



## Some new faces and some familiar challenges

I settled in my mind that I would write my latest blog after the Local Government Association (LGA) Fire Conference as that would keep things fresh and there would be up to date information, discussions and conversations that may shape what I write. So, I put some time aside today, Friday 15th March to sit down and write. Unfortunately, 15<sup>th</sup> March will go alongside a long history of dates where terrorist atrocities have been committed the world over as attacks on two mosques in New Zealand have resulted in, as I write, 49 fatalities (later confirmed as 50) with many more injured. My thoughts are with all affected, there should be no place for such hate in our world. But there is too much hate and this shows that as a UK Fire and Rescue Service we must be constantly prepared and vigilant to respond to terrorism alongside partners, no matter what the cause or origin.

It is difficult to write about other matters when such events happen, but it is the way we respond, particularly within the Fire and Rescue Service, that is to deal with all the issues in front of us. So back to the LGA Fire Conference in Brighton. I thought the agenda was well put together, covering many of the major issues that confront us all at the moment, from spending reviews to national programmes, building safety, inspection, standards, diversity and collaboration. There was something there to cover most of the major issues I mentioned in my [January blog](#). It also gave me and other members of NFCC the chance to build on the excellent working relationship we have with the Fire Service Management Committee (FSMC). It is probably true that in the first year or so of establishing the NFCC, dealing with the Grenfell aftermath and working with all stakeholders our relationship with FSMC remained good, but now it is really starting to develop as we face issues together. It is one of the challenges of being a UK organisation for NFCC, working with colleagues from all parts of the UK, with different responsibilities and devolved structures, but one I think we have recognised and developed well. As part of this engagement I visited Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue in February and plan to continue meeting colleagues throughout the country whenever possible.

As part of the continued improvement in NFCC we have changed the format of our quarterly meetings to allow more time for discussion, learning from each other and debate. Supporting everyone involved in Fire and Rescue is one of our main aims and I know colleagues found these open debates very useful. It gave us more time to agree some strategic positions, one of the most important being our offer of closer working with FSMC and more professional advice to assist the national employers. The NJC advisory forum is a long established way of working and the current advisers do the very best they can, but we have agreed that we could provide more operational and technical advice to assist in any national discussions to help us all move forward. We have seen some real progress here recently. Returning to the conference and a particular question from Dr Fiona Twycross AM to Councillor Nick Chard and Matt Wrack on the future of the Fire and Rescue Service, if it is still here in 50 years' time ([a good time to re-read my blog from June last year](#)). There was nothing in either summing up I could disagree with.

I mentioned to Matt afterwards that his summing up on closer standards, better research, an all hazards service that is shaped by risk assessment and changing vulnerabilities (I may be paraphrasing a little, so apologies if not the exact words). The trick is, how do we get to that future and maintain the relevance and value of the Fire and Rescue Service with some significant challenges ahead of us. Not least being finance, pay and pensions.

The NFCC is doing its bit to push improvement in all areas, our foundation programmes on Community Risk Planning, Workforce and Data & Digital are well known now. We finally have our own Building Safety Team in place to help with all the work coming out of Grenfell and the Hackitt review. NFCC have been involved every step of the way in this building safety work and our contribution is set to increase. We have also responded to significant consultations recently, [one on Approved Document B](#) and the other on [School Safety and the proposed review of Building Bulletin 100](#). NFCC has improvement at its core, so as well as trying to improve buildings safety and make the future of building safety as sound as possible we are also looking to help Fire and Rescue Services improve. This is manifesting itself in our current thinking about an Improvement Framework that takes learning from different areas and links them logically together so we do not end up dealing with issues piecemeal. At the core of the Improvement Framework will be learning from the HMICFRS inspections and their equivalent in other parts of the UK. Link this to the Grenfell Inquiry, Hackitt Review, National Operational Learning and workforce development and we start to see a framework that will influence current and future programmes and projects for the benefit of all. Moving from individual area and project learning to organisational learning.

Until now you might be wondering what the reference to new faces is about. Well partly it is the significant turnover of Chief Fire Officers and the subsequent knock on for other levels in Fire and Rescue Services. After discussions with the English Fire Minister I have been conducting a little research and found that if we take the categories of temporary, promoted in 2019 and leaving in 2019 that covers a third of UK Fire and Rescue Services. This does mean new faces and some fresh thinking, but it also means the need for induction to NFCC, some mentoring and continuous succession planning. Something Ann Millington, as Chair of the Workforce Committee, is thinking hard about. There are other new faces around; Martin Blunden has now started his role as Chief Fire Officer in Scotland, a significant role not only for Martin but for the UK FRS. Phil Hales has announced his retirement from the service, I am very grateful for the hard work Phil has put in for NFCC and the whole FRS as chair of the NFCC Finance Committee. If it wasn't for Phil's lobbying (strongly supported by Phil Loach) when we were discussing the formation of NFCC there might not be a finance committee, that would have been a mistake. I am very glad that John Buckley from Nottinghamshire has now taken on the role of Finance Chair.

We also see new faces in two of our most significant stakeholders. Luke Edwards is now in place as the Director for Fire and Resilience in the Crime, Policing and Fire Group at the Home Office. Meanwhile Alex Hill has taken over from Laura Gibb during her maternity leave, as Chief of Staff for HMICFRS. I have met both and I am optimistic that the excellent working relationships we have in place will continue as we all face the challenges of 2019 and beyond.