

GFRS Quality Assurance (Fire Safety) Policy Statement

This document details the internal auditing procedures (Quality assurance of fire safety standards) that the GFRS will use to ensure that the professional standards of fire safety officers is in accordance with the policies and procedures of the Service.

1. Introduction

Managers are responsible for the allocation and supervision of work in their team. To assist them in this process a complimentary quality assurance process has been established. This process supports the development of officers and maintenance of agreed technical and administrative standards. It will also confirm that the Fire Authority is providing a consistent level of service to the public by enforcing in a fair and consistent manner that takes into account the principles of the Enforcement Concordat and the Enforcement Management Model.

Although line managers will use this quality assurance process, individuals must still maintain a regular informal overview of their own work to ensure that correct policies, standards and procedures are being used.

On completion of this process, where developmental issues are raised these can be addressed in a number of ways –

- Training of individuals following the recognition of development needs with a coaching and improvement plan. This training and support may be provided from within GFRS, but will be agreed with all parties through consultation.
- Training for all fire safety officers so that nationally recommended occupational standards can be worked towards and met
- Individual coaching so that people are enabled to perform to the best of their abilities
- Changes to policy if it is clear that they do not support both the individual and the fire safety strategies of GFRS

***Quality Assurance** will be the term used within GFRS for the checking of the quality of a Fire Safety Officers work. This is to avoid confusion between the Auditing of premises for fire safety standards. References within this document to audit should be deemed as appertaining to quality assurance.*

2. Principles of Auditing

Auditing is characterised by the reliance on a number of key principles. These make an audit an effective and reliable tool in support of management policies and controls, providing information on which GFRS can act to improve the management of our performance.

The following principles listed below will provide audit conclusions that are relevant and sufficient and would enable auditors working independently of each other to reach similar conclusions in similar circumstances, -

a) **Ethical conduct:** *the foundation of professionalism*

Trust, integrity, confidentiality and discretion are essential to auditing.

b) **Fair presentation:** *the obligation to report truthfully and accurately*

Audit findings, audit conclusions and audit reports reflect truthfully and accurately the audit activities. Significant obstacles encountered during the audit and unresolved diverging opinions between the audit team and the individual are reported.

c) **Due professional care:** *the application of diligence and judgment in auditing*

Auditors exercise care in accordance with the importance of the task they perform and the confidence placed in them by audit originator and other interested parties. Having the necessary competence is an important factor.

d) **Independence:** *the basis for the impartiality of the audit and objectivity of the audit conclusions*

Auditors should be independent of the activity being audited and so can remain free from bias and conflict of interest; therefore the make-up of the quality control team will be dependent on the type of audit planned and will be decided by the Assistant Divisional Officer/Group Manager. Auditors should maintain an objective state of mind throughout the audit process to ensure that the findings and conclusions will be based only on the audit evidence.

e) **Evidence-based approach:** *the rational method for reaching reliable and reproducible audit conclusions in a systematic audit process*

Audit evidence is verifiable. It is based on samples of the information available, since an audit is conducted during a finite period of time and with finite resources. The appropriate use of sampling is closely related to the confidence that can be placed in the audit conclusions.

The information in this document is based on the principles set out above and they should be adhered to when a quality control check is being completed.

3. Management of the Quality Assurance Programme

The Fire Safety Manager (GM) will manage the Quality Assurance programme within GFRS.

SM & GM will initiate a quality control check by completing form **QC 1**. This will state the objectives of the audit, who is to complete it and in what timeframe.

When the check is completed the paperwork should be forwarded to the Head of Enforcement, who will maintain a register of the findings. This register will allow

an overview to be built up of individual and group needs that can then be addressed on a corporate basis.

Results of the quality assurance process and any necessary action that has been taken, or is proposed to be taken, will be raised at Enforcement Managers meetings for discussion and approval.

4. Quality Assurance Programme Objectives

The aim of the audit process is to continuously improve standards, identify areas for improvement and instigate procedures to correct failures. Beneath this general aim are specific areas and tasks that may be reviewed at the discretion of the Head of Enforcement. Triggers for this could be, a complaint, a management concern, information coming to light from the management information system, risks to the organisation or a desire to check standards being applied to specific tasks, etc. examples of some of these areas and tasks are:

- Full fire safety audits to ensure policies, procedures, enforcement concordat and enforcement management model are being adhered to
- Building Regulations consultations to ensure that we are complying with statutory duties and the latest procedural guidance issued
- Ensuring that technical standards being required or recommended are appropriate in the circumstances of the case, this may be for specific files or job types
- Ensuring that the provision of advice to other agencies or members of the public is in accordance with policies and partnership protocols.

5. Quality Assurance Activities

This section details the quality assurance process to be used in GFRS

Initiating the Process

This is the role of the SM/GM; the process will be started by the completion of the QC 1 form, one form will be completed for each fire safety audit carried out. This form will state the following information.

- Name of the person carrying out the quality assurance.
- The objective of the quality assurance check (what is to be accomplished)
- Fire safety file number or numbers that relate to the audit

Copies should be forwarded to the line manager; the individual whose work will be subject to the check and a copy kept in the audit register.

The line manager should make contact with the fire safety officer to confirm that they will be carrying out a review and confirm the fire safety files that are

required. They should make arrangements to review the file/s in a suitable location and also to be able to confirm any queries or anomalies with the respective fire safety officer.

Conducting the Fire Safety File Review

The fire safety file should be reviewed and examined to determine the level of compliance with service policies and procedures. The points detailed in these appendices are not exhaustive but are provided to indicate best practice during the audit.

- Appendix A - General generic areas
- Appendix B – Fire safety audit areas
- Appendix C – Building regulation areas
- Appendix D – Enforcement notices

If an issue is found that requires recording then it should be written in the relevant section of the QC 1 form. The QC 1 form has sections for general issues, technical issues and administrative issues. These last two sections have been divided into serious and not so serious, any items found should be recorded in either of these sections, whether they are serious or not so serious is at the discretion of the team leader. In common with audit best principles, good practices as well as poor should be recorded, the other comments section on page 3 should be utilised for these. This will allow an overall rounded view to be gathered of the work being checked.

The quality assurance team should, (if deemed appropriate) complete a site visit to confirm or clarify any of the information available. The QC 1 should be annotated that a visit has taken place and any additional findings from this visit should be recorded. If a site visit is deemed necessary the reasons for this should be recorded.

Completion of the QC 1 form

The QC 1 form will follow the process through, from instigation to final conclusions and is the only paperwork required for this process. Listed below are notes that will assist completion and consistency in the completion of this form.

- Fields marked * to be completed by the audit originator
- Appendices A – D provide guidance on the areas to look for and good practice, however, they are not definitive and all circumstances will need to be considered on an individual basis.
- Technical and administrative issues are divided into 'serious' and 'not so serious'. The team leader should decide where to place the comments. It is best practice to refer to benchmark standards/guidance if the fire safety standards applied represent a serious under or over provision.
- Good practices should be entered in the 'other comments' section
- The dates of any relevant correspondence should be recorded for cross-referencing purposes.

- Following the review, the fire safety manager and fire safety officer should be briefed and opportunity given to respond to the findings. Any disagreements that are not resolved should be recorded in the Assistant Divisional Officer/Group Manager comments section.
- At the conclusion of the review both the team leader and fire safety officer should sign this form

Audit findings and conclusions

The quality assurance evidence should be evaluated against the criteria in the appendix relevant to the particular job to generate the audit findings. Any supporting evidence should be recorded (for example, dates of letters or dates of note for files). The QC 1 and the file should be reviewed with the fire safety officer to obtain acknowledgement that the audit evidence is accurate, and that the non-conformities are understood. If there is a difference of opinion concerning the evidence then attempts should be made to resolve this difference, any unresolved points should be recorded.

The recommendations that follow from an audit will be recorded on the QC1 in the Assistant Divisional Officer/Group Manager comments section. They will be agreed with the Head of Enforcement.

Audit Frequencies

Fire safety managers should constantly seek to support, coach and develop their staff and ensure that the correct policies and procedures are being followed; the more formal quality assurance process laid down in this document will supplement this work. The table below details the suggested frequencies that should ensure professional standards are being maintained. Frequencies of Quality Assurance checks are suggested at 2 monthly intervals (admin) and 4 monthly (physical inspections); however, this may be increased or decreased dependent on the results of previous quality control checks.

Daily	2 Monthly	4 Monthly
Fire Safety Officers consultations with their line manager for guidance and advice on specific files that they are working on. An example may be whether a compensatory feature requested is acceptable.	Fire Safety Managers (SM/GM) to perform desktop internal audit of 1 fire safety audit from each officer. The appendices within this document provide benchmarks to check against. Result to be fed back to fire safety officer and recorded and kept in the manager's	Independent audit of fire safety officer's work by line manager. Audit to be instigated by SM/GM. QC 1 to be kept at Service HQ in quality Assurance register.

	office, possibly with the individuals PDR. This information can then help inform future training needs analysis.	
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Appendix A

These appendices are offered as a guide only, there may be many other areas to consider and not all of those listed will be applicable.

General Best Practice

- Is correspondence in date order (most recent on top) and easily understandable to Enforcement Administration Staff.
- Is the general condition of the paperwork good?
- Is the correspondence from each completed job card marked by the FSO to ensure Enforcement Administration Staff can take appropriate action?
- Does the time recorded reflect the job completed
- All necessary fields completed
- Have file copies of letters been dated and signed.

Appendix B

Fire Safety Audits

- Have all parts of the fire audit been completed satisfactorily.
- Have all mandatory sections (2a – 4) been completed and a compliance level inserted.
- Have all relevant non-mandatory sections (5 – 7) been completed and a compliance level inserted.
- Are the notes comprehensive so that accurate correspondence can be drafted?
- Are both good and bad practices recorded?
- Has section 8 been accurately completed and signed.
- Has the appropriate letter or enforcement notice been sent and do the requirements reflect the notes on the audit form.
- Are the requirements reasonable in the circumstances of the case (GMA may require a site visit)?

Appendix C

Building Regulations

- Is the complexity of the job appropriate for the officer
- Is the time taken within guidelines (21 days, including weekends (15 working days), from the date of receipt to reply).
- Is the job type BR.
- Has the paperwork been correctly completed?
- If comment is unable to be made due to insufficient detail, can this be justified?
- Have informal discussions been adequately documented (note for file).
- If no observations have been made, is this appropriate?
- If a joint final inspection has been made is this necessary.
- Has a Completion Certificate or Final Certificate (Approved Inspectors) been requested?
- Has Building Control, The Approved Inspector or the fire safety officer identified any discrepancies on the submitted plans and have these findings been dealt with appropriately.
- Have appropriate goodwill recommendations been made, e.g. sprinklers in new schools, see also Building Regulation Schedules under the Building Regulations within the fire safety section of the Intranet.
- If the building alterations are significant has a Fire Safety Audit been considered to adjust the risk rating

Appendix D

Enforcements Notices

- Does the Enforcement Notice satisfy the Enforcement Management Model and is it in the spirit of the Enforcement Concordat?
- Is the Notice dated?
- Is the expiry date reasonable?
- Has it been issued to the correct person or position of person responsible to satisfy the relevant legislation, (e.g. Company secretary and copied to local manager for a larger business)?
- Signed by the appropriate level of officer
- Do the requirements/steps necessary reflect the area of the Regulation not complied with?
- Have copies been sent to statutory consultees if necessary.
- Are the requirements reasonable in the circumstances of the case?

Quality Assurance Flowchart.

