



Zack Polanski AM
Chair of the Fire Committee

Jonathan Smith
London Fire Commissioner

(Sent by email)

28 July 2025

Dear Jonathan,

Priorities for the new London Fire Commissioner (LFC)

We were pleased to welcome you to the London Assembly Fire Committee's meeting on 1 July, your first day as London Fire Commissioner (LFC). Your role is fundamentally about protecting Londoners from the devastating impact of fire, and, as their elected representatives, we wanted to take this opportunity to explore what your priorities should be to ensure their safety now and in the future.

We were reassured by the unequivocal responses you provided to many of our questions. We now look forward to seeing what you will bring to the role, as the Brigade continues to navigate the challenges ahead and strives to deliver a modern, effective, and trusted fire and rescue service (FRS).

With your appointment, we have taken this opportunity to set out where we expect to see progress from London Fire Brigade (LFB) in the coming years. The Committee was established under the Policing and Crime Act 2017 to scrutinise the decisions, documents, and spending of the LFC and Deputy Mayor for Fire. We anticipate these priorities will shape our discussions with you in the future.

"LFB should be regarded as the best FRS in the UK, if not Europe."

We note the improvements His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) recorded in its most recent assessment of LFB.¹ Of the 11 areas inspected, LFB received one 'outstanding' grade, five 'good' grades, four 'adequate' grades and only one area graded as 'requires improvement'— just three years after the Brigade was placed in Engage, an enhanced form of monitoring for underperforming Brigades.

¹ HMICFRS, [Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2023–2025](#): London Fire Brigade, 29 November 2024

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to recognise the contribution of your predecessor, Andy Roe KFSM, during his time in post, as well the many LFB staff – without whom this progress would not have been possible.

This progress must be seen as just the start. The Committee – and Londoners – expect LFB to demonstrate continuous improvement across all the areas inspected and to work towards achieving the highest standards ahead of its next inspection. You told us that, “Over the course of the last five to six years, we have needed to move heaven and earth to get the LFB into a position where we are now”.² You also agreed with the previous comments of HMICFRS that, “LFB should be regarded as the best FRS in the UK, if not Europe.”³ We agree – and believe this is both achievable and ambitious. Reaching that goal will require continued focus, and visible progress against the 19 Fire Standards Board (FSB) standards and the 11 inspection areas.

As we heard from Suzanne McCarthy, Chair of the FSB, the FSB’s own 19 fire standards closely align with the HMICFRS 2025-27 inspection framework of what good looks like, and the two can reinforce each other.⁴

We share your commitment to delivering concrete progress. Given the next inspection is not due until later in 2027,⁵ we want to see interim actions that demonstrate not only that past issues have been addressed, but that LFB is now a forward-looking, learning organisation driving excellence across the sector.

Recommendation 1: By November 2026 LFB should either: (i) carry out an analysis of its performance against the 19 fire standards; or (ii) conduct a self-assessment of its performance against the HMICFRS 2025-27 inspection framework. LFB should share the findings of this assessment with the Fire Committee by the end of 2026.

Culture and workplace

As the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for the Brigade’s cultural change programme, you will be aware of the scale of the challenge and the progress made since Nazir Afzal’s independent culture review.⁶ The Committee’s report, *Ambition and Action: London Fire Brigade’s culture* lays out in detail our assessment of the challenges, priorities and progress made in addressing issues within the culture and complaints process.⁷ We appreciate your considered response to that work.⁸

In preparation for this meeting, we met with representatives of several LFB staff networks. We heard from them that the Brigade has often relied upon its staff networks to do much of the heavy lifting

² London Assembly Fire Committee, What Should the New London Fire Commissioner’s Priorities Be? – [Panel Three](#), 1 July 2025, p2

³ London Assembly Fire Committee, What Should the New London Fire Commissioner’s Priorities Be? – [Panel Three](#), 1 July 2025, p2

⁴ London Assembly Fire Committee, What Should the New London Fire Commissioner’s Priorities Be? – [Panel One](#), 1 July 2025, pp8-9

⁵ HMICFRS, [fire and rescue services inspection programme 2025–27](#), 28 April 2025

⁶ LFB, [Brigade launches wide-reaching, external review of its culture](#), 18 March 2021

⁷ London Assembly Fire Committee, [Ambition and Action: London Fire Brigade’s culture](#), April 2025

⁸ LFB, [Letter to Fire Committee Chair in response to Committee’s output](#), 4 June 2025

on cultural change. You acknowledged as much to the Committee.⁹ You also pointed to an ongoing assessment of LFB's HR function by the Director for People, Sally Hopper, which you said would look at the entire HR function and "where we have some new and innovative ideas in terms of how we can continue to improve, then we are very much open to that. [...] if it is right for the LFB".¹⁰ The Committee was also pleased to hear that you are retaining the Independent Advisory Panel¹¹ to continue in its current form, and the potential to develop the model further with additional responsibilities, particularly in relation to the PSU.

The Committee is encouraged by the commitment you have shown for this area of work and look forward to concrete actions to deliver on your statements to the Committee. Given our long-standing interest in this matter, we would like to be kept apprised of progress on Sally Hopper's review and any resulting actions as well as how you intend to expand the role of the Independent Advisory Panel.

Recommendation 2: LFB should share the findings of the review of LFB's HR function once complete, and update the Committee on progress towards implementing any recommendations annually (ahead of the Committee's Q&A with the Commissioner and Deputy Mayor).

Building safety

Since the Grenfell tragedy, LFB has been on a journey to rebuild relations with the local community as well as implement operational improvements. In that time, major changes to the building safety regime have also had an outsized impact on London and LFB's role in relation to fire safety in taller buildings.

We welcome your comments made around the importance of working with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR), key stakeholders, and the construction industry.¹² With the appointment of the former Commissioner Andy Roe as Chair of the BSR and of LFB Deputy Commissioner Charlie Pugsley as the Chief Executive¹³ there is an opportunity for LFB to deepen these relationships to deliver a safer built environment in London.

Yet, we heard from Professor José Torero, expert witness at the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, about a lack of technical capacity in the firefighting sector for building safety. He told us the LFC should "push very strongly towards giving the necessary priority to the technical competency that is necessary to be able to guarantee that the fire service can operate appropriately within the remit of their obligations, but also that there is consistency with what the BSR is asking from buildings."¹⁴

⁹ London Assembly Fire Committee, What Should the New London Fire Commissioner's Priorities Be? – [Panel Three](#), 1 July 2025, pp12-13

¹⁰ London Assembly Fire Committee, What Should the New London Fire Commissioner's Priorities Be? – [Panel Three](#), 1 July 2025, p7

¹¹ London Assembly Fire Committee, What Should the New London Fire Commissioner's Priorities Be? – [Panel Three](#), 1 July 2025, p7

¹² London Assembly Fire Committee, What Should the New London Fire Commissioner's Priorities Be? – [Panel Three](#), 1 July 2025, p5

¹³ MHCLG, [Reforms to Building Safety Regulator to accelerate housebuilding](#), 30 June 2025

¹⁴ London Assembly Fire Committee, What Should the New London Fire Commissioner's Priorities Be? – [Panel One](#), 1 July 2025, p3

Whilst LFB has challenges around recruiting staff, it is imperative that it engages with academics and other further educational establishments to help build and develop a pipeline of qualified fire engineers. There are opportunities to develop technical competency through the use of secondment programmes across various public sector organisations.

Emerging risks, technology, and wildfires

The risk environment in London is becoming more and more complicated. The developing risks of Lithium-ion battery fires, wildfires, flooding, and the implications of geopolitical events impacting London all need to be continually assessed and addressed.

These fast-evolving risks could all warrant new firefighting techniques, training and/or protective equipment. As Steve Hamm, Chief Executive Officer of the Institution of Fire Engineers, told us “Technology going forward opens up an entire set of opportunities for the LFB’s capabilities across the board, not just on emergency response.”¹⁵ Given the size, scope and remit of LFB’s responsibilities, the Committee encourages you to ensure the Brigade is helping to drive the research agenda nationally and consider how the Brigade could make use of the Areas of Research interest approach, which has been adopted by the Metropolitan Police Service and other public bodies.¹⁶

Recommendation 3: In your term of Commissioner, we encourage you to explore how LFB could establish a structured, research-led approach to innovation and risk management. The Committee would welcome progress updates on this annually (ahead of the Committee’s annual Q&A meetings with the Commissioner and Deputy Mayor).

Given LFB’s critical role in keeping Londoners safe, it is vital that you are fully supported on this journey by the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor, Jules Pipe CBE. To that end, we have also written to the Deputy Mayor to emphasise the importance of ensuring that LFB is adequately resourced to deliver on these priorities.

We do not underestimate the scale and complexities of the challenges ahead of you. We wish every success in delivering on these priorities – and others that emerge without warning. During your time as Commissioner, we look forward a constructive relationship with you. We will be revisiting these priorities as part of that.

The Committee would welcome a response to this letter by 8 September 2025. Please send your response by email to the Committee’s Clerk, Diane Richards (Diane.Richards@london.gov.uk).

Yours,



Zack Polanski AM
Chair of the Fire Committee

¹⁵ London Assembly Fire Committee, What Should the New London Fire Commissioner’s Priorities Be? – [Panel One](#), 1 July 2025, p10

¹⁶ [Areas of research interest for the Met | Metropolitan Police](#)