



**Safest People, Safest Places**

## **Combined Fire Authority**

**17 September 2021**

### **Core Code of Ethics**

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## **Report of Assistant Chief Fire Officer**

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### **Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the launch and process of implementation of the Core Code of Ethics which have been produced specifically for Fire and Rescue Services by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC).

### **Background**

2. The Core Code of Ethics is directly aligned to the National Code of Ethics Fire Standard and should be adopted by and embedded within every fire and rescue service (FRS) in England. It sets out the principles and standards of behaviour that will promote, reinforce and support the highest standards from the Members of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority (CDDFRA) and from everyone who works within or on behalf of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS).
3. The Core Code of Ethics contains 5 core principles and describes what the public should expect from the staff of CDDFRS as they deliver day-to-day business and how Members can hold the Service to account. The public expect the FRS to do the right thing in the right way. The principles must be more than words on a page and must become embedded in the way everyone thinks and behaves.
4. The Core Code requires everyone in the sector to prevent unprofessional conduct by questioning behaviour and is something that can be drawn upon to empower us to act when others are failing to meet the standards it articulates.

It gives confidence to challenge or report those who do not meet the required behaviours.

## The Core Ethical Principles

5. The 5 ethical principles outlined in the Core Code of Ethics are:
  - a) **Putting our communities first** - this principle outlines how the interests of the public, the community, and service users are put first.
  - b) **Integrity** - this principle relates to acting with integrity including being open, honest, and consistent in everything that we do.
  - c) **Dignity and Respect** - this principle is about treating people with dignity and respect, making decisions objectively based on evidence without discrimination or bias.
  - d) **Leadership** - this principle is about being positive role models, always demonstrating flexible and resilient leadership. Everyone is accountable for their behaviour, decisions, and actions, and challenge all behaviour that falls short of the highest standards.
  - e) **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** - this principle outlines the need to continually recognise and promote the value of equality, diversity and inclusion, both within the Service and the wider communities it serves. It is about standing against all forms of discrimination, creating equal opportunities, promoting equality, fostering good relations and celebrating difference.
6. In accepting to abide by the Core Code of Ethics, it demonstrates commitment to principles and standards of behaviour that are designed to provide support and guidance. A copy of the Core Code of Ethics is attached as Appendix A and includes a range of examples which are expected to be demonstrated within each of the five principles.

## Personal Responsibility

7. Personal behaviour is central to providing the best service to our communities. Ethical values provide the moral compass by which people live their lives and make decisions, 'doing the right thing' because it's the right thing to do. When decisions are based on good principles and people live by good values, the lives of others and the experiences they have in their roles in society and at work can be improved.
8. Everyone is responsible for their own professional behaviour and to ensure the highest standards possible can be delivered, a good understanding of the contents of the Core Code is necessary.

9. Members and employees are expected to use the Core Code of Ethics to always guide behaviour. This can be done by considering the 5 ethical principles in decision-making, challenging others on their decisions, being transparent and role-modelling the Service's values and behaviours.

### **Your role as Members of CDDFRA**

10. As Members of CDDFRA it is necessary to have an in depth understanding of the Core Code in order to hold senior leaders to account in the running of CDDFRS, and as such have additional corporate responsibilities which are outlined below:
  - a) Members have an individual and collective responsibility for the organisation. Each Member 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.
  - b) Members should ensure the organisation is financially responsible and properly managed to protect and enhance the interests of the organisation, be conscious of seeking value for money and be accountable to the public on how money is spent.
  - c) Members should be assured that the organisation complies within the law governing its operations. This includes our actions in a broader social context and the impact of the organisation on society.
  - d) Members must be prepared, if necessary, to express disagreement with senior leaders of CDDFRS where they consider the proposed course of action is not the right thing to do.
  - e) Members must not take improper advantage of their position on CDDFRA to gain, directly or indirectly, a personal advantage or an advantage for any associated person which might cause detriment to the organisation.
  - f) Personal interests and those of associated persons, must not take precedence over those of the organisation's partners generally. Members should seek to avoid conflicts of interest wherever possible. Full and prior disclosure of any conflict, or potential conflict, must be made and recorded where required.
  - g) Members must not make improper use of information acquired as part of CDDFRA or disclose, or allow to be disclosed, information confidential to the organisation. This prohibition applies irrespective of whether Members or any associated person would gain directly or indirectly a personal advantage or whether the organisation would be harmed. Members 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 organisation or is required by law. This is balanced by seeking to ensure our commitment to transparency is honoured and the Freedom of Information to our customers is fully supported.

11. To further support the above, Section 13 of the CDDFRA Constitution requires all Members at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Authority to sign a form entitled "Notification by a Member of a Local Authority of Pecuniary and Other Interests, Localism Act 2011, s 29 (1)" which seeks to identify and confirm any conflicts of interest and further supports the ethical principles. Members are also requested to complete a Related Party Transaction Form as part of the external audit of the Service on an annual basis, aligned to the reporting of our Statement of Accounts.
12. The Authority's Constitution was amended to include the Core Code of Ethics, and which was agreed by Members at the AGM in June 2021.

### **Breaches of the Core Code**

13. Members and all employees of CDDFRS have an obligation to question the conduct of colleagues that they believe falls below the expected standards and, if necessary, challenge, report or take action against such conduct.
14. Members should raise any concerns they have with the Monitoring Officer to the Fire Authority who will ensure appropriate action is taken. Further information is included in the Code of Conduct.

### **Implementation Plan**

15. Following publication, a plan was developed to implement and embed the Core Code of Ethics into the Authority and everything that the FRS and its employees do. The plan will ensure effective communication with Members and staff to develop an understanding of and outline the expectations of the Core Code.
16. Progress of the implementation plan will be monitored by the Service's Performance and Programme Board (PPB) and is expected to be complete in March 2022. By this point it is expected the following will be achieved:
  - a) Members and all staff to demonstrate awareness of and record compliance with the Core Code of Ethics.
  - b) Members and line managers are able to hold employees to account over ethical behaviour.
  - c) Compliance achieved against the National Code of Ethics Fire Standard.

### **Compliance for Members**

17. Members of CDDFRA are required to commit to respect and follow the five principles as set out in the Core Code in their service to the public. Members are also required to challenge inappropriate behaviour that does not meet the five ethical principles.
18. Each Member will be asked to sign a record to state they understand the Core Code of Ethics and will abide by these in their day-to-day activities. The documentation requiring signature will be sent to each Member individually and

on return will be held by our Governance Team, this will be renewed on an annual basis at the AGM.

19. Any deputies at Authority meetings will be asked to read the Core Code before attending and sign a record to demonstrate they are aware of the behaviour expected at our meetings.

## **Recommendations**

20. Members are asked to:
  - a) **Note** and **comment** on the contents of this report.
  - b) **Agree** to the adoption and implementation of the Core Code of Ethics.