



'This is not an exercise'

For the first time for a while I have been able to take a little time to think about the events of 2017 from a Fire and Rescue perspective, and when talking to some colleagues we have likened it to some sort of exercise where things keep on coming but you still have to deal with the consequences.

Let's start with the move of Fire and Rescue from DCLG to Home Office, starting with a new Director but then changing the Director quite soon, whilst pushing ahead with reform including an Act to enable Police and Crime Commissioners to become Fire Authorities for their area.

We could probably throw in a snap election and change of Minister, whilst London Fire Brigade installs a new Commissioner and top team. What we could do at the same time is change CFOA to a new organisation called the National Fire Chiefs Council with its first full time Chair who from 1 April takes on the Chief Adviser role to Government for major incidents. So as the NFCC works through transition, things can be a little stretched but the policy work and reform agenda still moves forward. Then to really stress test the system, 5 tragic events occur: 4 terrorist incidents and the largest loss of life in a fire in living memory that will generate immediate action on ACM clad high rise residential and other public sector buildings, along with a Police investigation, a public inquiry and establishment of an Expert Panel. Then why not throw in a pay claim.

It has been said many times before, but what I do know is that yet again the Fire and Rescue Services in the UK have met the challenge head on and been fantastic. Epitomised by Dany Cotton, Steve Apter and their teams in London as they responded to Grenfell Tower, but also clearly seen in how NFCC has co-ordinated advice and response into central Government departments and across the country.

An information cell established in West Midlands Fire and Rescue has been the conduit for information flowing out of DCLG, BRE and now Education to Fire and Rescue Services and then back again to keep government informed. One government department took a slightly different approach which ensured another full weekend of work, but even then NFCC stood up and moved swiftly with a risk-based approach. Whether it has been advice to Ministers, position statements on fire safety matters, or local working with partners, Fire and Rescue has not been found wanting.

There is still much work to be done with relation to Grenfell Towers, whether it is supporting the Expert Panel, providing information to the investigation, informing the public inquiry or confirming our position on sprinklers, Approved Document B or the Fire Safety Order; National Fire Chiefs Council will make a full contribution. This was evidenced by the NFCC meeting yesterday – solid professional debate on many issues that saw us agree positions on recharge for national deployments, pay, continued work of the Central Programme Office and Learning & Development priorities alongside the Grenfell matters. NFCC is in a really healthy place and working with partners such as the Fire Service Management Committee we can continue to demonstrate what a great and professional service we provide.

This professional service approach is going to be vital as we meet the challenges outlined already but also as focus comes round again to a Standards Body, Inspection, Police and Crime Commissioners, Collaboration, Workforce, openness & transparency and a new National Framework for England.

Change is the only constant and this is not an exercise.

July 2017
