

News story: Government announces new standards for fire and rescue services

Addressing the Local Government Association's Fire Commission yesterday, the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, Nick Hurd, announced a new approach to improve professional standards for fire and rescue services across England.

While some professional standards currently exist for fire and rescue services, they are inconsistently applied and the government believes they can be expanded. A Fire Standards Board will be created to ensure standards are nationally coordinated to a high level across the sector.

The proposal was developed in conjunction with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), Local Government Association and other partners. This new board will be independent from government and supported by the NFCC's central programme office which will produce the standards, drawing on external expertise as required.

It will be for the board to determine its workplan but initial issues the Board could consider include:

- workforce issues like leadership and development
- the identification and mitigation of risks
- fire prevention and the approach to protecting the public from other emergencies

The board will also be responsible for agreeing priorities in response to the recently published Hackitt review, the Grenfell Tower inquiry, and other emerging issues facing fire and rescue services.

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service Nick Hurd said:

We all recognise the bravery and dedication of our firefighters who work tirelessly every day to protect the communities they serve.

Creating a new Independent Board to oversee professional standards across England will support the continuous improvement of fire and rescue services and support them to become more professional than ever before.

This move is a key element of the government's ambitious fire reform programme which aims to improve the professionalism, effectiveness and accountability of fire and rescue services by:

- establishing an independent inspection regime – Her Majesty's

Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – for fire and rescue

- encouraging employers to drive workforce reform, including increasing the diversity of the workforce
- bringing greater accountability to the work of local fire and rescue services by enabling Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to take on responsibility for fire and rescue services where a strong local case is made
- supporting services to transform commercially with more efficient procurement and collaboration
- increasing the transparency of services with the publication of further information to allow the public to hold their service to account and the creation of a new national website in the summer