



‘Another pivotal year’

January has come and gone and with a commitment to improving communications in mind I thought it about time I wrote my first blog of the year. It could have come a little earlier but with the NFCC meeting on Wednesday 31st, it seemed reasonable to wait a while.

Wednesday’s meeting was once again extremely well attended with some robust, but professional debate that has set the NFCC action plan priorities for next year and complements work going on across the sector. A communication went out the day after the council meeting that covers the main items on the agenda, and the papers can be found here, but there are a few areas I want to concentrate on. The first of these is the priorities for the Action Plan.

This is the first time the full council has been able to debate and agree the plan for our organisation. In the past, this would have been the work of the Presidential team and CFOA Directors. Now, every Fire and Rescue Service can have their say in the debate.

This led to one addition: Operational Effectiveness, and some changes in emphasis and wording. It is a real step forward into a programme and project management methodology supported by the Central Programme Office (CPO) that will see us deliver even more for our organisations, the wider Fire sector and most importantly, the public. It is vital that as we continue to develop this methodology that all our work joins up, through the NFCC Strategy, work plan, committees, research, procurement, CPO and links into work with partners across local government, the governments of the UK, industry and other fire related organisations. One question I asked colleagues at council to ask themselves when engaging in a piece of work, is how does this reflect the plan and how might it link to other committees.

Another feature of the meeting well worth a mention was the attendance of the Home Office Police and Fire Minister, Nick Hurd. The Minister said a few words and then took a number of questions from the floor. I know this was appreciated, as was the Minister’s commitment for his officials to work with NFCC to provide an evidence base for the level of reserves held by Fire and Rescue Authorities and for any submission to a future Comprehensive Spending Review on Fire Authority funding.

Another item that generated much interest was the use of technology for fire prevention education and training using 360 vision and virtual reality technology. I had a try of both pieces of technology and the potential for training and learning is immense; another project we can work on collaboratively through the structure of the CPO and the plan.

One of the biggest items in the Action Plan is ‘Advise and support the outcomes from the Hackitt Review including any review of relevant British Standards’. A few words that cover a wide ranging and systematic review of the building safety system in England and which will affect the United Kingdom and beyond as building regulations in other areas, such as Scotland, are also reviewed.

It is well known that for the second stage of the Hackitt review there have been six workstreams identified: Design and Construction, Occupation and Maintenance, Regulation and Guidance, Competency, Residents Voice and Product Testing.

NFCC stands ready to actively engage and support in all the workstreams and we are a busy gathering names to input into the Review team to ensure the Fire and Rescue Service is well represented in any recommendations for the future.

In the meantime, Fire and Rescue Services across the country are still working with local Building Control teams and responsible persons from relevant buildings to ensure interim safety measures remain in place until the ACM materials that do not comply with Building Regulations are removed. It is important that colleagues everywhere maintain communication links with the NFCC hub in the West Midlands in order to keep everyone up-to-date.

We saw from two significant fires over the Christmas and New Year period, the high-rise fire in Manchester in a building with wooden balconies, and the car park fire in Liverpool; we are still exploring the extent of the systematic changes these fires might provoke. Both fires also prove that fire is still an issue and maintaining the Fire and Rescue Service's ability to deal with large incidents is vital.

One thing that has occurred to me throughout is our current assumptions about fire loading within buildings and other structures. I believe it is time for some significant research to ensure our understanding of fire loading in structures and beyond is up to date and informs our methods of firefighting. Of course, there will always be fire and so our ability to prevent fires happening or keeping people safe if they do is not diminished.

That is why prevention, fire safety education, working with vulnerable people and the Fire Service's wider role is also prominent in our work plan. Preventing a fire or emergency incident is always better than having to respond, but our building safety system needs to reflect property safety as well as life safety and we must always be in a position to respond in a professional manner when required.

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