



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council



Core Code of Ethics Guidance

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This guidance document demonstrates the actions that a fire and rescue service (FRS) should ensure at an individual, management and strategic level to aid interpretation, support implementation and to embed the Core Code of Ethics effectively.

The Core Code requires both an individual and a service commitment to the ethical principles in order to be effective.

It is intended that an FRS will initially use the Core Code to undertake a gap analysis with regard to existing behavioural frameworks, values, and cultural approaches. This is to ensure that the principles within the Core Code are evident and incorporated within all existing as well as new associated documentation.

What does the Core Code require?

The Core Code should be adopted by every service in England. The principles should be embedded within everything that fire and rescue services and their employees do. This includes those working within, or on behalf of the FRS.

FRSs will ensure that the principles of this Core Code are represented within policies and processes to ensure they are embedded and at the heart of day-to-day activity.

The five principles in the Core Code apply to every action we take, as individuals or as a FRS. The principles will help all of us do our jobs in the right way.

The Core Code requires everyone to promote the five principles. We should all feel confident challenging behaviour that breaches the Core Code.

The Core Code and your FRS

Your FRS should make sure everything it does complies with the Core Code. This includes all policies, procedures and plans made within your FRS. The Code of Ethics Fire Standard sets expectations for how an FRS should apply the Core Code of Ethics.

Your FRS may have its own ethical principles, which can be added to the Core Code, ensuring that both are recognised.

Your FRS will support you if you challenge behaviour which breaches the Core Code. Your FRS will take appropriate action to address behaviour which breaches the Core Code.

The implementation of the Core Code will provide a foundation from which FRSs will develop their cultural approaches and will set clear standards regarding the expected behaviours of all personnel throughout an organisation. FRSs will strive to conduct all their activities efficiently, to the highest ethical standards and in compliance with legal obligations.

The Core Code also provides a clear understanding to the public regarding the expected standards of professional behaviour of FRS personnel and the way in which they conduct their business.

FRS employees shall follow the fundamental principles set out within the Core Code of Ethics and FRSs will utilise the Core Code also as the basis of developing the FRS's own values, vision, mission, and strategic business plans, which ultimately influence the culture and values within an organisation.

FRSs shall be guided not merely by the terms within, but also by the spirit of, this Core Code and its principles.

FRSs shall ensure that work for which they are responsible, which is undertaken by others on their behalf, is carried out in accordance with the requirements of this Core Code.

The Core Code is designed to sit alongside all the statutory obligations that an individual has under various pieces of legislation. Therefore, individuals need to abide by both the professional requirements of the Core Code and their legal responsibilities.

The Core Code is about demonstrating responsibility and leadership at all levels and provides a basis from which to demonstrate how things should be done to create a positive culture and working environment. It is about staying true to your obligations as they apply to you personally, no matter what role you hold.

The Core Code provides clarity and consistency in relation to expected behaviours and therefore will support the development and maintenance of trust within an organisation, not just with individuals but also within the sector.

The Core Code encourages ethical behaviours in you and others and provides a basis from which inappropriate behaviours can be raised, challenged, and discussed at all levels. It provides clarity regarding correct behaviours and conduct.

You are expected to use the Core Code to guide your behaviour at all times at work whether online or offline.

How the Core Code links with other documents

The Core Code is directly aligned to the National Code of Ethics Fire Standard <https://www.firestandards.org/approved-standards/code-of-ethics/>

The Core Code sits alongside other documents such as the NFCC Leadership Framework, however, it is a standalone piece of work that should not be confused with other documents. It can be added to but not detracted from.

To ensure that behaviours are consistent, the Core Code provides a set of principles from which an FRS can build their internal documents. It is not intended to dictate how FRS should deliver services to the public; however, it does provide a structure to what the expected behaviours throughout the sector should look like.

The Core Code is a key document for FRSs to consider when developing policies and procedures and should be at the heart of each of these. Strong ethical behaviour will influence how employees and service users view the organisation and the way in which it conducts its business.

Contraventions

The Core Code of Ethics provides a baseline for discussion regarding behaviours and provides FRS with a blueprint from which to structure their own behavioural framework.

Contraventions of the Core Code may range from relatively minor shortcomings through to gross misconduct. Existing FRS' internal formal and informal mechanisms will be utilised to deal with these instances. The Core Code will however assist in the development of these policies and thus create a greater degree of consistency across the fire and rescue sector.

All personnel have a duty to act where a concern is raised about any behaviour, level of performance or conduct which may amount to a contravention of the Core Code.

Guidance structure

The Core Code helps every member of the FRS to act in the right way in our service to the public and towards each other.

The Core Code applies to everything we do. It will help us to continue to do our jobs professionally and to the best of our ability.

The following section sets out specific responsibilities for the implementation of the Core Code and is split into four distinct tiers: all staff, supervisory and middle managers, strategic leaders and FRAs.

All staff

All staff should have an understanding of the Core Code and maintain high standards of ethical behaviour within their working life. The Core Code:

- sets out principles that support these behaviours
- supports all staff to look for opportunities from which to learn, identifying mistakes and celebrating successes
- assists all staff in understanding how actions and behaviours impact on others.

Mindful of the Core Code and its ethical principles, all staff:

- have a responsibility to implement the Core Code and should challenge unacceptable behaviours as and when they occur
- have a responsibility to treat each other with respect and recognise individual difference
- understand they are representatives of the FRS, their responsibilities within the community, and act in a manner that is in line with the Core Code and any additional individual FRA/FRS expectations
- value Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and set a positive example of appropriate behaviour
- maintain an open approach with others, taking account of, and accepting, individual differences including age, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, social background, disability, sexual orientation, and physical appearance
- will challenge or question others constructively in the context of the Core Code to achieve more effective outcomes

- have an understanding of policies and procedures applicable to them and also understand that they have a duty to uphold the principles within the Core Code in day-to-day activities and via electronic platforms. Information will be provided to all staff to support gaining such understanding
- should be aware of the escalation process within their FRS to ensure that issues of any sort are appropriately dealt with in a timely manner
- should not make improper use of information acquired as part of their role, or disclose, or allow to be disclosed, information confidential to the organisation.

Supervisory and middle managers

In addition to the points applying to all staff, it is incumbent on supervisory and middle managers to understand the impact of the Core Code on their specific responsibilities.

The Core Code will assist managers to understand the importance of how to communicate responsibly, with sensitivity and respect for others. It will support managers to take a proactive approach in dealing with difficult or sensitive situations, influencing others to reach an acceptable solution.

Managers need to have a detailed understanding of the FRS informal and formal conduct mechanisms that sit alongside the Core Code to be clear of their managerial responsibilities in the case of any contraventions in order to provide appropriate support to their team members.

Mindful of the Core Code and its ethical principles, managers will:

- consider the Core Code in ensuring ethical considerations have been applied to all issues and decisions
- utilise the principles of the Core Code as part of all their discussions with team members.
- take responsibility for implementing inclusion strategies, encouraging different points of view, and utilising the Core Code as part of their management approach
- be sensitive to the feelings and well-being of others and take actions to support them.

Senior managers

Senior managers within the FRS must have an in depth understanding of the contents of this Core Code. Senior managers include corporate management board members, area managers, heads of departments, and heads of service.

In addition to the points applying to all staff, senior managers have individual and collective responsibility for the organisation and the exercise of executive judgement in their areas of work. Each senior manager should act in a way which allows decision-making meetings to fulfil their purpose in meeting our communities' needs and improving the success of the organisation

Mindful of the Core Code and its ethical principles:

- A senior manager should ensure the organisation is financially responsible and properly managed to protect and enhance the interests of the organisation and its customers. They must always be conscious of seeking value for money in all dealings and be accountable to the public for how their money has been spent.
- A senior manager must always act to ensure the organisation complies within the law governing its operations. In evaluating the interests of the organisation, a senior manager is accountable to the stakeholders as a whole. But various Acts of Parliament have imposed wider responsibilities on organisations and senior managers. Senior managers must evaluate their actions in a broader social context and must be conscious of the impact of their organisation on society.
- A senior manager must be prepared, if necessary, to express disagreement with colleagues, including the chief executive or managing senior manager and the Core Code supports appropriate challenge.
- A senior manager must not take improper advantage of the position as a senior manager to gain, directly or indirectly, a personal advantage or an advantage for any associated person which might cause detriment to the organisation.
- The personal interests of a senior manager, and those of associated persons, must not take precedence over those of the organisation's partners generally. A senior manager should seek to avoid conflicts of interest wherever possible. Full and prior disclosure of any conflict, or potential conflict, must be made to the corporate management board and recorded.
- A senior manager should not make improper use of information acquired as a senior manager or disclose, or allow to be disclosed, information confidential to the organisation. This prohibition applies irrespective of whether the senior manager or any associated person would gain directly or indirectly a personal advantage or whether the organisation would be harmed. A senior manager must not disclose, or allow to be disclosed, confidential information received in the course of the exercise of their duties unless that disclosure has been authorised by the Corporate Management Board of the organisation or is required by law. This is balanced by seeking to ensure our commitment to transparency is honoured and we fully support Freedom of Information to our customers.
- It is vital that senior managers are impartial in their dealings and remain politically neutral.
- Continual professional development is a requirement for all senior managers. Senior Managers should ensure that they continue to develop so that they can deliver high value services to the public through an effective and efficient FRS that continues to look after its people in an ethical way.

A senior manager must honour the Core Code in the spirit as well as in the letter. No code can be all-embracing. It is not possible to identify every circumstance in which the provisions of this Core Code need be applied, and undoubtedly there are many other circumstances not mentioned in the Core Code or this guidance in which the conduct, integrity and judgement of a senior manager must be of considerable

importance. The Core Code, however, is not intended merely to prohibit certain specified kinds of conduct, allowing any kind of actions which are not specifically ruled out. When questions arise, which are not covered explicitly by the Core Code, personal adherence to the generally accepted principles of honesty, professionalism and justice should determine a senior manager’s behaviour.

FRA’s

Those who govern fire and rescue services will demonstrate their commitment to the Core Code of Ethics by championing its use. This may include utilising the Core Code to inform FRS values and vision; monitoring and supporting its development and progress through effective scrutiny.



Examples

The Core Code contains examples within each FRS principle, and to support FRS in communicating how these principles will be integrated into each FRS there are a number of more detailed examples included here for consideration and discussion.

Putting our communities first

We put the interests of the public, the community, and service users first.



Example

You and your team are developing a community event with the aim of reducing accidental dwelling fires within a locality. The local community demographic is 75 per cent elderly residents living alone. Your approach is to have an open day on a local piece of grassland covering one square mile, with various stands demonstrating the services that the FRS can provide. You have decided that social media will be the platform to promote the event and expect a good attendance. At this same event, there are several local businesses selling their produce. A number of your team are seen consuming alcohol at the event whilst on duty and this has also been witnessed by members of the public.

Consider and discuss the example above in the context of the principle: Putting our communities first

You understand the diverse needs of your local community by:

- understanding the different cultural requirements within an area will allow you to ensure that all community needs are catered for, ie, faith, neurodiversity, religion, sexuality, etc
- adapting your approach based upon the needs of the audience you can improve your understanding of community needs for both yourself and the organisation
- providing alternative approaches in all that the service does you can ensure that equity of access to services are improved
- providing information in a variety of languages, media, formats, and platforms, you will be able to interact more and understand what a local community need
- listening to your communities, you will gain greater insight into what their needs are and how you can best meet those needs
- working to foster good relationships within your communities you will be able to achieve improved outcomes with them.

You consider the impacts of your actions upon the wider community by:

- understanding community needs in the first instance you will be well placed in being able to improve community outcomes, and thus reduce risk within the wider community
- considering if your actions are going to have a positive or negative effect upon the wider community and ensure that you understand the implications of your actions upon all community members
- engaging with your communities in different ways in order to fully assess and understand how the FRS can adapt their initiatives and activities based upon the needs of the community.

You understand the role that you hold within the community.

- You are an ambassador for the Fire and Rescue Service and take responsibility for the work that we do and understand that members of the community always view you as a representative of the service.
- You recognise that members of the community will know that you are a member of the service and they will associate your behaviours and actions to that of a service ambassador.
- You act as a role model, and always understand the impacts of your behaviours and when using all media platforms.
- The community will look to you for guidance and support. As a representative of the service, your engagement will be of the highest standard to provide confidence within your communities.

Integrity

We act with integrity including being open, honest, and consistent in everything that we do.



Example

You see a colleague pick up a wallet at an incident, and later a member of the public reports this missing. Your colleague states that they know nothing about it. You know that your colleague picked up the wallet and that another member of your team also witnessed this. This topic has been discussed on your teams WhatsApp group and some members of the team have commented, yet others who have clearly read the messages have not said anything. Your Line Manager has advised you to say nothing as the individual involved is an experienced member of the team and is only two years from retirement.

Consider and discuss the example above in the context of the principle: Integrity

Therefore, you need to ensure that:

You are sincere and truthful.

- People will look to you as a member of the service and expect that you always uphold the fire services values and act in an honest and truthful manner.
- You provide information and support as and when required and seek to always do the right thing. This may sometimes be a very difficult thing to do, ie, providing information that may cause an issue for a colleague or a member of the public.

You show courage in doing what you believe to be right.

- You will be required to always challenge inappropriate behaviour, and this will no doubt challenge you at times, however, by doing so you will reinforce your own credibility and that of the organisation eg calling out racist, homophobic, bigoted behaviours, reporting of safeguarding issues etc within all contexts will be expected.
- No matter what level within the organisation you are operating at, your behaviours will reflect upon both you and the organisation, and as such you will be required to make critical decisions that will need you to be resilient and consistent in your approach. Whether that be in an operational setting or within non-operational settings, it is vitally important that your behaviours are consistent with the FRS Core Code and supplementary FRS values.

You ensure your decisions are not inappropriately influenced.

- Decisions will always be made based upon accurate information and you will consider all points of view prior to making a decision.

- You will not be influenced inappropriately by others and, no matter how difficult this may be at times, you will maintain a focussed approach in line with the Core Code of Ethics, ie, you will not accept gifts or financial incentives, you will report any inappropriate behaviours that could be deemed as individuals or organisations attempting to influence your actions.
- You do not knowingly make false, misleading, or inaccurate statements.
- You have a responsibility to provide accurate, honest, and timely information whenever requested. This will ensure that the credibility, trust, and honesty of you and your organisation will be maintained. This may be challenging at times, for example, if you have witnessed a safety event and a colleague may have done something incorrectly. It is important that you provide an honest account of what happened to ensure that appropriate remedial actions can be implemented.

Dignity and respect

We treat people with dignity and respect, making decisions objectively based on evidence, without discrimination or bias.



Example

You and your team are attending a community event to explore the ways in which the FRS can improve community safety. At the event, there are several presentations regarding community cohesion. During the panel question and answer session (of which the FRS is a panel member), certain members of the audience start to voice their mistrust and dissatisfaction with the police and the local authority. These discussions start to become quite heated and the audience starts to question the FRS position regarding these allegations. How do you as a representative of the FRS respond to the situation?

**Consider and discuss the example above in the context of the principle:
Dignity and respect**

Therefore, you need to ensure that:

You maintain a composed and respectful manner.

- Despite the pressures of a situation, you always remain calm and professional.
- You take personal responsibility for your actions.
- You communicate effectively with a range of different stakeholders.
- You are aware of the impact that you have on others.

You respect individual differences.

- You take time to understand individuals and their perspective.
- You understand your communities and their diverse needs.
- You understand that individual difference is a positive aspect of all communities.

You recognise the needs of community members.

- You recognise that all groups will have different needs and opinions on a range of subject areas.
- You are fully aware of the environments in which you are operating and understand that your approach must be flexible to meet these differing needs.

You challenge inappropriate behaviours whenever they occur.

- You understand that by not challenging inappropriate behaviours you are in effect condoning those behaviours.
- By challenging inappropriate behaviours on each occasion, they occur you will be role modelling positive behaviours and will provide others with the strength to challenge
- To change behaviours of others it is vital to create an environment whereby inappropriate behaviours are challenged.

You keep an open mind and do not prejudge.

- You take time to listen to others and to understand their position on a subject area.
- You are aware of unconscious bias that might exist.
- You make decisions based upon accurate information and check facts prior to making a decision.
- You treat everyone based upon your experience of them rather than prejudging individuals based upon hearsay.

Leadership



We are all positive role models, always demonstrating flexible and resilient leadership.

We are all accountable for our behaviour, decisions, and actions, and challenge all behaviour that falls short of the highest standards.

Example

Your line manager has arranged to conduct an appraisal with you. You have been worried about an upcoming training exercise because you feel that you do not fully understand the new procedure and are concerned that you may let your team down. Your manager has always been helpful and is polite, kind and treats everyone with respect. They also take pride in their work and encourage the team to do the same. You know that they set clear expectations, objectives and continually monitor and support team and individual performance.

During the meeting, your manager encourages open communication and actively listens to your concerns, showing a supportive approach. They take responsibility and use the opportunity to provide wider team development and training. They ensure that they provide you with coaching and mentoring and that ongoing support is available. They have fostered a positive culture in the team, where individual and team wellbeing is seen as a priority and they continue to provide you with the opportunity to discuss your concerns. During the meeting, your manager asks you how you may deal with a similar situation in the future and how you can develop your leadership approach.

Consider and discuss the example above in the context of the principle: Leadership

Therefore, you need to ensure that:

You strive to act as an inspirational role model.

- You demonstrate role model behaviours that are in line with the Core Code of Ethics and your FRS values.
- You consider the needs of individuals and take time to understand their needs.
- You communicate with passion and integrity.
- You use non stigmatising behaviours and language.

You take responsibility for your actions.

- You admit to your mistakes publicly.
- You are comfortable stating when you do not have the answer.
- You are constructive about receiving challenge.

You make decisions based upon accurate information.

- You make decisions based upon sound information rather than hearsay or rumour.
- You look at the facts and follow the evidence.
- You do not prejudge individuals or tasks.

You are mindful of the wellbeing of your colleagues.

- You look after yourself and others.
- You actively look for behaviours that may show people are struggling or need help.
- You show compassion.
- You strive to create an environment where the wellbeing of your teams is a priority.
- You embed processes and services that support the wellbeing of all.

Equality, diversity and Inclusion (EDI)



We continually recognise and promote the value of equality, diversity, and inclusion, both within the FRS and the wider communities in which we serve. We stand against all forms of discrimination, create equal opportunities, promote equality, foster good relations, and celebrate difference.

Example

A member of your team is going through a difficult time and following some discussions they open to you and explain that they have been struggling with their mental health for some time. They have been receiving support from occupational health; however, they do not wish anyone in the team to know about their struggles.

You listen to their concerns and put a plan in place to make reasonable adjustments to their working environment and day to day activities, as the individual and occupational health know that these small changes will have a significant impact upon their working life. These adjustments are made; however, you soon are informed of discontent within the rest of your team with individuals suggesting that you are making special provision for the individual and it is not fair or equal. Some of your team is even suggesting that if the individual cannot perform all of the role in the same way as everyone else then they should be subject to capability. How will you deal with these concerns from the rest of your team?

What does this example demonstrate?

**Consider and discuss the example above in the context of the principle:
EDI**

Therefore, you need to ensure that:

You show compassion and empathy to people you meet.

- You create an environment whereby people are happy to approach you without fear of reprimand or blame.
- You take time to listen and understand.
- You do not prejudge anyone or their circumstances.

You treat people according to their needs.

- You take time to explore all options available.
- You can distinguish between needs and wants.
- You provide support based upon the individual's needs.

You take a proactive approach to opposing discrimination.

- You always challenge discriminatory behaviours.
- You call out inappropriate behaviours whenever they occur.
- You are aware of unconscious bias that may exist.
- You do not use stigmatising language or behaviours.
- You promote two-way dialogue.

You act and make decisions on merit, without prejudice and using the information available.

- You make decisions based upon fact.
- You are not influenced by others when making decisions.
- You follow evidence and information prior to making a decision.

You actively seek or use opportunities to promote equality and diversity.

- You are an ambassador for equality, fairness, and inclusion in everything that you do.
- You actively promote the ethical principles within the Core Code of Ethics, FRS value and behaviours.
- You promote and role model inclusion.