



## ‘Change, the only constant’

Unfortunately, tragedy is a significant part of any job in fire and rescue. Although being in the fire service is a fantastic career—and as I mentioned in my last blog, a well-kept secret—tragedy does occasionally strike. We have all by now heard of the sad and untimely loss of Chief Fire Officer Kevin Pearson, the longest serving Chief Fire Officer and CFOA/NFCC member. My thoughts are very much with Kevin’s partner, Erica, his family and friends.

Since I last wrote we have also had the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kings Cross disaster and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Windsor Castle fire—both defining and iconic fires. Where Kings Cross is concerned, this involved a significant loss of life and was followed by inquiries and changes in legislation. I watched a documentary on the fire and it brought back many personal memories.

I was a leading firefighter at Holloway fire station at the time, just a few short miles from Kings Cross; four years later I was a Station Officer at Soho fire station, where the loss of Colin Townsley was still keenly felt. The parallels of that time with what is happening post-Grenfell are stark. The immense loss of life, the inquiries, the talk of a game changer and even discussion about complacency. The Kings Cross documentary talked about the escalators having not been cleaned for decades and a possibly complacent attitude to this type of maintenance.

Similar has been said about Grenfell and the linked regulatory regime, with talk of a sense of complacency as fires and fire fatalities have thankfully been dropping over years, a feeling that some thought fire as a hazard had largely been dealt with. I must say that I never felt this in fire and rescue—and certainly not within the national organisation which is now NFCC. Whether there was any complacent attitude or not, we must ensure the same vigour that occurred following the Kings Cross fire, with the same determination, that Grenfell never happens again.

Grenfell, quite rightly, is still the focus of much of my time; as I know it is for many colleagues across the country and in many professional spheres. Although this work pales into insignificance when considered alongside the pain of the victims, their family and friends, there is a determination to put things right. I am heartened by the fact that many submissions to the Dame Hackitt Review cover many of the same subjects and suggest the same outcomes. This should see us work together to ensure the regulatory system for fire safety and other aspects of the building regulations work together and for the same goal: safety, not just compliance.

When I reviewed the meetings I have attended in the last two weeks, I came to realise that although they were dominated by Grenfell Tower, I had attended at least one meeting that covered many of the NFCC’s priorities, in England at least. For Grenfell alone, I attended the Expert Panel (including a risk workshop), a Dame Hackitt Review roundtable, a Ministerial meeting, the All Party Parliamentary Group and the Fire Magazine Grenfell Congress. Plus, a meeting with the Cabinet Office about how national mutual aid as e-practice through the National Co-ordination and Advisory Framework (NCAF) might be developed to assist other agencies such as local authorities during major incidents. As NFCC we are now well into our second phase of ACM-clad building visits and I am really hopeful that the myriad of organisations involved in the Grenfell response have the same goal: a safer built environment.

My other time fell into a number of familiar themes, namely Operations, professionalism, reform and partnership. Operations fell into three categories with the National Operational Guidance Strategy Board being the first of these, as we head towards the end of the programme, we still have some work to do to ensure that industry best practice has been adopted by all fire and rescue services in order to underpin

firefighter safety and intraoperability – critical features of local services' risk-based plans. Maintenance of the guidance is firmly embedded in the future plans of the Central Programme Office (CPO) which is now planning its work along the five themes of the NFCC Strategy: Community Risk, Workforce, Digital, Governance, and Finance. These are extremely important themes and work programmes for us as we develop the NFCC of the future. I also had a JESIP meeting where the theme of embedding the doctrine, training and learning has a similar profile to embedding NOG. Lastly came Business Continuity Planning—a difficult subject for all involved, and I fully understand the pressures this brings, but BCP is a duty we all have.

The third theme of my meetings beyond Grenfell and Operations was that of professionalisation and reform. A meeting of the HMICFRS External Reference Group demonstrated to me that although there is still much to do, colleagues in the Inspectorate are doing all they can to ensure that independent inspection is relevant to fire and rescue services and is not just a recycling of police inspection. Similarly, the Professional Standards Board last week agreed the concept of a small commissioning team with independent oversight was appropriate for fire and rescue rather than a replica of the College of Policing model. Again, there is still work to do here, but the direction of travel is promising. I do know that NFCC and fire and rescue services welcome independent inspection—we are proud of what we do and we welcome the use of standards, as I have never known us to set ourselves a poor or inappropriate benchmark.

My last set of meetings were about our important partnerships: meetings with the NPCC (I'm still often at their offices when I am in London) and then functions with both the Fire Industry Association and Worshipful Company of Firefighters, to ensure NFCC engages and works with partners across the fire sector. Most importantly, and this is really much stronger than mere partnership, I attended the LGA Fire Services Management Committee to update elected members on the work of the NFCC and how this is benefitting both the profession and our fire authorities by supporting collaboration, consistency, efficiency and value for money. We discussed the importance of high-quality professional advice to members, and a connection between the developing LGA Vision 2025 and our NFCC Strategy. I also had my regular meeting with LGA officers, which helps LGA and NFCC to keep up-to-date on current relevant issues.

It was a busy two weeks but I think it helps demonstrate the benefit of our new arrangements: a Council that sets the positions and priorities of the sector, acting collectively as a team; committees that commission and deliver valuable national work, influencing agendas; our three hubs, with the flexible capacity to drive our priorities; and a full-time, multi-year Chair who can join the dots, having the singular focus and time to commit to the NFCC's priorities and help deliver them.

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