



Spring conference 2019

Good morning and welcome to the National Fire Chiefs Spring conference, it is great, yet again to see so many of you here to learn from each other, network and contribute. It is at these events where we not only provide information on issues at the forefront of our minds. We also use your experiences and ideas to help shape policies and positions for the future. In particular we have two sessions directly aimed at helping to shape the future of Fire and Rescue Services and the NFCC, The Standards session today and Improvement Framework tomorrow, both being directly linked.

I am also really pleased to see such a strong array of speakers from the Home Office, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services and the new Fire Standards Board. For Fire, these are English institutions for sure, but I have no doubt that what they will have to say will be relevant for all Fire and Rescue Services and will inform future fire policy thinking in all parts of the United Kingdom. I am very pleased to welcome Luke Edwards the new Director for Fire and Resilience in the Home Office. Although we welcomed the move back to the Home Office it is fair to say that despite the best efforts of Home Office colleagues the previous arrangements were not all they could be. Having Fire policy split between two Directors, both of whom had Police policy responsibilities as well, at a time of significant focus on Policing, left Fire and Rescue policy in a slightly difficult position. By joining three deputy directors with responsibility for policy, fire safety and resilience under Luke we now have the type of focus, which I think will benefit us all and provide better long term outcomes for our communities.

However, despite a slightly fragmented approach to Fire policy in the Home Office there has still been significant progress with the fire reform agenda first set out in 2016. We have known about the inspectorate for some time now with the tranche one reports completed, tranche two inspections complete with reports expected soon and tranche three services gearing up for their turn and I am delighted to have Sir Tom Winsor with us tomorrow to provide his perspective on how inspection of Fire and Rescue Services in England is progressing and giving us his early thoughts on the findings. HMICFRS recognise that they are in a learning process as much as we are and deciding what good looks like after 15 years of localism in is not always easy. Sir Tom will be writing a state of the nation report for Fire in the autumn so I have no doubt he will be looking forward to hearing views and questions from this audience, please make sure you have some. Whilst on the subject of HMICFRS, many of you know that Laura Gibb is now on maternity leave and has had a healthy baby boy, Hamish, congratulations Laura. Alex Hill is covering for Laura and is, I know, looking forward to working with Fire and Rescue Services. His focus at the moment is very much the tranche two findings, moderation and publishing the reports.

Of course, inextricably linked to the English inspection programme is the Fire Standards Board and I am pleased to say we have the independent chair, Suzanne McCarthy and vice chair Alison Sansom with us to go through the work of the board, followed by a workshop to look at

how services might adopt and implement standards. Many of you will have met Suzanne and Alison at the recent LGA Fire conference, and I know they have visits booked with FRS and NFCC committee chairs as they become more familiar with the work of fire services and NFCC. A lot of underlying work for future standards has already been completed or is in train through the NFCC work programmes. Issues like National Operational Guidance, the NFCC leadership framework, LGV driving standards and others are there as technical content, but how we then attach these to a standard that benefits all, but in particular our communities is the next piece of work. The standards board will be using a prioritisation tool to focus our work and resources in the best places.

Before we move on I would like to say a few thank yous. To Hollie and Babita for organising the conference and our two sponsors, Bristol Uniforms and APD Communications. Our conference could go ahead without our sponsors, but it would cost us all more money and we would miss out on the opportunity of networking with representatives of the Fire Industry. So I urge you to visit their stands and talk to the sponsors. And yet again; I urge you to chat to someone you haven't met before or do not know that well every time we have a break or at dinner tonight. Whilst I am saying thank you, I would like to pay tribute to Phil Hales, who will be retiring from the Fire Service in June. Phil has chaired NFCC Finance committee since we started, in fact, if it wasn't for the lobbying done by Phil, ably supported by Phil Loach, we would not have a Finance Committee at all. With the work on fair funding formulas, pension payments and now a possible comprehensive spending review, plus the link into the Fire Finance Network, we can all see how necessary the Finance Committee is. So my thanks to Phil for all his work and support and thank you to John Buckley who will be taking over as NFCC Finance committee chair imminently. Thank you both.

Actually succession, capacity and working together to achieve better outcomes are recurring themes in many discussions. But one thing is very clear to me from the last two years; that is, by working together and keeping the National Fire Chiefs Council as a focus of our national work, whilst offering local support, we are much more effective, with a much stronger voice into Government and other national bodies.

On the subject of working together I am delighted to say we finally have our NFCC Building Safety Team in place to help deal with the mountain of work and issues following the Grenfell tragedy, Hackitt review and recently published Building Safety Programme from Government. Not only do we have all the remedial work on buildings that have ACM 3 cladding still taking place we also have a plethora of workstreams linked directly to the Hackitt review and other policy changes such as the combustible cladding ban.

The introduction of the building safety team, supported by finance from both MHCLG and Home Office has not come a moment too soon. We are fast approaching the second anniversary of the Grenfell tragedy and although there has been progress there is much still to do. This progress has come in removing the non compliant ACM materials from local authority and social housing residential blocks but the private sector still lags behind. We are all still struggling to use legislation that isn't fit for purpose, the Fire Safety Order or the Housing Act to try and force people to remove the cladding, but it is taking some time despite best efforts. When we have examples of blocks owned by foreign nationals who live in Jersey and register their company in the British Virgin Islands for tax reasons, no amount of logic and reason seems to be able to persuade them to do the right thing but through the work of the fledgling Joint Inspection Team,

supported by NFCC, Local Government Association and central government we are pushing building owners to do the right thing.

I have already mentioned the fact that the combustible cladding ban is now in place, apparently banning something that was already banned, but at least it brings some clarity to the situation meaning any new cladding as to be A2 S1 D0. Our concern as NFCC is that this ban only applied to residential buildings above 18 metres so didn't go far enough. Especially when considering buildings where vulnerable people reside, hospitals, care homes, specialised housing. We have seen over the last 20 months or so some very poor build quality in hospitals and have expressed these concerns consistently to government and through the independent Expert Panel. Our concerns over the scope of the cladding ban were very similar to those we had, and still have, about the scope of the Hackitt recommendations. But it does appear from recent conversations that government colleagues are listening and there may well be some movement on scope. This would be welcomed.

I mentioned the Expert Panel, I am still a member and the panel meets every two weeks and is still dealing with fire safety issues linked to, but not necessarily specific to Grenfell. The fire door scenario that saw glass composite fire doors failing to meet the 30 minute fire resistant threshold was a real cameo of the broken system that Dame Judith described. Fortunately, those doors are only about 3% of the market and timber doors are performing as expected. But fire tests houses, third part accreditation and UKAS itself, all need to consider their processes and help fix the building safety system. Much of this requires cultural change throughout, and we all know how difficult that can be, but to be clear, everyone's focus should now shift from achieving compliance to ensuring building safety. Is the product or system or construction and management fit for purpose and doing what it is supposed to do, keeping people safe from fire? The issues we deal with at Expert Panel can be wide and varied, for instance our most recent discussions on matters that affect building safety and might require further advice and guidance are living green walls and balconies with combustible materials.

The main task facing our Building Safety team is working with MHCLG, the Local Government Association and other partners on the Hackitt recommendations and implementation plan. To ensure there is a wide view on the way forward the team have recently held two workshops, one in Manchester and the other in London which were attended by colleagues from 43 Fire and Rescue Services, this is fantastic and ensures NFCC taps into the great expertise that is in our organisations across the UK. My thanks to Nick Coombe, now MBE of course, congratulations Nick, Penny Pender, Anna Carey and the Building Safety Team for the work they put into this. Areas discussed included the effectiveness of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order) particularly in relation to common parts. Safety in occupied buildings, a new regulatory framework and there was unanimous support for the NFCC position that the current scope of the Hackitt recommendations does not go far enough.

Perhaps it is no surprise that the workshops struggled with the idea of a Joint Competent Authority and how that would operate in a fire safety regime. The NFCC view is that this should be a national body with the ability to set standards, apply direction when absolutely necessary and have the ability to support local regulators with very complex buildings and provide dispute resolution when required. The main bulk of the work should stay with local Fire and Rescue Services and Building Control. Similarly, there was consensus that residents should have a stronger voice but a separate body to facilitate this might create confusion in an already complex environment. Finally, on the subject of prosecution and enforcement there is some

concern that capacity, experience and maybe competence to prosecute is not always there. This is understandable given the direction from Government over a decade ago for reduced prosecutions through the better regulation directive. We need to look at how to build this capability again and the work being led by Adreena Parkin-Coates and Guy Keen on a Fire Safety competence and enforcement structure will undoubtedly help as we look to take on greater responsibility through the Hackitt recommendations. There is, of course, different legislation covering these matters in Scotland, but the principles are sound and linked to building safety so NFCC ensures we all keep in touch and learn from each other. A great example is an evacuation communication development first considered in Scotland and now in the British Standard process with a NFCC chair.

All this talk about Protection naturally leads me on to HMICFRS in England and the tranche one inspection reports. It appears to me that following tranche one and now well into tranche two our colleagues in the inspectorate accept that when we said we are different from the Police it wasn't just a throwaway line. HMICFRS have accepted that they are on a learning process in the same way we are learning to interact with an independent inspectorate. NFCC still welcomes inspection, but the principles we asked for when the inspectorate was first announced, that is - inspection should aid transparency and improvement; not be over burdensome, needs strategic Fire expertise; to understand Fire is different to policing; for inspection to stay relevant and to be aware of the impact of reporting; - these all still stand and are points we make to HMICFRS and Home Office colleagues.

The great thing about inspection is that it is holding up a mirror to our services and I really believe it will help us improve our organisations, but this must be done in the context of 15 years of localism and 10 years of austerity. I am really pleased that overall our operational response is holding up but the reports show that Prevention has been suffering a little and Protection has suffered considerably through the reduction of resources, a trend that needs to be reversed and improved. This will be reflected in our spending review lobbying to Government. The learning from inspection will inform the NFCC strategic aims and programmes as we support Fire and Rescue Services on their improvement journey. But we must remember HMICFRS has an English focus and cannot be the only driver for change for NFCC as a UK wide organisation. Other issues like national operational learning, the Grenfell Inquiry and Hackitt means that inspection results, although very important, are not the only improvement driver.

On the subject of austerity, finance and everything related there are two really important and big issues facing us as Fire and Rescue Services and Fire Authorities, that is the ongoing pay discussions and the possibility of a Comprehensive Spending Review to be completed by the autumn. Although with the ongoing Brexit debacle the spending review may slip or morph into a one year roll over.

Let me cover the pay discussions first, you may have seen as I have, comments in social media and circulars that Chief Fire Officers haven't been supporting a pay rise for firefighters or that the National Fire Chiefs Council have been less than helpful during the current discussions. I would like to be absolutely clear and put a couple of things on record, I have not met a current or recently retired Chief Fire Officer or Chief Executive who does not support a pay rise for their staff, including firefighters. What has been said, and I would expect nothing else from the responsible heads of Fire and Rescue Services, who are the people responsible for the organisation and answerable to the communities they serve; is that any pay rise needs to be properly funded otherwise it would mean even more cuts to fire and rescue services, many of

which are struggling after the years of austerity. It is no good writing cheques and making promises that cannot be kept.

As for the National Fire Chiefs Council, we did have a pay position statement that re-iterated this position, firefighters deserve a pay rise, but it needed to be funded if it went above 1 or possibly 2%. Our statement did go on to say that many of the issues described as 'broadening the role', like fire safety inspections, responding to marauding terrorism and flood rescue were already part of a firefighter's role. It is true that others thought this view was unhelpful, in the same way that I believe that lists of activities that may or may not be a firefighter's job are equally unhelpful. For instance, flood rescue is already a statutory duty in Wales and Scotland with Welsh Government already funding an asset refresh, including boats and Personal Protective Equipment. How do lists help in this case?

Jobs and careers evolve; I expect it would be hard to find any job that has not evolved in some way over the last 10-20 years. It is exactly the same in the fire and rescue service and arguing about what activities are in or out of a list leads to exactly what we currently have – a period of stagnation that isn't in the interests of firefighters, fire services or the public

Another thing we need to be very clear about is that the National Fire Chiefs Council was not involved in developing the current employers position that the Fire Brigades Union very recently balloted on. It is true that there are Chief Fire Officers who are advisers to the national employers, but they have, up to very recently, been told to act alone, coming to meetings to be handed documents to comment on and not being part of the lead up discussion or having any part in the drafting of the document. They were also under clear instruction that they were not to extend their discussions into the NFCC for wider input.

But things have changed recently, many of you will have seen a note sent yesterday that explained NFCC and national employers are now working together.

In NFCC we believe in a risk assessed and evidence based planning scenario to deliver the right services to the communities we serve. This undoubtedly means excellence in Prevention, Protection and Response. Although impact on other services is also a key issue for the Home Office, work that reduces risk that is the responsibility of other government departments, such as health and social services is currently unlikely to help convince Home Office to back a funding increase. But arguments can still be made that the contribution made by fire and rescue services to broader social issues are key. I believe we can demonstrate safe and well visits, partnership work to improve social cohesion and health and wellbeing makes a significant contribution to risk reduction from fire and is not simply assisting improvement in other areas of government responsibility. It is us making Prevention excellent.

More evidence being provided to Home Office and Treasury is related to operational response - we know it is not just major national incidents that now need more than one or two fire and rescue services to deal with them and at the same time as maintaining business as usual activity.

In addition, as already mentioned we need to replenish some of our specialist Protection capability. I also believe we can demonstrate a clear productivity gain through using our staff better in the Protection area of work. This all reflects the core model for the NFCC Community Risk Programme at its heart, which is at the heart of how we see the future. This is not just

about demand, it is definitely about risk as well, a point accepted now by Home Office colleagues.

One important aspect is that discussions are at a different stage in different parts of the UK, Wales is not as advanced as the Scottish Government who have talked numbers with reference to a pay deal. But both are currently more convinced than the Home Office and they are keen for national negotiations to succeed and for the NJC to be successful in securing this. Our aim as NFCC is to assist as far as we can now we are engaged in the process.

Any changes we may propose in partnership with the employers need to be reasonable and reflect the huge regard in which we hold firefighters and the work that they do. We will want any changes to be delivered in a way that safeguards an appropriate work/life balance and ensures ongoing health, safety and wellbeing of all employees.

One thing that really needs to happen is that the talking needs to continue. NFCC is determined not to see the Fire and Rescue Service side lined, funding reduced further and Services unable to sustain their core role and make a real contribution to wider community safety— . That is a real possibility if we take the wrong road.

The pay discussions and any financial implications are directly linked to another topic of work, the current plan for a 3 year comprehensive spending review in the Autumn. Luke Edwards will cover much of this in his presentation.

But it is worth covering a few of the principles here before we hear from Luke. We know Fire and Rescue has not been a protected service throughout austerity, we know there has been a 23% reduction in the wholetime workforce and a 35-40% drop in inspecting officers with the Inspectorate reporting a 40% drop in building audits. We know the statistical drop in the number of fires has plateaued and shows signs of rising, we also know the number of home safety visits has fallen and we want to keep ahead of the statistics so we do not end up in the type of discussion the Police are having where many feel the reductions have gone too far.

In addition we know that there is a greater call on Fire and Rescue Authorities in terms of employer pension contributions, we know that the employers pay position cannot yet be funded, we know many fire authorities are struggling with capital investment and have tried to use a build-up of reserves to cope with this, unless of course you are in a county where you have no reserves, we know that county fire services are under pressure related to massive increase in demand for adults and children's services, we know that the Incident Recording System needs some serious work which is yet unfunded, we know there is work looking at New Dimensions 2 and we know that the Emergency Services Network still hasn't got the final costs associated.

When you add all of this up - there has never been a more important time for Fire and Rescue, through NFCC, LGA and the Home Office, to make its case to Treasury for a good settlement for Fire – accepting this is in the context of the Home Office being an unprotected department with serious law enforcement and national security pressures. As NFCC we are working hard to produce the best business case we can. I'm pleased that Home Office colleagues now understand our planning is about risk, not just demand. But we also know that Treasury will ask the 'so what' question when we talk about the impact of austerity, yes we have a 23% reduction in the wholetime workforce but we will be asked what difference has that made and where is the evidence to prove there is a difference to our communities through these reductions. By the

way, professional judgement doesn't hold as much sway as evidence in these discussions, although I am encouraged by Luke's support of a good narrative in the business case.

Work is picking up between us on the Fire submission to Treasury. The Home Office have three overriding themes –

Safety and Security – Prosperity - Impact on other services

I think we have a good story to tell for each of those

It will undoubtedly be a challenge for us all. Talking of challenges, on top of the Regulatory reform challenge stimulated by the Hackitt review, we understand the Phase One report from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry will be with us soon. My understanding is the report will be out for Maxwellisation in early May, apparently that follows on from the Robert Maxwell case and now anyone named in a public report has the right of reply on accuracy before that report is published. We do not know exactly what will be in the report, but is likely to cover issues such as Stay Put, evacuation of high rise tower blocks, fire survival guidance, external firefighting, 7 2 d building inspections, internal firefighting aids such as wet risers and others. NFCC will support London Fire Brigade and will be tracking the outcomes through the Central Programme Office so we support every FRS with a single response to the findings. We have already revised and upgraded the relevant national operational guidance and stand by to include any further learning into our strategy, policies, guidance and programmes. We still firmly believe that the inquiry started at the wrong end of the tragedy, we understand the reasons, but there are a plethora of professions and stages that were gone through before the fire service was called to try and mitigate everything that had gone wrong. Designers, architects, planners, manufacturers, builders, sub contractors, building control, building owners and building maintenance. The broken system had to break down in a tragic and catastrophic way before the Fire and Rescue Service was called.

That improvement journey for NFCC and Fire and Rescue Services is something else you will hear much about in the next two days. We already have national Operational Learning, closely aligned to Joint Operational learning, we have seen the early inspection reports, we have an idea of what is coming from Hackitt and Grenfell. These must not be seen in isolation, no one single learning opportunity must be the driver of all others. That is why the improvement framework proposed by Geoff Howsego's sector improvement committee and the CPO could be so crucial, we will hear more about that tomorrow.

Of course, that links directly to standards and I am really pleased that Suzanne and Alison are here to meet with you, explain some of the process and ask you to help shape the thinking about prioritisation and implementation, based on your experiences with National Operational guidance.

All of this is happening whilst the change in Chief Fire Officers and senior managers seems greater than ever, possibly reducing national capacity whilst colleagues learn the new day job.

Another challenge that has occupied the thoughts of colleagues in Wales has been the ambition of Government to reform the Authorities governance, funding and performance management arrangements. There were over 60 consultation responses, not many in favour of reforming existing governance arrangements; including a move to a PCC form of governance or a single

Service for Wales. A reformed form of funding gathered more interest, which included precepting and a revised performance managements framework was agreed by all. But colleagues are still awaiting Governments response to their White Paper.

Challenges exist across the UK and in February I visited colleagues in Northern Ireland, where the lack of government is not stopping them think of their own transformation agenda, something NFCC will be there to assist with as necessary.

As you can see there is still plenty to occupy us and I haven't even mention diversity and the continuing challenge of ensuring difference is embraced in all our workplaces.

So, as I draw this to a close - someone once said that change is the only constant, oh yes that was me at the last conference. The challenges keep coming over the horizon, the pace of change and innovation doesn't seem to be slowing up. But I see this as a real opportunity for us to work together in a consistent manner through the processes of the National Fire Chiefs Council and continuing to link transformation, strategy and NFCC programmes together. I'll be doing that as your chair for the next 2 years, but I can't do this alone and I'd encourage you all to keep volunteering to support NFCC work, whether as committee members, national leads, through regional meetings, or simply through adopting NFCC work in your own Service.

Finally, a brief look forward to our next conference, an emerging theme is the future, with disruptive speakers (apparently that is a thing) a look forward to a revised NFCC strategy and working with partners to ensure the Fire and Rescue Service remains the relevant and valued service we know it is. I know that together it is a future we can achieve.