

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority			
Meeting of the:	Authority		
Date:	29 October 2026	Report No:	CFO/20/2627
Presenting Officer:	Chief Fire Officer, Nick Searle		
Responsible Officer:	Director of Professional and Organisational Development, Nick Mernock	Report Author:	Head of Human Resources, Mike Pilkington
Officers Consulted:	Workforce and OD Planning Manager, John Price, Consultation Manager, Mike Cummins, HR Services & Recruitment Manager, Sara Fielding Strategic Leadership Team (SLT)		
Title of Report:	Review of Leadership Message		

Appendices:	Appendix A: Our Leadership Message Appendix B: Core Code of Ethics for Fire Appendix C: Code of Ethics Fire Standard Appendix D: Service Ground Rules
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Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of a review into our existing vision, purpose, values, ethical and behavioural frameworks as outlined within our Service Leadership Message.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that Members;
 - a) note the work being undertaken to review the Service's vision, purpose, aims, values, ethical and behavioural framework; and
 - b) instruct the Chief Fire Officer to bring a further report back to Members setting out any proposals arising from the review.

Introduction and Background

3. The Authority's current Leadership Message (**Appendix A**) was approved by Members in June 2021 alongside the People Plan 2021–2024. It brought together the Service's vision, purpose, aims, values and expected behaviours within a single statement intended to provide clarity about the organisation's direction and the contribution expected from all employees.
4. The 2021 Leadership Message replaced an earlier framework developed in 2010, which had helped shape the Service's people strategy and informed its

recruitment, promotion and appraisal arrangements. The review undertaken at that time was prompted by feedback from staff focus groups and forums that the previous language had become dated, could be simpler and did not fully reflect the Service's ambitions. The intention was to develop a clearer message that would help employees understand and connect their individual contribution to the Service's organisational goals.

5. The revised vision placed the Service at the centre of its communities and expressed the ambition of being the best Fire and Rescue Service in the UK, with employees working together as one team and putting communities first.
6. The purpose sought to capture the public service basis of the organisation's work, while the Service aims described its approach to protection, prevention, preparedness and response.
7. The values of Courage, Integrity and Compassion were selected as the three strongest themes arising from the staff engagement exercise and were intended to define both what the Service believes in and how its people behave.
8. The framework was also intended to support a positive and inclusive organisational culture. The People Plan described equality, diversity and inclusion as cornerstones of both the plan and the Leadership Message, with commitments to creating a strong inclusive culture and a sense of belonging.

National Context

9. The Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services (**Appendix B**) in England provides a common ethical framework for those working in, or on behalf of, fire and rescue services. It is based upon five principles:
 - Putting our communities first;
 - Integrity;
 - Dignity and respect;
 - Leadership; and
 - Equality, diversity and inclusion.
10. The importance of the Core Code is reinforced through the Code of Ethics Fire Standard (**Appendix C**). The Standard was first approved on 17 May 2021, reviewed on 28 May 2026 and re-issued on 1 June 2026. The revised Standard requires a fire and rescue service to proactively adopt the Core Code and demonstrate that it is fully committed to fulfilling it.
11. The Fire Standard also requires services to demonstrate how the Core Code is embedded within their decision-making, policies, procedures and processes; to provide appropriate training and support to those who work for, or on behalf of, the service; to promote a positive and inclusive culture; and to monitor performance in relation to culture and the Core Code.
12. The Fire Standard recognises that services may have their own local values but requires these to be aligned with the Core Code. It does not, therefore, require a

fire and rescue service to remove its local values. It does require the relationship between those values and the Core Code to be clear and capable of being demonstrated. The Standard also states that it and the Core Code underpin all other Fire Standards.

13. The Fire Standard also identifies relevant HMICFRS Characteristics of Good from the 2025–27 inspection framework. These include governance oversight and assurance of people strategies, regular assessment of organisational culture, and ensuring that Service values and the Core Code are established across the organisation and that acceptable standards of behaviour are understood and demonstrated.

Embedding the Leadership Message and Core Code

14. Since its introduction, the Leadership Message has become embedded within a range of Service policies, procedures and people management processes. The vision, purpose, values and leadership behaviours inform recruitment and selection, promotion and development, appraisal discussions, leadership development programmes and the design of role profiles and competency frameworks.
15. Following adoption of the Core Code of Ethics, the Service has also aligned a range of people management and organisational development activities with the Code's principles. The Core Code is reflected within leadership development, behavioural expectations, recruitment processes, policy development and wider culture initiatives.
16. Together, the Leadership Message, Core Code of Ethics, Leadership Behaviours and Ground Rules (**Appendix D**) form the framework through which the Service seeks to promote positive culture, leadership, inclusion, accountability and professional standards.
17. Whilst these arrangements have developed for different purposes and at different points in time, feedback from staff indicates that the relationship between the various frameworks is not always clear. The number of overlapping statements and behavioural frameworks can make it difficult for employees to understand which elements should be regarded as the primary reference point for leadership, behaviour and decision-making. A simpler and more coherent framework may therefore provide greater clarity, consistency and organisational impact.
18. Since the Leadership Message was introduced, the NFCC Leadership Framework has also been revised and updated. Whilst many of the underlying leadership expectations remain consistent, the updated framework provides a refreshed national approach to leadership development and behavioural expectations across the UK Fire and Rescue Service.

Rationale and Scope of the Review

19. Against this backdrop, the Service is undertaking a review of its Leadership Message, including its vision, purpose, aims and values, and its relationship with the Core Code of Ethics, Ground Rules and Leadership Behaviours.
20. Staff feedback gathered through the Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Values training programme indicates that employees do not always find the current framework easy to navigate. When asked whether having both the Leadership Message and Values alongside the Core Code of Ethics created confusion, 256 respondents (60.8%) answered yes, compared with 165 respondents (39.2%) who answered no.
21. The feedback also demonstrated a clear preference for simplification. When asked whether they would prefer a single set of guiding principles or expectations, 334 respondents (79.3%) answered yes, compared with 87 respondents (20.7%) who answered no.
22. Whilst these findings do not determine the outcome of the review, they suggest there is merit in considering whether the current combination of local and national frameworks remains the clearest and most effective way of communicating the Service's purpose, culture, values, ethical principles and behavioural expectations.
23. It is important to note that the feedback does not necessarily indicate disagreement with the existing arrangements, but suggests a desire for improved clarity, reduced duplication and a more coherent framework for employees.
24. The review will consider:
 - a) the continuing relevance of the framework approved by Members in 2021;
 - b) the requirements of the revised Code of Ethics Fire Standard;
 - c) feedback from staff regarding the clarity of the existing frameworks;
 - d) whether the relationship between the Service's local values and the Core Code is sufficiently clear;
 - e) opportunities to simplify existing arrangements and reduce unnecessary duplication; and
 - f) how any future framework can retain an appropriate sense of MFRS identity and staff ownership while meeting national expectations.
25. The purpose of the review is to assess whether the current combination of local and national frameworks remains the most effective way of communicating the Service's direction, culture, values, ethical standards and behavioural expectations, and whether opportunities exist to simplify and strengthen the overall framework.
26. No conclusions have been reached regarding the future form of the Leadership Message or its individual components. The review will recognise the substantial staff contribution that informed the 2021 framework and the Authority's previous

decisions, while considering subsequent national developments and current workforce feedback.

27. Appropriate engagement will be undertaken with employees, representative bodies and other relevant stakeholders as the work progresses. Any substantive proposals for change arising from the review will be brought back to Members for consideration.

Equality and Diversity Implications

28. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been completed at this stage as the report does not propose any changes to existing arrangements.
29. Equality, diversity and inclusion considerations will form a key part of the review. The existing Leadership Message was developed through extensive staff engagement and sought to promote an inclusive culture and sense of belonging. The review will consider the relationship between the Service's values and the National Fire Service Core Code of Ethics, which includes Equality, Diversity and Inclusion as one of its five core principles.
30. Should proposals for change emerge, a full Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken and presented to Members alongside any future recommendations.

Staff Implications

31. This report does not in itself introduce any changes for employees. However, the review concerns frameworks which are embedded within a range of people management processes including recruitment, promotion, appraisal, leadership development and organisational communications.
32. Staff feedback regarding the number of existing frameworks and the clarity of their application has been one of the drivers for undertaking the review. Appropriate consultation and engagement with employees and representative bodies will take place before any substantive proposals are developed.
33. There are no immediate training implications arising from this report. However, should any changes be approved following completion of the review, consideration will be given to any communication, awareness-raising or training requirements necessary to support implementation and embedding across the Service.

Legal Implications

34. The review is being undertaken in the context of the National Fire Service Core Code of Ethics and the Code of Ethics Fire Standard, which requires Fire and Rescue Services to proactively adopt and embed the Core Code within organisational policies, procedures, decision-making and culture.

35. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. However, any future proposals arising from the review will require consideration of relevant legislative requirements, including equality, employment and governance obligations, together with alignment to relevant Fire Standards and HMICFRS expectations.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

36. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations contained within this report.
37. Any costs associated with the review are being met from existing resources.
38. Whilst there are no direct financial implications, reviewing the effectiveness and clarity of the Service's values and ethical framework represents good governance and supports the continued alignment of organisational culture, leadership expectations and national standards. A clear and coherent framework can also improve understanding, consistency and organisational effectiveness.
39. Should any future proposals have financial implications, these will be identified and reported to Members as part of a subsequent report.

Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

40. The review is intended to mitigate organisational risks associated with multiple overlapping frameworks by considering whether greater clarity, simplification and alignment can be achieved. Any proposals arising from the review will be subject to appropriate consultation, impact assessment and governance processes before implementation.
41. There are no direct health and safety implications arising from this report. The review will, however, take account of the role that leadership, culture and behavioural expectations play in promoting a positive organisational culture and safe working environment.

Environmental Implications

42. There are no identified environmental implications arising from the recommendations contained within this report and no anticipated impact on the Authority's commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2040.

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.*

43. The review supports the Authority's ambition to be the best Fire and Rescue Service in the UK by ensuring that the Service's vision, values, ethical principles and leadership expectations remain clear, relevant and aligned with both organisational needs and national standards. A coherent and well-understood framework supports positive culture, effective leadership, inclusion,

accountability and the delivery of high-quality services to the communities of Merseyside.

Background Papers

CFO/056/21 Implementation of the Revised Leadership Message and Values
CFO/041/21 Our People Plan 2021-24

Glossary Of Terms

MFRA **M**erseyside **F**ire and **R**escue **A**uthority

MFRS **M**erseyside **F**ire and **R**escue **S**ervice