



Chair's speech: Autumn Conference 2018

Bora da, Good Morning, it is great to see so many of you here for our latest conference. I think those of you who attended the Spring Conference in Oxfordshire would agree that was an excellent event with lots of learning. Topped off by the session on Health and Wellbeing where Clarke Carlise held the audience spellbound as he spoke about his battles with mental health. A hard act to follow but, I think, looking at the agenda for these two days we have made a pretty good attempt. We have a plethora of expert speakers to inform and engage you, including colleagues from the MetroChiefs organisation of North America.

I have no doubt that everyone will get something from the conference, even if it is just my usual challenge of speaking to someone you have never met before. If a packed agenda is not enough to excite you, we also have the UKRO 2018 challenges very close by with an invitation to attend the opening ceremony this evening before our networking dinner. There, we will be congratulating Executive Leadership Programme graduates on their excellent achievements. It will be a late night, but it is conference season! I want there to be an even closer relationship between UKRO and National Fire Chiefs Council than there was between UKRO and CFOA.

This a great opportunity to support UKRO, but even more important to support the teams from across Services, teams that dedicated so much of their own time to improve our rescue capabilities. It is certainly a packed two days into which I have also added Performance Committee, which holds me to account, the CFOA Trustees and like many of you, a number of side meetings—I'm already looking forward to the weekend.

I would like to start with some 'thank-yous', particularly to Hollie Tell who puts so much work into organising these events, ably assisted by Babita and also our sponsors PBI Performance Products and Ballyclare Limited, without whom none of this would be possible. The NFCC is happy to work with industry to develop ideas, share learnings, and to engage the fire sector. Indeed, through the NFCC International Committee led by Paul Walker, we are willing to, and have helped, the Department of Trade and colleagues in the Fire industry to improve relations abroad and do our bit to help UK PLC.

But on to the business at hand. When I spoke at the spring conference I talked about being careful we, as NFCC, didn't have second season syndrome. We needed to make sure we kept up our momentum as THE professional leaders and advisers for Fire and Rescue across the UK. National Fire Chiefs Council is the organisation that leads and represents 100% of professional Fire and Rescue staff, operational and in other professions, across the country.

Every month NFCC is developing and growing and meeting the increasing demands and challenges that face us as an organisation and as a Fire and Rescue Service. At the same time, I am always impressed by the amount of work and commitment that is shown throughout the committees and working groups, all trying to improve and develop the Fire and Rescue Service with the ultimate aim of making our communities safer. The list of current significant

work streams sounds pretty fairly familiar by now, with some such as diversity still with us even after many years of trying to improve the representation in our workforce and develop a welcoming and accepting culture wherever one might work in Fire and Rescue.

Other issues on this list include the inspectorate, Standards, finance and the comprehensive spending review, post-Hackitt work, the Grenfell Inquiry, climate change, Kerslake and resilience, the pay dispute, and our own NFCC structures. I do realise that there is an English bias to that list, but the outcomes will have influences for all of us. Many will be covered in some depth during the conference, but I intend to add my perspective as an opening to the conference.

One thing is clear to me when looking at the landscape we operate in, and that is the increasing pressures on the leaders of our Services which come from a myriad of sources. I know it is not just in Fire and Rescue where pressures on leaders has become an increasing issue, I was fortunate to read a National Police Chief's study into the tenure of Chief Constables which highlighted the greater turnover of Police Chiefs, increased political and media scrutiny, tax liabilities, increasing demand with reducing resources and personal social media attacks as concerns for colleagues in Policing.

There are differences in terms of legislation, operational independence for Chief Constables, section 38 for their removal and the number of complaints that go to the Independent Office for Police Conduct. But there were many places in the paper where one could cross out Police and simply write Fire and Rescue.

Woe betide any senior fire officer who dare suggest that Fireman Sam might be better titled Firefighter Sam—the social media backlash is amazing. Keyboard warriors that will never engage in discussion and understand the arguments. And if you might suggest that the public could be better served through smaller response units, different shifts, the fire service being commissioned by the local health trust to help vulnerable people—or many other progressive ideas that might even hint of being outside the role maps without significant increases in pay—be prepared for a storm. Of course, I am not suggesting that every manifestation of the good ideas club is immediately adopted without discussion, but if we do not adapt, grow and remain relevant we are in danger of being marginalised as the focus for governments and the public is elsewhere.

But after 10 years of austerity with no protection and ever-growing demands on senior management teams to transform fire and rescue services whilst national negotiations role on year after year—the pressure can take its toll. Added to this, colleagues who are women who happen not to have started their careers as firefighters and now lead Services are trolled online. Even where ambitious plans are considered, it can be a struggle to implement in the face of local or even national opposition Add to this a feeling of uncertainty when Police and Crime Commissioners become Fire Authorities and remove the well-established chief executive role from the Chief Fire Officer and we have a recipe for uncertainty and added pressure—an environment which we ask people to step into, and then we, as leaders, get questioned when we only have one or two applicants for top jobs.

The Police are looking at leadership skills and a leadership hub, mentoring schemes, reform of the pension allowances and even changes to legislation to support the Chief Constable. I know the Workforce Committee chaired by Ann Millington is working on many similar frameworks and

products, and together with the Police I think this is yet another fertile area for collaboration. This all links very closely to the health and wellbeing discussion from the last conference. Since then, NFCC has signed up to the Oscar Kilo initiative to help support mental health, led by Ian Hayton through Ann's committee; I am not sure the phrase 'it is OK not to be OK' has ever been so appropriate.

But even with this pressure and under difficult circumstances Fire and Rescue continues to deliver. We saw extensive grass, heathland and wildfires this summer with resources coming from across the country to assist local services. Co-ordinated through the National Co-ordination and Advisory Framework and the NFCC National Resilience Hub, but with particular expertise engaged through our Wildfire Lead, Paul Hedley and some of the specialist wildfire tactical advisers and burns teams. Wildfire is not yet recognised as a national capability, similar to flood rescue almost ten years on from the Pitt review, but NFCC and the Fire and Rescue Services stood up and delivered.

As the Grenfell Inquiry continues and incidents like the dreadful School of Arts fire in Glasgow and the Primark fire in Belfast show, fire risk is not a 'done deal'—and we need to be resourced to risk as well as demand. Recent data shows not only a plateauing of fire and related statistics, but the indications of a worrying reversal as austerity has seen even bigger reductions in prevention and protection staff, too often an easier 'efficiency' than closing fire stations. I have been pleased to see the Home Office being good to their word, working with us to analyse risk and demand to inform its submission to next year's probable Comprehensive Spending Review. We have also been engaged with the wider Home Office work on the CSR, our difficulty being in England that much of our funding still comes from MHCLG—meaning we have to influence two government departments; three, if you count the Treasury. Whilst they are listening, some precept flexibility would be useful.

One thing that has become clear through this work and other projects is the importance of good data; its analysis and application to an evidence-based plan for moving forward. We already knew this; but recent work has brought even more clarity to the need for excellent datasets that provide clear intelligence. After 15 years of localism for Fire in one form or another, our data collection, analysis and use is not all it could be.

Home Office finance colleagues say we are where the Police were before the 2015 CSR, struggling to find data and evidence to support what we know as professionals and say about risk and the need to at least maintain present funding levels. We have many unknowns in our financial future: the final level of a pay award; can I emphasise that NFCC supports a pay rise for all our employees, but we have organisations to run and the rise needs to be funded; the costs of the Emergency Services Network and ESMCP; the impact of possibly-increased employer pension contributions. All need to be factored into any financial settlement to support this vital service that has seen a 21% drop in wholetime staff—a fact that's often overlooked when discussing the reductions in the number of fires in the past 15 years.

On the subject of funding; the Home Office interaction with Policing is interesting; as is the National Audit Office report that makes several recommendations about the Policing landscape; noting the importance of defining who is accountable for what; observing that funding should be sufficient for an efficient and effective service; and that the funding formula should be fair. The report continues: the Home Office needs a strategy for Policing that includes clarity on where

policies are being delivered and that bodies like the National Police Chiefs Council must have resources. Another document where Policing could be crossed out and Fire added in its place.

But it's not just the financial planning issues that require good data. The Inspectorate ask for data returns as do the national employers; our own Community Risk Programme led by Phil Loach will have data at its heart; our research and development work, prevention and protection strategies and any refresh of the Incident Recording System—all need coherent and connected data.

Shantha Dickson, our NFCC Data Lead will be taking a paper to the next Steering Group to highlight the issues and start a conversation on the way forward. I am not sure we will ever be, or want to be, in a place where we have a single data environment to work from, but we can certainly make it more joined up, easier to analyse and easier to produce evidence-based business cases. Home Office have recognised what we say about risk and not just demand. Our task now is to demonstrate how risk affects the resource requirements through an evidence base. We know this is an issue but any of us apply risk and the IRMP in different ways.

Talking of business cases, following the transition from the National Operational Guidance programme the NFCC Central Programme Office is really starting to fire on all cylinders. Maintaining NOG is a vital part of the CPO's work, but so is applying the programme and project methodology that has been so successful in developing our up-to-date guidance catalogue to our new work programme, ensuring that we have real deliverables as we support Fire and Rescue Services and Authorities to help deliver the best possible services to our communities. But, this is not just about delivering new things that may sit on a shelf, it is about delivering change and improvement. A vital part of our approach is to have an empowered Engagement Forum where stakeholders and partners can help shape the outputs of the programmes and projects. I am pleased that Mick Crennell will chair the new forum and invitations will be going out to stakeholders very soon. Thank you to others who expressed interest, it is great that colleagues come forward for extra work.

The NFCC CPO will also be responsible for the administration of the new English-based Fire Standards Board. We have had some excellent candidates apply to be the independent Chair and Vice Chair of the FSB. A vital part of the 'what does good look like' question from the inspectorate as we develop standards for fire and rescue in England that I have no doubt will have relevance in the other countries of the United Kingdom—as they will be developed through our NFCC structures, a UK-wide organisation that benefits from our combined knowledge and expertise. I have said many times before, much of NFCC's current work plan will form the bedrock for future standards.

That is why it is vital to have an inclusive consultation forum, which along with the independently chaired Fire Standards Board will give the standards legitimacy. It is great to see the Home Office invest £1.5 million a year which, combined with Fire Authority payments, will see programmes like Workforce, develop. Issues like our ethical leadership framework, already in our work plan, will be adopted as standards if agreed by the Standards Board. This all points to a single programme and project management methodology where our work is linked for efficiency and effectiveness—but not control.

It means that NFCC projects cannot be satellites in the same solar system as the CPO, they must at least be in the same orbit and held together by more than just gravity. One important project is the NFCC sustainability project, I think we all agree that the current set up is working well, but this doesn't come without cost. The National Operational Guidance programme cost about £2 million a year, we are now trying to do even more, with a full time Chair and the support hubs. This needs to be sustainable and reports will be going to NFCC Council in October and January. These will include a benefits paper that will tell you some things about NFCC you know but I suspect it will also include a lot of the benefits not immediately obvious to all.

Tranche one of the inspection programme in England has been a learning process for everyone and it is recognised that, when HMICFRS want to pass judgement on a Fire and Rescue Service, they need guidance on how and where to set the bar for judgement. We have the judgement criteria, but to be fair these are still developing as we all understand the differences between areas for improvement; cause for concern; a serious cause for concern; and a significant cause for concern—and how many of these create an inadequate judgement?

One of the other things we have been working on with the LGA is peer support for any Service who might not have achieved all they wished for during inspection. We will also have a need to highlight notable practice to help us all improve, in arenas such as the recent improvement seminar led by Geoff Howsego and Phil Hales.

Another significant area of work for us continues to be post-Grenfell and post-Hackitt review. It is hardly credible that it is over 15 months since the Grenfell tragedy and we still have hundreds of high-rise buildings in this country with ACM 3 cladding systems still in place. Progress is being made in the local authority and social housing sector with interim measures in place and plans to remediate the cladding issues. But, in sections of the private sector, it is still a struggle with some owners waiting months to get the cladding confirmed as ACM or not; others saying there are enough fire safety measures in place so the cladding does not need to be replaced; and even more saying that the cladding is just decorative so it's fine.

I, and others leading for NFCC, have seen examples of two complete upper floors of a block of flats described as decorative—it beggars belief. NFCC is very clear that we would be very surprised if an ACM 3 cladding was safe to keep in situ. When I talk about decorative cladding, I mean one or two 8x4 metre coloured panels in different locations with no insulation behind. As soon as it is part of a cladding system it is unsafe. We are clear that this cladding does not and never did comply with Building Regulations. Once again, as a reminder, the Building Regulations are very clear—Schedule 1 Part B B4 (1) *External Fire Spread*; where it states: '*The external walls of the building shall adequately resist the spread of fire over the walls.*' We have responded to the consultation on banning combustible cladding, and of course we agree with this, but it can be seen as banning something that is already banned.

The Government response to the consultation returns needs to be worded very carefully so it does not give the reticent building owners the excuse that ACM 3 cladding systems previously complied. Whilst the Building Regulations are unambiguous to us I wish the same could be said about the regulatory system that can force the removal of this dangerous material. The high hazard approach of the Housing Act seems wholly inadequate, through no fault of colleagues in local authorities.

We will have a further update on Grenfell and Hackitt tomorrow, but we continue to work hard to help shape the future of the fire safety landscape through the Joint Competent Authority, the competence and regulatory frameworks, project testing and many more, yet again some excellent work through the Protection Committee chaired by Mark Hardingham and his Vice Chair Nick Coombe.

As well as a busy operational year, Northern Ireland is seeing some significant change in their Protection regime. The Department of Health there has completed a consultation, on proposed amendments to the Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. In general terms, the proposals are to bring fire safety enforcement for the common areas of domestic premises within the scope of the Order and make NIFRS the enforcing authority, as happens in England and Wales. In addition, changes are proposed to enable the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer to employ Green Book staff to become fire safety inspectors—a longstanding arrangement this side of the water. Currently NIFRS can only authorise a fire and rescue officer to be a fire safety inspector.

The final amendment proposed is to strengthen NIFRS ability to be able to make arrangements with other agencies to enforce fire safety legislation on NIFRS behalf. Examples include local councils who inspect premises for Entertainment Licences, and in the future, following the introduction of a proposed Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) which is planned to be introduced on 1 April 2019. It is NIFRS understanding that these proposed changes to primary legislation may require Northern Ireland devolved administration approval, once back in place.

Welsh Government have also completed a commissioned piece of research over the summer. This research is seeking to reform the governance and funding arrangements for the Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities. The Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services here in Wales has also appointed Andy Fry as his Fire and Rescue Service Advisor.

It is great to see the whole focus on Fire Safety and Protection as it is one of the three pillars of our service delivery that we need to be excellent in, along with Operations and Prevention. I suspect some of this has sounded like challenge after challenge with an immense amount of work to get through. Well, unfortunately, it is. I wrote a blog a few months back called a fork in the road that had two possible pathways for the Fire and Rescue Service, one of which takes us to a smaller less relevant place. But I know with the excellent people in all our committees and working groups working so hard to push forward and develop the Fire and Rescue Services, we can meet those challenges and continue to move forward. I certainly won't let the UK Fire and Rescue Services become a backwater without a fight.