



Last week saw the first NFCC conference take place since the organisation's introduction in the spring.

I know I don't need to say how much has happened during the past few months, but the NFCC Autumn Conference gave us all a good opportunity to reflect and take stock, while looking forward to the innovations and reforms which are due to be introduced in our sector.

Firstly, let me say how pleased I was to see so many people attending, from a wide range of services and roles. It is really important that we are sharing information widely so I would like to thank everyone for their support.

It was a busy and interesting two days which saw a variety of subjects covered, which in turn led to lively discussion and debate on a number of issues.

## **NFCC Strategy**

We heard from Phil Loach who has been leading on the NFCC Strategy, which will be the cornerstone for NFCC Coordination Committees to develop their plans and monitor their performance, supported by the Central Programme Office.

Driving continued improvement and development, the NFCC strategy will provide a set of strong, concise strategic commitments – an important basis for the Council's engagement with government and our partners.

The creation of the NFCC gave us the opportunity to produce a set of strategic commitments which are bold and ambitious to enable fire and rescue services to work together to deliver further transformation. I'm pleased that our draft strategy does that.

## **Fire Inspectorate**

One of the key presentations at our conference was from Zoë Billingham, from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services.

It was an interesting oversight into the new Inspectorate and how it will work. NFCC has been fully engaged in developing the new inspection process and will provide guidance to fire and rescue services, where necessary.

NFCC welcomes the re-introduction of a Fire Inspectorate to help demonstrate accountability and transparency across fire and rescue services, ensuring the public, officials and our partners have more access to how fire and rescue services perform, with data from their local services.

Fire and rescue services already provide an excellent service across the country, and we are always looking for continuous improvement. I am confident the new Inspectorate will help with this improvement, without becoming burdensome.

Zoë did talk about secondments from FRSs which will help to shape and run the Inspectorate. It is vitally important that we have the best possible people involved in this, but understand that while it is a good opportunity it is also a big ask for a very lean sector.

I was very pleased that Zoë was able to share a draft timetable which I believe has helped give clarity to the inspection process and I await further announcements with interest.

## **Standards**

Closely linked to inspection is the Professional Standards work. I thank colleagues from the NFCC who have put in so much time and effort in developing proposals. Although independent oversight adds rigour, I believe much of the architecture already exists to develop standards through the NFCC committees, supported by the Central Programme Office, without requiring government to invest in another new organisation. It is essential that NFCC provides a cohesive approach across professional, operational and technical matters.

## **A year of challenges and tragedies**

A lot has happened across the UK in recent months. As a blue light service we have witnessed the aftermath of the Westminster Bridge attack, terrorist attacks in Manchester, London Bridge and Finsbury Park, and then Grenfell happened.

To see this tragedy unfold in the early hours of June 14<sup>th</sup> was horrifying and no one could imagine what firefighters were faced with as they arrived at the incident. Therefore, it was only fitting that the last presentations of the day focussed on Grenfell by led London Fire Brigade and followed by an overview of NFCC's work.

The presentation did not always make for easy listening but gave an insight into the huge scale of the response, along with the decision-making process and the sheer number of people and organisations involved.

Importantly we also heard about the support offered to all staff involved following the incident, both at the scene and also taking calls in the control centre. However difficult it has been to hear some of these accounts by staff and residents, it is essential we are sharing our learning from the disaster.

The Grenfell Inquiry was officially launched only a few days later and I am sure we are all following this with both a professional and personal interest.

The aftermath of the Grenfell incident demonstrated how the Fire and Rescue Service will pull together, now under the co-ordination and leadership of the NFCC in response to what is a national disaster. NFCC will provide extensive evidence to both the Grenfell Inquiry and the Hackitt Review.

From those very early days we were at the cross-government meetings giving advice, particularly to our new Fire and Police Minister in England, Nick Hurd, and Alok Sharma, the new Housing minister.

I must pay tribute to the officers, firefighters and control staff who have responded to all these incidents and the hundreds of incidents with less of a profile that happen every week. The response of London Fire Brigade in response to Grenfell was humbling and incredibly professional.

The second day of the conference had a very strong political focus. One of my ambitions when I took the role of NFCC Chair was that it always remains to be a UK-wide organisation, while recognising the different needs of the devolved administrations.

So, I was delighted to hear from Wales, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and receive very interesting updates into how legislation, policies and governance are both working and in other instances, taking shape. It is extremely important to recognise there are some differences in approach that we need to be aware of and take into our debates and policy formation.

The Minister for Policing, Fire and Criminal Justice and Victims, Nick Hurd MP gave a video address as Parliamentary business prevented him from attending in person.

As to be expected, there was a focus on Grenfell Tower. The Minister thanked the NFCC and wider FRS for their expertise in the days following the fire and the demands placed upon services.

I would like to reiterate those thanks; in the days and weeks following Grenfell the support and hard work from the Coordination Committee Chairs and all services was invaluable at an incredibly demanding time.

The Minister also said that Grenfell was a 'game changer', which I think we have all seen with the introduction of the Expert Panel and Review into building regulations, and not forgetting the Inquiry which has now launched.

He said:

*"Just as Bradford led to big change, just as Kings Cross led to big change, it's inevitable in my eye that Grenfell will of course lead to change. We have to contemplate clear signs of system failure in that space between building regulation and building construction and fire risk assessment and fire safety enforcement.*

*"I am as confident as I can be at this moment in time that what we've set up in terms of the public inquiry and the Hackitt review will get to grip with the truth, however uncomfortable. It is up to us to shape a response that is robust and proportionate and deliverable resources and I hope that we can work together to do just that in order to reassure the public about our desire and determination to tackle that system failure."*

Following the video address Chloë Dunnett and David Lamberti from the Home Office were on hand to take questions following the video address, which was very helpful.

You can find copies of the Minister's speech along with mine at the links below.

I was very pleased with how the NFCC Autumn Conference went, the range of subjects it covered and commitment of FRSs across the country to give up their time to attend. I look forward to seeing you again at future events which I hope are just as informative.