in other areas of work. The [NFCC’s response to the Hackitt Review](#) has been published. Whilst we continue to welcome much of the review we still believe the definition of high hazard buildings is too narrow and the regulatory overlap and uncertainty with the Fire Safety Order and Housing Act is a priority area for clarification. The other area where we have highlighted a need for clarity is that of the Joint Competent Authority (JCA), with 45 Fire Authorities in England, one Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Local Authority Building Controls (LABC) numbering well into three figures,

a clear strategy is important – especially when considering links to the planning process and Environmental Health Officers.

The NFCC strategic vision for a JCA would see a single national JCA that sets standards, offers guidance, assures local arrangements and offers assistance for complex projects including dispute resolution.

There is also ongoing discussion about the future of the Emergency Services Network, or Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme. It looks very likely that the decision will be to keep going, but with a reset of timescales and an important confirmation of costs to come.

Whilst this all this important work moves forward we have seen the very best of the Fire and Rescue Service in coming together to tackle extensive wildfires, particularly in the North West, and I would like to pay tribute not only to Greater Manchester and Lancashire colleagues, but also to the 21 other fire and rescue services, the NFCC National Resilience team and partners such as the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission who did such a great job. Alongside the continuing Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry, we are reminded that firefighting can be a very difficult and dangerous job.

But it is not all good news as we survey the Fire and Rescue landscape, which sees difficult circumstances for Chief Officer colleagues. Being the Chief of any organisation, be it Police, Fire, Adult Care or similar, comes with extra responsibility, plus extra focus and scrutiny. They are difficult roles to fulfil and are increasingly difficult to recruit to. This is a conversation that will, I have no doubt, develop. Another difficult area is pay, we have also seen the recent employers pay offer that largely maintains the principle of affordability but does not meet the aspirations of the Fire Brigades Union. The associated working groups have been in place for over three years now, and as we ponder the future of Fire and Rescue in a changing world we would all welcome some resolution. This week we also saw the release of the latest Fire statistics from the Home Office which continue to show not only a slowing and plateauing of fire numbers and related issues but a slight increase, some evidence for the spending review.

I will finish, however, on a lighter note, I (along with Mark Hardingham) took part in the British Firefighter Challenge – a gruelling course based on firefighters' role of ascending stairs, hauling aloft, breaking in, dragging and making-up hose, and rescuing a casualty. If ever you want to challenge yourself, this is the place to do it. Mark smashed the course, I was happy to survive and finish in the allotted time of 6 minutes.

Roll on the 2019 challenge.

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