

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE		
DATE:	24 JULY 2025	REPORT NO:	CFO/07/2526
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, NICK SEARLE		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, NICK MERNOCK	REPORT AUTHOR:	HUMAN RESOURCES ADVISOR OD, JOANNE WOODS
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	WORKFORCE PLANNING AND OD MANAGER, JOHN PRICE, HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCE, MIKE PILKINGTON, STRAGTEIC LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)		
TITLE OF REPORT:	HIGH POTENTIAL PROGRAMME		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX A: APPENDIX B: APPENDIX C	HPP POLICY EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS 'THE HOW'
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Purpose of Report

1. To update members in relation to the Authority's 'High Potential Programme'.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that Members:
 - a) note the positive work undertaken to date as part of the development of the High Potential Programme;
 - b) note the outcomes of the detailed review that has been completed with a variety of stake holders and reported back into People Board and SLT;
 - c) approve the attached HPP policy
; and
 - d) note a further review will be undertaken in 18 months' time to consider the most appropriate ongoing approach for supporting employees with high potential at the Leading Yourself and Leading Others leadership levels.

Introduction and Background

3. The High Potential Programme (HPP) was introduced to enhance how Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service ('the Service') supports the development of its staff to facilitate them in maximising their potential. The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) committed to supporting a pilot HPP as part of the People Plan 2021-24 to supplement the existing package of existing development programmes as part of encouraging and nurturing talent.
4. Following its launch as a pilot in late 2022, the programme has provided talented individuals with access to a range of development resources such as Coaching, Mentoring, Leadership Masterclasses, Command Confidence and other individualised support.

Pilot Review

5. Ongoing scrutiny of the programme has been undertaken via regular updates and reviews as part of governance via the People Board. In June 2024 a HPP participant audit was undertaken. This showed out of the 160 individuals referred to the program that around 1/3 were highly active, 1/3 partially active and 1/3 not participating. It was identified following completion of a number of service appointment process in 2023/24, that 42 individuals within the programme had secured promotion into a higher leadership role. This equated to 27% of all participants. Table 1 details the break down on this

Table 1 – HPP participants securing new leadership roles - June 2024

Firefighter to Crew Manager	9
Firefighter to Watch Manager	6
Crew Manager to Watch Manager	12
Watch Manager to Station Manager	5
Non-Uniformed Progression	10
Total	42

6. Following on from this audit, the Organisational Development & Change Advisor, who was appointed to the Service in September 2024, undertook a more wide-ranging review and evaluation of the pilot programme. This evaluation included comprehensive consultation with staff and key stakeholders and has informed the proposed changes to the programme moving forward. A rolling programme of evaluation will continue to inform best practice and reporting.
7. Key learning from this review was reported into People Board in December 2024 and then followed up by an article in the Hot News outlining both positive areas and improvements that HPP participants felt could be made. Some of the key themes from the review were:
 - a) Increasing participation by ensuring resources available were inclusive.

- b) Improving communication regarding aims of the HPP.
- c) Clarify and streamline the nomination process.
- d) An appetite to use HPP to broaden awareness of wider organisation.
- e) An enthusiasm and passions for development

The High Potential Programme

8. As a result of the work completed, a number of changes to the programme (fig 1) have been agreed by SLT which will allow participants to have access to a core suite of Masterclasses designed to raise their awareness of positive leadership styles and enhance their understanding of our leadership message, values and expected behaviours.
9. Further development will be recorded in a Personalised Development Plan (PDP), devised with a Talent Advisor. This will outline all development opportunities bespoke to the individual participant. An annual review of the PDP will take place to more effectively monitor progress and record outcomes.
10. On completion of PDP's, it is proposed that participants have access to extended learning through a Learner Network to continue to develop future leaders within the organisation.
11. There is an MS Teams Channel to facilitate Networking across a small group and to deliver targeted shared learning. The Learner Networks will allow 24hrs access to Leadership Content and generate more effective working relationships.

Fig 1 – Revised HPP



12. Coaching and Mentoring provision may form part of an individual's plan if appropriate; both are significant means of supporting and developing others in line with our values and behaviours. It is also acknowledged that a coaching style of leadership is a leadership behaviour encouraged by the Service.

13. Learning content will be made available through a variety of delivery methods, building on the feedback received from participants and ensuring the programme is inclusive and accessible to all staff.

Leadership Levels & HPP

14. Members will be aware that as part of the development of our Leadership Message, the Authority introduced its Leadership Behaviours framework. Ensuring close alignment with the NFCC Leadership Framework, we utilise four key themes to outline what leadership looks like at every level and what good leadership looks like in our respective roles. The four leadership themes are: **Personal impact; Outstanding Leadership; Service Delivery; Organisational effectiveness.**
15. Our Leadership Behaviours Framework (**Appendix C**) aims to assist colleagues in understanding their role, highlighting both the 'WHAT' and the 'HOW' in terms of expected leadership behaviours.
16. Under each of the four themes outlined, we are able to set expectations at the four leadership levels within the service, clearly defining the behaviours we are seeking to develop in our leaders. This provides a simple framework that sets the standard for those performing at the following levels:
 - Leading yourself (everyone)
 - Leading others (supervisory managers)
 - Leading the function (middle managers)
 - Leading the service (strategic managers)
17. In terms of the specific leadership levels, the HPP programme is aimed at employees operating at **Leading Yourself** and **Leading Others** levels.
18. POD are considering further focused development activities for talented staff aspiring to develop up to **Leading the Function** and **Leading the Service** levels.
19. It is expected that access to, and development through what may be termed the "*Aspiring Leadership*" programme will be suitably different to HPP. Formal application, robust selection and a structured programme of development and qualification are currently being considered. A further report will be brought back to members surrounding this proposed development.

Policy Document

20. As part of the piloting of the HPP programme, it was agreed to develop the programme 'in flight' and adapt and evolve as necessary whilst forming the approach. Whilst the intention is that the long-term future of HPP in this current format remains subject to ongoing review and evaluation, there is a requirement to support and evidence the process with a published Service Policy.

21. The draft policy is attached as **Appendix A**, and as new policy, would require Authority approval before publication. Full consultation has been undertaken with representative bodies over the policy.

Equality and Diversity Implications

22. An EIA is attached as **Appendix B** for review.
23. Participant feedback suggested that a lack of nomination criteria in the pilot devalued the programmes aims. As such, a new criterion has been devised and approved by SLT.
24. It is based on how nominees demonstrate the leadership behaviours and values in practice. This facilitates us in working towards overcoming issues raised in Section 4 of [Pathways and barriers to leadership in fire and rescue services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pathways-and-barriers-to-leadership-in-fire-and-rescue-services)
25. Blended learning resources are being created on an ongoing basis to facilitate better inclusion for our Neurodiverse Participants, shift workers and those with caring responsibilities.
26. Surveys conducted around timing of sessions has allowed us to facilitate better access for those who have caring responsibilities.

Staff Implications

27. Feedback was sought using the following methods; Focus Groups, 1:1 meetings, email messaging, surveys, HOT News articles, Portal tiles, meetings with Talent advisors and SLT members.
28. Environmental scanning was conducted with internal and external stakeholders. Including other FRS's, Blue Light Partners, Representative bodies, and all Staff Networks.
29. At the time of writing, the team have engaged with all existing participants by the methods outlined above. Over 73% of participants have been contacted and met to establish their next steps in relation to HPP and their development in the next 12 months. This equates to approximately 12% of the overall Service.
30. Masterclass content is being reviewed following the feedback to ensure that participants acquire learning in addition to inspirational content. They have requested content from internal Leaders which will be explored in more detail.
31. New workshops have been devised around the five themes that have been raised by all participants through their PDP. Providing best value for money, targeted learning opportunities.

Legal Implications

32. Development of HPP has considered compliance with Equality Act 2010, Public Sector Equality Duty. Further detail is provided in the EIA – Appendix B. We will adhere to all H&S legislation in the delivery of the programme as standard.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

33. Growth was submitted and agreed as part of the 2025 budget setting process to facilitate planned HPP commitments.
34. The HPP will have its provision targeted to ensure it better meets the needs and learning objectives of the participants ensuring better value for money. Improved evaluation methods will allow for the Kirkpatrick model review of cost vs benefits.
35. However, it is appreciated that much of the value will be intangible as participants will be empowered, better connected, have a greater understanding of the Service, become more confident in their knowledge and understanding, gaining soft skills.
36. The programme will raise self-awareness and encourage personal growth. It will enhance existing skills to facilitate developing others. Culture metrics such as staff retention and employee engagement will be monitored as part of evaluating value of HPP.

Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

37. There should be minimal H&S impact for standard meetings, workshops, and masterclasses. HPP events will be risk assessed as necessary and any actions taken to mitigate will be recorded on OSHENS.
38. Risks identified from Coaching & Mentoring activity is managed through the provision of contracting, which is established at the outset of the relationship. This clarifies expectations, defines objectives and sets clear boundaries.
39. Signposting for further provision in relation to safeguarding or Health and Wellbeing support will be provided as CPD to coaches. HPP is designed to have a positive impact on participants wellbeing, investing in their potential. It will also have a positive impact on the Service's reputation as an employer of choice, who take the development of staff seriously.

Environmental Implications

40. The blended learning approaches facilitate remote access 24/7. This reduces the need for in-person delivery. Which in turn reduces the carbon footprint of the programme compared to the previous year. Deletion of unnecessary admin documents will reduce the storage space used on network drives which further reduces the carbon footprint of the programme.

41. The programme will no longer be providing a book to each participant which will significantly reduce the carbon footprint of the programme and increase inclusivity.

Contribution to Our Vision: *To be the best Fire & Rescue Service in the UK.*

Our Purpose: *Here to serve, Here to protect, Here to keep you safe.*

42. The programme will directly contribute to the People Plan 2024-27, particularly to “*Develop exceptional people and leaders*” and the Service’s action to “Consider approaches to enable High Potential employees to grow in the organisation through involvement”.
43. In addition, the programme will support the effective and timely development of talented individuals aligned to the Service expectations through our Values, Behaviours and NFCC’s Core Code of Ethics. It will also contribute to HMICFRS recommendations set out in 2023.

Background Papers

CFO/54/22 Coaching & Mentoring

Glossary of Terms

MFRA	M erseyside F ire and R escue A uthority
HPP	H igh P otential P rogramme
SLT	S enior L eadership T eam
PDP	P ersonal D evelopment P lan
ND	N eurodiversity
HMICFRS	H is M ajesty’s I nspectorate of C onstabulary, F ire & R escue S ervice