



People Strategy

2025-2028





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Foreword



Alex Waller
Chief Fire Officer
and Chief Executive

Our vision, as outlined in our Community Risk Action Plan (CRMP), is a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies. In order to achieve this, our people must feel proud and motivated to work for an organisation that is connected closely to its communities and be committed to changing, protecting and saving lives.

We genuinely believe that people are our greatest asset and at a time where culture is a high priority across the fire and rescue service nationally, we recognise the significant role colleagues play in shaping the cultural environment for each other and for everyone whom we engage with as a trusted public service organisation.



**Councillor
Stef Nelson**
Chairman, Cheshire
Fire Authority

In times of changing demands, appreciating the value of staff and embracing a changing workforce and working environment is more important than ever before.

The pace of social, economic, technological and environmental change in recent years has put pressure on our Service in many ways, affecting the way we carry out our core duties and how we look after the well-being of our people. Moving forward, we must continue to balance our operational responsibilities with the need to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce, while remaining

responsive to the diverse needs of our communities and embracing new, more modern and smarter ways of working.

Attracting the best people from our diverse communities to work for us is key to enabling us to deliver our strategic people aims and ensuring we consistently provide an excellent experience for them and the communities they support. We remain committed to maintaining our clear focus on diversity and inclusion, and to strengthen our reputation as a compassionate and inclusive workplace. Everyone within our Service is and will continue to be treated fairly, and able to enjoy their work in a welcoming and collaborative environment where they know their contributions make a real difference to people's lives, and that their contributions are recognised, valued and celebrated.

Through this People Strategy and the associated action plan, we will deliver on our commitment to develop a positive, inclusive and fair culture for our staff, while also supporting, developing and enabling them to provide the best possible fire and rescue service to our communities.

Our Core Values and NFCC Leadership Framework

Our Core Values, which were developed by our own staff and are now well embedded, provide a framework for everything we do. They determine how we act, how we carry out our roles and how we deliver a service to our communities. We have also incorporated the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Core Code of Ethics within this model.

In addition, we have adopted the NFCC's Leadership Framework, which underpins our leadership development, recruitment and career progression processes.



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

National and local picture

National

There are a number of external factors that we need to consider in the delivery of our People Strategy. These include the following:

- Economic environment:** The national economy faces demands from several key areas such as health, education and defence; to meet the challenges we face as a society. We will need to be transparent about the budgetary pressures we face and involve staff in designing service improvements and new ways of working.
- Emerging technology:** The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) opens up a range of possibilities to redesign our services, making us more efficient and effective in supporting our staff and communities. The continued drive for more digitisation also presents us with a need to ensure our staff have the necessary skills to work with new technologies.
- Working towards net zero:** We must continue to work hard to reduce our carbon footprint by modernising working practices. Agile working and further investment in communications technology could have a significant impact on our need to drive to work.
- Health and wellbeing:** Wellbeing issues are becoming more complex in our fast paced and challenging world. Access to appropriate healthcare, particularly mental health services, is becoming difficult given the financial pressures on the health service, so we need to support staff to look after their own health and wellbeing, as well as continuing to invest in wellbeing, and plan for bridging that gap.
- Pensions and retirement:** An increasingly older workforce, coupled with the ongoing changes in pensions legislation, will directly impact the number of people we employ. This may result in a loss of expertise over a short period and require greater investment in recruitment and succession planning.



- **Cultural reform:** Following critical reports into several fire and rescue services, there is a clear need for our sector as a whole to reform and improve its culture so that we can ensure we are a modern, professional and inclusive service which is reflective of the community which we serve.

Colleagues at all levels across the Service have a role to play in helping to shape our culture and this is a key focus of our People Strategy.



Local

Some of the areas we need to address include:

- **Representation:** We have worked hard to make our workforce more diverse and inclusive. However, we still have too few firefighters from traditionally under-represented communities. We also need to not only recruit a more diverse workforce but to also provide a platform to enable our staff to progress their careers, thus ensuring more diversity at middle and senior management levels.
- **Succession planning:** We have an ageing workforce and during the life of this strategy several of our senior leaders could retire. There are limited opportunities for middle and senior leaders, particularly in non-operational roles. More needs to be done to support non-operational staff looking for career progression, especially into leadership roles.
- **Local action plans:** We will continue to engage with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), with our next inspection scheduled for 2025. We will also continue conducting staff surveys, with the next survey also planned for 2025. Both of these will generate clear priorities for us to work to that will impact our ways of working and organisational culture.



Our proudest achievements

As a result of our 2022-25 People Strategy, we:

- were recognised by HMICFRS in 2023 as: having “...**well-defined values, which staff understand**”, “**a positive working culture**” and staff who feel “**empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they come across them.**”
- fully implemented the recommendations of HMICFRS’s **Culture and Values Spotlight Report**, with the majority being achieved ahead of time
- entered the prestigious **Top 50 Inclusive Companies** list at number 50 in 2023, rising to 39th a year later
- engaged directly with senior and middle leaders across the organisation as part of our Chief Fire Officer-led **Culture Conversations** initiative, ensuring we recognise the strengths of our culture as well as identifying areas we may want to develop further, in order to move us closer to our mission and our values
- in accordance with a change in legislation, implemented **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks** for all staff, to bolster the trust that Cheshire residents can have in our Service. Prior to 2023 we could only carry out DBS checks on staff in certain roles
- established a **People Board** chaired by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and attended by all heads of department, where the delivery of people-related activity and trends are reviewed along with key performance metrics including a culture dashboard, to ensure we are making positive progress
- regularly achieved the **lowest sickness absence rates** in the country for our operational workforce
- developed and implemented a pilot for **improving the pay and reward** of our on-call operational staff with clear linkages to the improvement of on-call appliance availability during key periods
- developed a unique leadership programme called **Elev8** which aims to remove perceived barriers to promotion for staff, including those from underrepresented backgrounds, with participants achieving considerable success in subsequent promotion processes



Engaging *everyone*

- achieved **improved staff engagement** as evidenced by the 2023 Staff Survey, which resulted in a higher staff engagement score than most other fire and rescue services
- introduced our **Engaging Everyone** framework which outlines how we will engage effectively and meaningfully with all our colleagues
- introduced **electronic appraisals** to streamline the process for managers and staff, provide real time completion data and incorporate wellbeing conversations into performance discussions
- continued to develop our mental health and wellbeing provision through the establishment of our staff-led **Stay Well Network** who provide the driving force behind flagship events such as World Mental Health Day
- made measurable progress in the **recruitment of female and lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT+) staff** and have acted positively and proactively to improve diversity within recruitment
- increased the **diversity of our Service Leadership Team** in terms of female, LGBT+ and ethnic minority representation
- continued to develop and expand our **Wider Horizons** initiative, recognised by HMICFRS as “innovative practice”, to enable fire staff to take ownership of their career pathways, to aid succession planning and to address skills needs within the organisation
- reduced our **gender pay gap** from 19.6% in 2021/22 to 9.6% in 2024/25
- continued to improve arrangements for monitoring **adherence to working time regulations** and implemented a suite of **fatigue management guidance** for all staff groups
- invested considerable time and resources into implementing the complex **McCloud/ Sargeant and Matthews pension remedies** by the required deadlines, while keeping affected staff updated through a variety of communication methods
- improved the pathway for aspiring incident commanders by providing better learning resources through the introduction of a **dedicated information hub**
- expanded the number of our **staff networks** to five, with separate networks for women, staff and volunteers who identify as LGBT+, colleagues from diverse ethnic backgrounds, colleagues with neurodivergence and members, former members or family members of the armed forces.



Related strategies

Including *everyone*

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2025-28

In our workplace:

**Everyone can be themselves**

and feel safe, respected and able to give their best

**Everyone has a voice**

so they can share their unique experiences and shape our Service for the better

**Everyone has a fair opportunity**

to reach their full potential because of their skills and talents, not their backgrounds

Serving our communities by:

**Understanding everyone**

through talking and listening to people from a diverse range of backgrounds

**Meeting the needs of everyone**

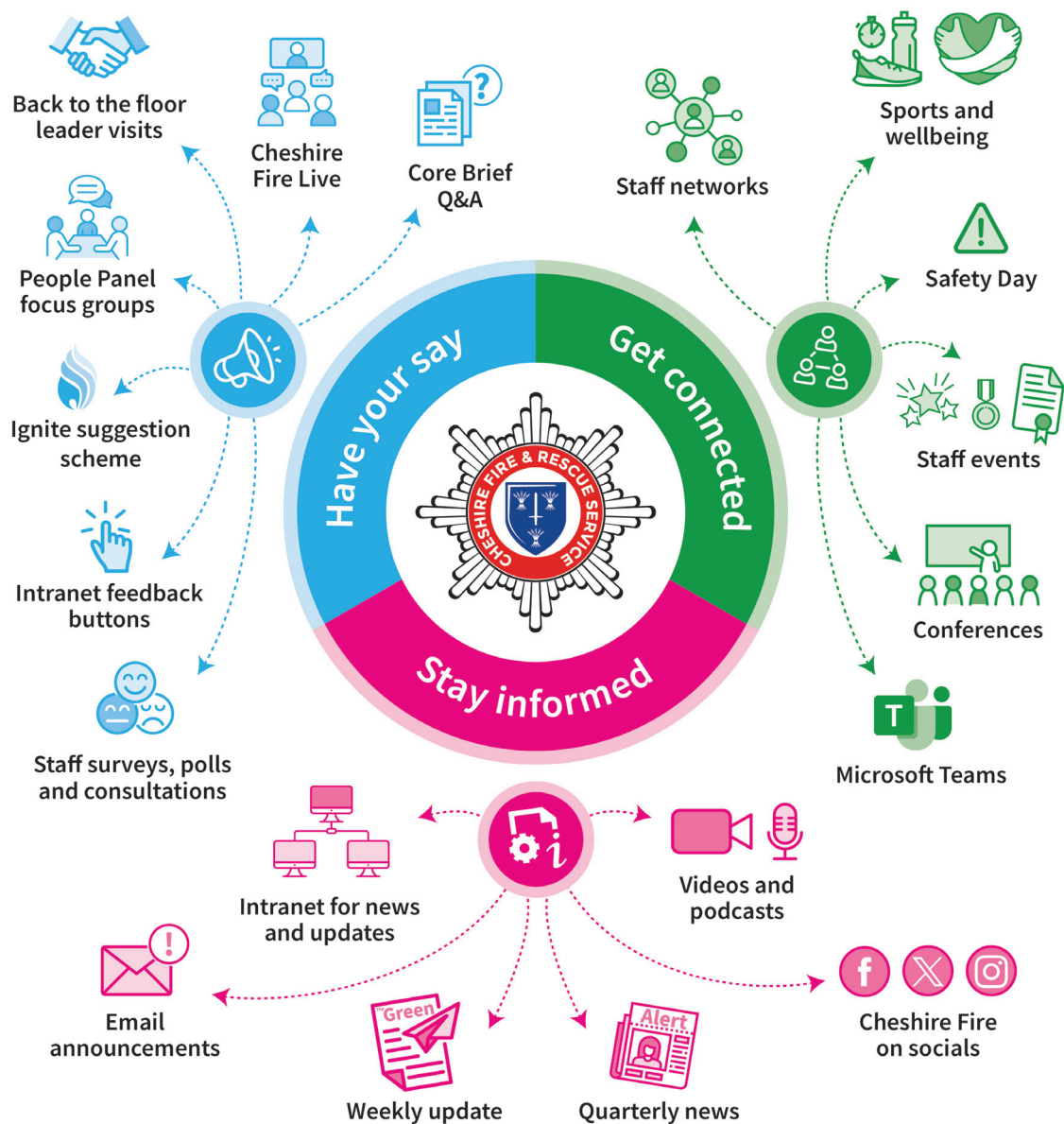
through services that recognise the different risks and challenges people face

**Supporting everyone**

by being proud champions for diversity and inclusion, and strong and visible allies to people who feel underrepresented

Engaging *everyone*

Our Internal Communications and Engagement Strategy 2024-28



“We’re Listening”

Find out the answers to commonly asked questions and how the Service is responding to your ideas and comments on the new **We’re Listening** section of the **Engaging everyone** intranet hub.

Our strategy at a glance

Our People Strategy 2025-28 has been developed under four key themes which will drive the organisation forward to face our future challenges and enable the delivery of our mission, our strategic objectives and broader service-wide improvement.

In addition there is a fifth theme which underpins the delivery of all other themes, outlining how we will use modern digital technology and systems to support our work..





A great place to work

Our ambition is to make our Service a great place to work for all of our staff and a welcoming environment for everyone we engage with.

This theme is all about strengthening our positive culture and reinforcing our Core Values and the standards to which we should all hold ourselves professionally.

We will achieve this by:

- continuing to develop our positive, inclusive and safe culture in line with our vision and values by recognising our existing strengths and **identifying and addressing any potential risks**
- building on the success of our **Culture Conversation** and inviting all staff to participate and pledge their personal actions to continuing to develop a positive and inclusive culture, with further sessions delivered on fire stations
- meaningfully engaging with, listening to, and acting on feedback from our workforce in line with our **Engaging Everyone** framework, ensuring that staff know how their contribution is making a difference
- implementing a robust **professional standards framework** to address HMICFRS's national recommendations in relation to the management and oversight of professional standards, dealing with complaints and addressing confidential disclosures
- ensuring the **Who Do I Turn To?** campaign is fully embedded across the organisation so that everyone is clear how to access support and assist colleagues
- reviewing and promoting our **staff benefits package** to ensure we remain an employer of choice in a competitive market, enabling us to recruit the best talent
- enhancing employee rights, entitlements and protections in line with **new legislation such as the Employment Rights Bill**, not only ensuring we remain legally compliant but that we also provide fair and attractive terms and conditions of employment
- continuing to develop the **metrics we monitor and review** at our People Board to ensure that we remain on a positive trajectory.



Develop excellent leaders

It is imperative that the organisation develops excellent leaders at all levels both for now and for the future, in order to achieve our mission.

However leadership is not just about managing staff, it is about developing everyone in the organisation to reach their maximum potential, and ensuring our leaders exemplify behaviours and high levels of professional competence.

We will achieve this by:

- continuing to develop our **Core Learning Pathways** to ensure individual and organisational development needs are identified and addressed
- reviewing and developing our **leadership development programmes** to ensure they remain fit for purpose
- developing individuals and leaders in new and innovative ways which do not just promote the acquisition of new skills but also prompt **new ways of thinking**
- ensuring we adequately equip **leaders of the future** with the skills and knowledge they need to operate in increasingly complex and collaborative environments, and in light of emerging operational risks
- **developing leadership capability as a mindset** rather than a role, ensuring that everyone in the organisation understands how they can show leadership by leading themselves as well as others
- ensuring that **organisational learning** is captured and factored into everything we do
- in relation to **readiness for promotion**, moving the focus from 'time-served' to increased recognition of individual competence, potential and talent
- continuing to develop and expand our **coaching and mentoring framework**, including opportunities for reverse mentoring to facilitate reciprocal learning.



Diversify our workforce

In support of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, we will endeavour to ensure that all our staff and those we come into contact with are treated equitably, recognising that different groups have unique needs and perspectives that we must be aware of in our decision-making and service provision.

In order to achieve this we must continue our efforts to diversify our organisation at all levels in terms of sex, race and religion, sexual orientation and trans status, age, disability and other protected characteristics.

We will also actively encourage diversity of thought and constructive challenge, and we will also seek to ensure that socio-economic background is not a barrier to recruitment or promotion.

We will achieve this by:

- growing our **staff networks** and empowering them to continue to help shape what we do and how we do it
- developing our **positive action** activity to encourage more applicants from all sections of our communities, especially those which are currently under-represented in our workforce
- building on existing connections with diverse communities in order to **promote the range of career opportunities** available within our organisation
- complying with new **ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting** legislation, and incorporating this into internal performance metrics to drive improvements
- creating more **entry points for younger people** to obtain employment, apprenticeships and work experience within the organisation, in order to build a diverse talent and skills pipeline for the future and increase the percentage of people aged under 30 who work for us
- ensuring pathways exist from our **cadet and youth engagement programmes** into adult volunteering or paid employment opportunities, and explore how we can provide similar opportunities to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds
- ensuring we comply with the recent **UK Supreme Court ruling on definition of sex** in a sensitive, compassionate and collaborative way which recognises the diverse needs and perspectives of our workforce
- exploring opportunities to work with **partner organisations** in order to collaborate on initiatives which could have a positive impact on our efforts to diversify our workforce and promote us as an inclusive employer.



Stay well

The health, safety and wellbeing of our staff is a high priority for us. In order to provide the best fire and rescue service to the communities of Cheshire we must ensure that our staff remain physically and mentally fit and well.

We have developed our approach to supporting the health and wellbeing of our staff in recent years through our Staywell Network, who meet regularly in order to provide direction to our efforts in this area.

We will achieve this by:

- reviewing and re-launching our approach to managing **exposure to traumatic incidents** ensuring that when our staff need it we are able to provide the right support mechanisms for each person
- developing a range of **training interventions** to ensure that managers and staff have an awareness of the signs of poor mental health, and can effectively signpost to further ongoing support
- continuing to run **campaigns**, in conjunction with the Staywell Network, to promote good physical and mental health and wellbeing, using our internal data to target specific groups within our workforce
- utilising real time data within our appraisal system to **pro-actively manage staff wellbeing** and target interventions and support as needed
- ensuring the **health and safety** of our workforce and communities remains a high priority through our Health and Safety Committee
- ensuring that as well as facilitating our operational workforce to stay physically fit enough to meet the demands of their role, that we also make physical activity and fitness inclusive for as many staff as possible, encouraging them to participate in a way that works for them
- reviewing our **occupational health** contract arrangements to ensure the provision of a service which continues to meet our current and future needs
- introducing a pilot for the use of **wellbeing support dogs** within the Service to facilitate a climate where open and meaningful conversations can take place about mental health and wellbeing
- engaging with and promoting national campaigns in relation to key issues such as suicide prevention.



Digital transformation of people-related Services

The four main themes of our People Strategy for the next three years are underpinned by a fifth enabling theme which is to transform the way we deliver people related activity through investment in modern IT systems and smarter ways of working.

As part of this we will explore opportunities to streamline and automate processes and become more efficient in how we deliver this work

We will achieve this by:

- utilising technology to streamline and **reduce inefficiencies and manually intensive admin processes**, in order to focus on adding value through people related activity which supports delivery of Service objectives
- implementing an **Applicant Tracking System (ATS)** to streamline our recruitment and selection processes, enhance the customer experience, and drive performance improvement
- scoping, procuring and launching a **new HR system** to modernise the way we deliver people related services
- exploring the potential of an **in-house payroll system** which could replace existing outsourced arrangements
- implementing the national **Pension Dashboards** initiative
- exploring the feasibility of using **artificial intelligence (AI)** to deliver or enable some people related services
- implementing an **internal people dashboard** for our leaders and managers, as part of a wider Service project looking at a business intelligence platform
- developing the use of systems to ensure we **manage performance and talent** effectively and are more responsive to the development needs of our staff and leaders.

Making it happen

This strategy provides a high-level framework for our people-related activity over the three years spanning 2025-2028. Primarily it will be delivered through an annual action plan, progress against which will be closely monitored.

Scrutiny of progress against the strategy will be undertaken by the Staffing Committee, which will receive an annual update from the Head of People and Organisational Development as the strategic lead for people.

Internally, progress will be monitored via departmental plans and through the People Board which meets quarterly and is chaired by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

We will also engage with our staff and representative bodies through our regular communication and feedback channels in order to seek their views and suggestions, and to help shape the delivery of the activity outlined within the strategy.

Ultimately, this strategy is owned by all departments across the organisation and responsibility for its delivery sits in the key areas:



Cheshire Fire Authority and the Service Leadership Team (SLT)

Members of the Authority and SLT are committed to this strategy and believe that it will support the delivery of our Service's vision and mission. Leading by example, the Fire Authority and SLT will role model the standards expected from all staff, and will ensure scrutiny and oversight of the progress of the strategy and associated action plans.



People and Organisational Development

Our People and Organisational Development team will have an overarching responsibility for enabling, monitoring and providing updates on the strategy and associated plans, as well as determining how the respective priorities will be resourced and actioned.



Our staff

The strategy will only be effective in supporting us to achieve our vision and mission if our staff are engaged with it and committed to making it a reality. Therefore all staff have a part to play in helping us deliver it through their individual contributions, actions and behaviours.





Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service

Our Vision is a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires and other emergencies.

Our Mission is to help create safer communities, to rescue people and protect economic, environmental and community interests.

We will deliver this through our **Core Values**

Being Inclusive

By acting fairly, with integrity, respect and without prejudice.

Doing the Right Thing

By holding each other to account for ensuring high standards of professionalism in everything we do.

Acting with Compassion

By being understanding and offering help to each other and to our communities with warmth, patience and kindness.

Making a Difference

By making an impact in our organisation and in our communities in whatever ways we can, for as many people as we can.



Recognising the Fire and Rescue Service's **Code of Ethics**



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

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