

Fire Reform – Professional Standards Update

Purpose

For discussion.

Summary

In the Home Secretary's Fire Reform speech in May 2016, the Rt. Hon. Theresa May MP committed to developing "a coherent and comprehensive set of professional standards, building on the work of the National Operational Guidance Programme".

At a meeting of the Chief Fire Officers Association's (CFOA) Fire and Rescue Service Council on 20 October 2016, the Chief Fire Officer for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Dave Curry, was commissioned to lead this work and CFOA have now set clear terms of reference. A working group has been established involving the Home Office's Fire Strategy and Reform Unit and the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, Fire and Rescue Sector Professionals and a range of partners including the Institute of Fire Engineering (IFE).

This report informs FSMC of the work taking place relating to the development a coherent and comprehensive set of professional standards for the Fire Sector and to test and further develop the working groups thinking.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. Note the commitment to develop 'professional standards' from the Home Secretary in the Fire Reform Programme; and
2. Provide views on the developments made by the working group to inform the future direction on the establishment of a professional standards body.

Action

Officers to action as appropriate.

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Background

1. In her speech of 24 May 2016, the then Home Secretary introduced her expectations for Fire Reform under the following headings: Efficiency & Collaboration; Accountability & Transparency and Workforce Reform.
2. Under Accountability & Transparency, Theresa May proposed the establishment of a rigorous and independent inspection regime for Fire and Rescue Services in England. She also made it clear that the Fire Sector itself would develop these proposals. This resulted in the formation of working groups to develop the proposals further; an 'Inspectorate' working group and an 'Independent Standards Body' working group, both mandated by the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA).
3. The development and implementation of a standards body compliments the planned introduction of an independent inspection regime for fire, the development of the LGA/CFOA Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge process and CFOA's reform work to establish a National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and Chair.

Standards Working Group

4. The Standards working group is made up of CFOA and Home Office colleagues who have agreed to develop options for the establishment of an Independent Standards Body. This working group is keen to continue working with wider stakeholders including the Fire Commission (LGA), to test and further develop our thinking.
5. In order to achieve this, the working group have established links with the College of Policing (CoP), the FSMC Lead Members, the National Occupational Guidance (NOG) Programme, the Institute of Fire Engineering (IFE) and the FBU. The importance of involving the Devolved Administrations has been recognised and their views are being sought in the development of an Independent Standards Body. It is not anticipated that the standards body will have any influence on terms and conditions or the role of the National Joint Council.
6. There has not been an independent standards function for the fire and rescue service previously. However, there was a Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council which '*was empowered by the Fire Services Act 1947 to advise the Home Secretary on all matters relating to the fire service, except fire fighters' conditions of service*'. It is the current expectation that the Home Office will produce and consult on a new Fire and Rescue National Framework for England in Spring 2017. Within the Framework, Fire and Rescue Services and Authorities are expected to be required to take due regard of the standards created by the new body.
7. During reform of the Police, the College of Policing was developed from some of the functions previously carried out by the National Policing Improvement Agency, to provide a professional standards capability. It is the view of the Home Office, supported by the working group, that there is currently a gap in the landscape for Fire in relation to the similar development of professional standards. The Home Office have clearly indicated

that they wish to see an independent standards body created for the Fire sector to bridge this gap.

The Standards Body

8. It is proposed that the Independent Standards Body will become the home for professional standards for Fire. It would create standards that individuals and Fire Services follow and would create a professional pathway for individuals, giving accreditation to Fire Sector professionals.
9. It is the current view that an Independent Standards Body would provide fire services with a source of professional standards across a range of areas to ensure the highest standards of public service, delivery, accountability and integrity. It is expected that the standards would be developed by a dedicated team and supported by experts from within the Fire and Rescue Services.
10. The working group are exploring various forms of standards models, all of which include how it could be staffed and funded, the governance of how standards would be signed off, where it would be located and what it would be called. As part of the development, the working group will consider whether the CoP, or parts thereof, can be replicated for fire. Development will include working with policing colleagues and the CoP as part of the scoping phase, as well as looking at professional standards models from other professions (e.g. medical profession).

Scope of the standards

11. The following areas are being explored as possible themes that standards would cover. These themes are for consideration and at this point nothing has been confirmed. The list below is intended to ensure all areas are given consideration:
 - 11.1 **Individual standards** – career progression and pathways, leadership, management, individual operational assessments, Fire Professional Framework, code of ethics, complaints, recruitment, discipline, whistleblowing, fitness.
 - 11.2 **Organisational standards** – IRMP, assurance statements, governance statements, transparency, benchmarking/performance data, inclusion, diversity, data protection, fraud & corruption, financial probity.
 - 11.3 **Operational Guidance** – It is currently felt by the working group that Operational Guidance will fall outside the scope of the Standards Body. The current development of National Operational Guidance is not expected to change and will link to the Co-ordination Committees that are being established under the new NFCC.

Next steps

12. The development of an Independent Standards Body was discussed at FRS Council on 20 October 2016 where a mandate was given to Dave Curry, Chief Officer of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight FRS, to continue to develop this work further.

13. The working group's early thoughts have centred on a phased introduction of the standards over the next few years, working to the same timescales as the new arrangement being established for an Inspectorate.
14. Various governance models and resource arrangements for setting standards are being explored and a paper proposing outline options will be presented to the Home Office by December 2016. Current thinking is that whatever model for establishing the independent standards body is pursued an invitation would be extended to FSMC to nominate a representative to participate in the governance arrangements.

Implications for Wales

15. The adoption of standards by Fire and Rescue Services is highly beneficial if Welsh colleagues are also able to benefit from their creation. The Working Group are ensuring that all Devolved Administrations are consulted throughout the development of the standards work and it is envisaged that Wales and other Devolved Administrations will be able to adopt some or all of the standards.

Financial Implications

16. The establishment and maintenance of an independent standards body will have financial implications. Discussions are taking place to identify where funding could come from. The precise cost of the establishment and maintenance of the body is currently being explored, and may require central government funding to ensure such a body is viable.

Recommendations:

17. Members are asked to:
 - 17.1 Note the commitment to 'professional standards' from the Home Secretary in the Fire Reform Programme.
 - 17.2 Provide views on the developments made by the working group to inform the future direction on the establishment of a professional standards body.