



People Strategy

2020 - 2023



County Durham and Darlington
Fire and Rescue Service

Safest People, Safest Places

People Strategy

1. Foreword

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service's (CDDFRS) vision is to have the Safest People, Safest Places. Our core strength in achieving this is through our people who are proud to work for an organisation connected closely with its communities and who are genuinely committed to changing and saving people's lives.

The Service's strategic priorities are detailed in our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) which explains our vision "Safest People, Safest Places" and how we plan to achieve this. This People Strategy in addition to the Workforce Plan and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy forms part of a suite of documents which support the delivery of the IRMP. They explain the interventions which will take place to support the achievement of our vision and ensure the Service develops staff with the right professionalism and skills who demonstrate our cultural values and behaviours.

The Government's fire reform agenda set a clear direction of travel to ensure fire and rescue services are efficient, accountable, transparent and reflective of the diverse communities they serve. This is underpinned by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) regime and the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England that sets out the overall strategic direction for fire and rescue authorities. Following our first inspection, it is evident that we need to make changes within our culture to improve our working environment and our People Strategy sets out how we aim to do this.

We expect the Authority to continue to face a very challenging financial climate going forward with great uncertainty as to future Government funding. This is exacerbated by restrictions on the amount of income we can raise through council tax and predictions of significant pressures on spending. As well as this, the unexpected nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has seen the Service make significant changes in the way we operate in order to keep our staff safe whilst continuing to deliver services to our communities. As we look to the future it is important that we do not pause with the delivery of our People agenda, we must ensure we continue to identify innovative solutions to engage with our workforce and deliver quality training and supportive measures. The next three years are therefore likely to require further innovation and changes to the way we operate and deliver our services and the People Strategy will help us achieve this.

CDDFRS has a history of adapting and dealing well with adversity throughout this prolonged period of austerity. Putting our staff at the heart of everything we do and developing and maintaining a positive organisational culture will help to ensure that we continue to be successful, despite these many challenges. We are committed to delivering a professional, innovative and effective FRS, as we continue to work towards our vision of "Safest People, Safest Places".

2. Where are we now?

We believe that our workforce is our greatest asset and in times of increased austerity and changing demands, appreciating the value of staff and embracing a changing workforce and working environment is more important than it has ever been.

Our workforce has changed significantly in the past few years and this will continue as we change the way we do things, implement transformation plans and continue to redesign our services. With the uncertainty over future funding levels we need to ensure the organisation is future focused and flexible to facilitate growth, change and innovation.

As the Service prepares for the challenges ahead, we know that being successful depends greatly on having a positive, inclusive and engaging culture. Through this People Strategy we aim to create a culture where everyone feels they are treated fairly, enjoys their work in a welcoming and collaborative environment and recognises that their contributions are valued.

Attracting the best staff to work for (CDDFRS) is a key factor that assists us in delivering our strategic people aims and ensures we consistently provide an excellent experience for them and the communities they support. Through this strategy and the associated delivery plan we aim to reinforce our commitment to supporting, developing and enabling our staff to provide the best possible FRS to our communities.

Our People Strategy is shaped by what we are trying to achieve in the context of the above. It will set the direction and focus for people related activity relevant to our Service at this time as well as incorporating the six areas of improvement outlined in the National People Strategy developed by the National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC). These are outlined below and feature in our five key areas of work:

- Strengthen leadership and line management to support organisational change and service delivery to the public;
- Developing cultural values and behaviours which make the FRS a great place to work;
- Develop ways of working that are able to respond to service needs;
- Provide excellent training and education to ensure continuous improvement of services to the public;
- Strengthen our ability to provide an excellent service by diversifying our staff and creating a fair and equal place to work;
- Continue to support the health and wellbeing of all our staff.

3. Key Drivers

The key drivers which have set the direction of the People Strategy are:

- Compliance with key employment legislation, national operational standards and guidance and consideration given to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, NFCC People Strategy and Leadership Framework and Fire Vision 2024;
- Future proofing service delivery in terms of staffing levels, skills attainment and knowledge enhancement;
- Reductions in funding which has necessitated restructuring, changes to responsibilities and ways of working;
- Our internal culture survey provides an opportunity to listen to our people, prioritise actions and make key changes. Through this we aim to improve employee perceptions around fairness and trust through increased levels of engagement;
- Improving levels of underrepresented groups in our workforce to reflect the diversity of the community we serve in line with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and the NFCC EDI strategy;
- The requirements on public sector organisations to meet the government targets for apprenticeship new starts and building our apprenticeship portfolio across the Service;
- Ensure we address areas of improvement relating to workforce issues identified in our report from HMICFRS.

4. Our Values and Behaviours

The Service's core values and behaviours are integral to the People Strategy as they define the principles that guide our Service's internal culture as well as its relationships with external communities, stakeholders and partners. Our core values and behaviours were developed and introduced 3 years ago and as a Service we are still working hard to ensure they are implemented across everything we do, in particular in the areas of performance, promotion and talent management.

PIE represents our values and describes the service our customers should expect. This element of 'being the best' is the external key message around the service we provide

The 4C's communicates the behaviours we expect all our people to display at work. Delivery of the 4 C's across the service will lead to an organisation which displays the PIE values and fulfils the organisation aim of 'being the best'



How We Approach Challenges

Our people should approach challenges with flexibility, enthusiasm, motivation, passion, determination & resilience.

How We Conduct Ourselves

Our people should conduct themselves in an honest, trustworthy, reliable, accountable, consistent and respectful manner.

How We Collaborate

Our people should be approachable, supportive, encouraging, inclusive and show that they value their own development and the development of others when collaborating and working with others.

How We Drive Change Across the Organisation to Make a Difference

Our people should drive change by being creative, resourceful, courageous, original, clear and focused.

5. Where do we want to be?

Our culture plays an integral part in enabling the Service to achieve its vision of ‘Safest People, Safest Places’. Through the key objectives set within the People Strategy, we aim to support the creation of a positive, inclusive and engaging culture that encourages innovation and continuous improvement.

Culture is at the heart of everything we do and we understand that the actions we take and the decisions we make through the People Strategy form part of our cultural journey. We believe achieving the right culture will enable us to give the best services to our communities and be the best FRS in the UK.

The Service has invested significant effort and resources to understand its culture by designing a bespoke staff survey in partnership with Durham University Business School. Our survey is able to measure our workforce’s attitudes, motivations and behaviours which helps to give the Service an insight into the feelings of our employees and how we can make positive improvements.

One of the key areas of improvement for the duration of this strategy is to improve the perceptions of fairness and trust across the whole organisation following the outcomes of our own survey, engagement activities and more recently our HMICFRS report. We believe improving fairness and ensuring an evidence-based approach will be a key enabler for changing our culture.

We have taken steps to support diversity and inclusion within the workplace through our EDI strategy and openly promote and foster everybody’s right to be different, to be valued as an individual and to be afforded dignity in the workplace without fear of discrimination. The Authority is aiming to be seen as an open, inclusive employer and we expect our employees to treat each other and those who they come into contact with whilst undertaking their role with dignity and respect. We are committed to ensuring fairness and equal opportunity for all our employees and as such will apply all policies and make decisions equitably and fairly.

Our aim is to maintain a workforce that is highly skilled, agile, engaged and safe in their diverse roles, whilst ensuring where possible, employees have opportunities, choice and pathways for promotion and development. We will be putting additional focus on our leadership pathways and ensuring these are aligned to the national leadership framework and behaviors as well as further developing our systems and processes for talent management to ensure those staff with potential receive additional support and development.

An investment in leadership will be an important catalyst for achieving the culture that we desire. Although we have the foundations of an existing positive and inclusive culture, the results of our previous surveys and our HMICFRS report have highlighted areas where we can strengthen our culture and improve overall engagement and staff satisfaction.

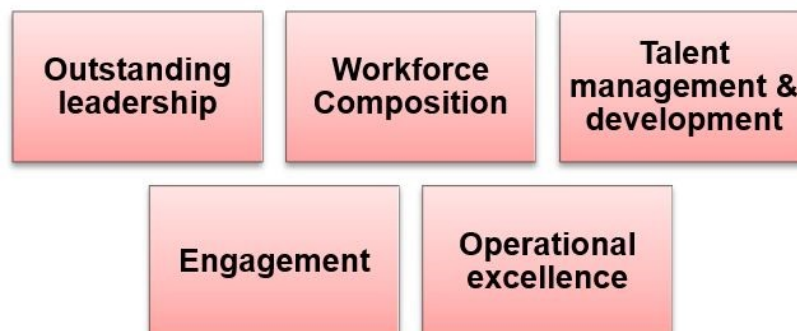
6. Key Principles

The People Strategy is an integral part of the way we work and ownership for its delivery rests with everyone and across the whole organisation. In order to support the delivery of this strategy we have adopted underpinning principles, some of which have been devised locally and some which are included in the national People Strategy.

These are as follows:

- We will give our staff the best training, equipment, premises, appliances and personal protective equipment (PPE) to ensure we have the best staff to help us achieve our aim of being the best FRS in the UK;
- As leaders we will lead by example, articulating the values, behaviours and standards expected of the Service outlined in our frameworks;
- We will provide clarity on the decision-making levels, accountability and processes without unnecessary hierarchy, and empower operational staff to use operational discretion;
- We trust our people to make decisions and will give them the skills and knowledge to do this;
- We will strive towards evidence-based decisions, in particular for promotion processes to ensure a transparent, consistent and fair approach;
- We will understand what our people do and will provide them with regular feedback to support and develop them, build confidence and challenge underperformance where necessary;
- We will provide learning and development which has a demonstrable impact in terms of behaviour change and is measured through our appraisal system;
- We understand the importance of engaging staff in decisions and will listen and involve our people in improving our Service;
- We will focus on clear and consistent communication of key messages using a wide range of engagement methods;
- We will build trust across the Service and allow constructive disagreement and challenge to be seen as part of a positive culture;
- We will continue to strive to be a reflective and inclusive organisation;
- We understand the importance of investing in the health and wellbeing of all of our staff and will enhance our provisions in this area where required;
- We will ensure our employees have access to excellent training and development in order to maintain competence and develop in their role.

To achieve this, the People Strategy has five key improvement objectives (KIO) outlined below. Each objective will have an action plan which will be monitored regularly and refreshed as progress is made:



7. How do we get there?

Outstanding Leadership

Leadership is a key area of focus for the Service which needs to be exhibited at all levels of the organisation. Delivering an excellent service to our communities and being adaptable to the evolving requirements of a 'modern fire and rescue service' is key to our leadership and management focus for the future. Within this element there are tangible links to the work that is ongoing at a national level and our People Strategy seeks to adopt the professional standards outlined with the Fire Professional Framework and will be broadly aligning its leadership development to the new Leadership Framework developed by the NFCC.

Our leaders are vital to our success and the success of this strategy. More than ever before we need leaders who are both operationally and professionally competent as well as being capable of creating a compelling vision for the future to inspire and motivate others. We need resilient leaders who will take responsibility for continuous improvement in our performance as a public service and bring other people with them. We want to develop leaders who are credible, visible, accessible, take responsibility and lead by example, portraying the Service's values and behaviours at all times and to be catalysts for achieving the culture we desire.

Our culture survey results tell us that we still have some work to do in this area, we need to ensure our leadership messages are clear and our staff understand what is expected of them. We promote a supportive leadership style within our organisation and we will re-design our processes to recruit leaders who demonstrate their commitment to putting the needs of the community first, focus on identifying what changes and support is required to ensure the well-being of their team and in turn, will deliver a high standard of performance by alleviating any unnecessary obstacles. We need our leaders to make decisions which align to our values and which positively impact on our cultural journey.

To achieve this, we have worked with a local higher education establishment to utilise our apprenticeship levy to design bespoke leadership programmes for supervisory through to strategic leaders. The programmes are CMI accredited and are underpinned by our profiling tool i3 and the principles of supportive leadership. Our ambition will be to deliver accredited programmes internally once we have the frameworks in place. We are designing a leadership pledge for our workforce which will outline what is expected of them as well as our commitments to them.

Workforce Composition

The aim of this work stream is to ensure that our workforce has the capacity, structure and sustainability to meet current and future business needs. Strategic workforce planning will help to get the best from our talent by providing an accurate picture of the availability, composition, age structure and capabilities of the workforce.

Workforce capacity and establishment planning is a key function which is subject to both monthly and quarterly scrutiny at middle and senior management level. A priority within these discussions is to align planning for recruitment, planning for promotion, manage postings and transfers of uniformed personnel whilst maintaining business continuity and operational effectiveness. Whilst we have developed a way of forecasting workforce capacity, HMICFRS highlighted that more work is required to ensure workforce planning techniques will facilitate more accurate data and costs. This will support our workforce plan which outlines our planning strategies for all staff groups.

On Call recruitment provides us with an ongoing challenge so we need to reconsider our approach to both attraction and retention. Much work has been undertaken in recent times to target local communities, this needs to continue to secure more innovative and sustainable recruitment practices. Developing closer partnership working with local employers is imperative and we need to find ways to enrich the perceived value of the role in order to improve on call availability and retention.

The Service will continue to support positive action and other community events to help encourage recruitment from under-represented groups, such as women and black and ethnic minority residents, to make our workforce more reflective of our community. To assist with this our EDI working group has a dedicated action plan and is focused on developing strategies to target under-represented groups and raise awareness about career opportunities within our organisation with a particular emphasis on the recruitment of females into operational roles. We have had great success in the recruitment of females via our firefighter apprenticeship scheme, efforts will continue to draw people from diverse groups and highlight what a good place the Service is to work.

Over the course of this strategy we will review our approach to recruitment both internally and externally to fully align to our behaviours and leadership framework. This will include a review of the methodologies, technologies and processes currently in use to ensure the candidate journey is positive and engaging whilst remaining robust, fair and non-discriminatory and securing the best talent for our organisation.

It is also important to us to ensure opportunities for young people and the provision of a spectrum of meaningful apprenticeships and job opportunities are incorporated into the Service's talent management scheme and in particular for our cadets. We need to explore other ways of engaging with young people in schools and colleges and become more proactive in raising the awareness of the FRS as a career option.

Talent Management and Development

The aim of this work stream is to develop a clear, consistent, structured and sustainable talent management process which will enable the Service to identify and make use of its talent across all areas of the business.

We will be broadly adopting the National Leadership Framework as it provides a simple and consistent approach to leadership and development for all staff, irrespective of discipline, role or function. The Framework brings together the “what and the how” combining traditional professional competence with behavioural expectations aligned to the principles of supportive leadership. The Framework and leadership behaviours will be incorporated into a range of people processes over the course of this strategy, including recruitment processes, appraisals and career planning discussions.

Managers and staff are required to use the appraisal system to discuss performance, career aspirations and readiness for promotion. However, based on staff feedback we know we have more work to do with our system, aligning it to the National Leadership Framework and providing training to all managers to enable them to measure our staff against them.

For career planning, it is essential that the Service raises awareness of the different career options, career pathways and routes of entry into the Service. Not only will this form part of the recruitment strategy, but it is also important to ensure that internal staff can recognise how their transferrable skills may assist them in their own career plans in the future e.g. Cadet to Apprentice to Firefighter. Consideration is also being given to the ability to accelerate high performing individuals who display high potential through our ‘fast track’ programmes which are open to all staff groups.

We have been proactive in becoming early adopters of apprenticeships and will seek to extend this further by broadening the overall apprenticeship portfolio at entry, supervisory, middle and strategic management levels. The Service will continue to be strong advocates of staff studying for academic qualifications e.g. the Institute of Fire Engineers and degree/masters level qualifications. The acquisition of these qualifications alongside the respective incident command assessments are, and will continue to, represent part of the eligibility criteria for progression for our operational staff.

Engagement

The aim of this work stream is to increase our levels of engagement and ensure our staff feel supported in the roles they undertake and their contributions, ideas and suggestions are listened to and valued.

We are very keen to fully understand the issues that affect staff morale and in turn performance. Staff engagement is a key priority for us, and we will seek to find out more from our people about what affects their happiness at work. A key to this has been senior management visibility and proactive engagement with staff at watch/section level through regular visits and two-way communication. We will continue to work closely with our recognised Trade Unions to encourage positive and collaborative working, promote sustainable employee engagement and seek collective solutions for our people.

The Service has a strong commitment to create a healthy environment that is conducive and beneficial to our people. Having an environment which allows people to flourish and achieve their full potential is essential to ensuring that the Service is fit for both current and future demands. We seek to empower our employees to take control of their own health and wellbeing.

The Service has achieved the Better Health at Work Award (BHAWA) for many years and is currently at the 'Maintaining Excellence' phase. The award is externally accredited and demonstrates the Service's commitment to the health and wellbeing of our workforce.

The increase in awareness of mental illness has also been acknowledged as a key issue and the Service signed the MIND pledge. Being a compassionate organisation that fosters wellbeing and breaking down the stigma of mental illness continues to be one of our areas of focus and further investment will be entered into as part of this strategy to extend the support that we offer. Last year we invested in the recruitment and training of a Trauma Support Team which was well received. The team provide support to our staff following a traumatic event, but we need to continue to embed our new processes and highlight its effectiveness to our workforce. The Service also supports the TUC's Dying to Work Campaign and is committed to assist any person with a terminal diagnosis to remain in the workplace in some capacity.

Innovation is one of our values and we believe innovation and ideas from our workforce will allow us to grow and develop as an organisation through these challenging times. Our survey measures behaviours and attitudes regarding innovation and improvements. This helps us to understand our staff's perceptions about putting forward new ideas and making positive changes in the workplace. We have recently launched our 'Fire Away' concept, this is a staff led process whereby new ideas are discussed and progressed where value can be realised, or efficiencies can be made. Our aim is for some of these ideas to be linked into our CMI leadership projects for our potential leaders to take ownership for change throughout the organisation.

Operational Excellence

This work stream aims to ensure that our operational employees achieve the highest level of professional standards by having the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding in order to fulfil the vast array of operational demands placed upon them, therefore developing a safe and competent workforce. We will do this by ensuring our operational staff can access high quality technical training to maintain and improve their skills on a regular basis and evidence of continuous professional development is appropriately gained.

We recognise our training environment is a key function within the Service who have contact with most of our workforce on a regular basis. Our Training Team will have a significant impact on our cultural journey by setting the highest standards for operational training, being role models for our values and behaviours and ensuring any inappropriate behaviour is challenged and dealt with accordingly whilst in the training environment.

An operational employee demonstrates competence by applying their skills, knowledge and understanding at operational incidents or in a realistic simulation. Designing and implementing an operational competence framework that covers technical skills, command and control, leadership and management skills, working with others and multi-agency collaboration, is about ensuring that operational firefighters and commanders have the right skills to deliver public safety by applying recognised operational procedures, Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles [JESIP] and complying with appropriate health and safety legislation.

We recognise that the requirements of the FRS are changing as we prepare to respond to all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks. Our workforce has developed their skills to respond to a changing risk profile, including extreme weather events such as flooding or wildfire; terrorist incidents; and medical emergencies. The change in our community risk results in the need to ensure that we maintain a workforce that is competent and safe within their respective and diverse roles.

The geographically diverse nature of our Service area and the reliance on the On-call Duty System and its personnel necessitates operational learning environments that are both flexible and easily accessible. The recent Covid-19 pandemic has also instigated a review of our training delivery methods and how this could be delivered in different ways whilst still maintaining the same high standards and performance. The use of e-learning modules to assist centralised learning and development delivery provides one such flexible delivery method however it is important we still assess operational practical skills.

To this end, we require our workforce to take ownership and responsibility for their own personal development and supporting the development of others to enable everyone to excel in their roles. Operational staff acquire, maintain and continuously develop the appropriate technical and professional skills and knowledge specific to their role through regular high quality training which is aligned to National Operational Guidance (NOG) and where appropriate adopt professional standards and skills for both operational and command roles such as accredited incident command qualifications. We will ensure our driver training aligns to relevant legislation and will investigate the sustainability of our capabilities to achieve this.

8. Governance and Measuring Progress

We will monitor progress of this strategy in the following ways:



Role of the Fire Authority and Service Leadership Team (SLT)

Both Members of the Fire Authority and SLT believe in this strategy and that it will help to deliver the Service's vision in respect of its people. Leading by example, our Members and SLT will set the standard for what is expected of all staff in enabling this strategy to be delivered by 2023.



Role of our Staff

This strategy will only be successful if all staff within CDDFRS support it, making the vision of what the Service will look like from a people perspective, a reality. In supporting this strategy, employees will not only assist in enabling the actions outlined but they will also demonstrate their support through their behaviours.



Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)

We will develop a suite of appropriate Key Performance Indicators to help measure the progress of this strategy.



Culture Survey

Our culture survey will assist us in having insight into the motivations, attitudes and behaviours of our staff. Progress will be measured against key indicators and shared with the workforce.



Reporting Progress

Scrutiny of progress against the strategy will be undertaken by the Performance and Programme Board (PPB) who will receive regular reports from the Head of People and Organisational Development, in their role as strategic lead for People.



Measuring Perceptions/ Sense Checking

We will regularly ask for feedback from our staff to inform us of our progress on elements with the People Strategy through our engagement sessions, range of leadership forums and through meetings with our representative bodies. Their opinions and suggestions will be used to influence improvement.



Keeping it current

We will provide a progress report to the relevant committees and update the action plan annually to ensure it remains current.

