

A LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR FIRE AND RESCUE

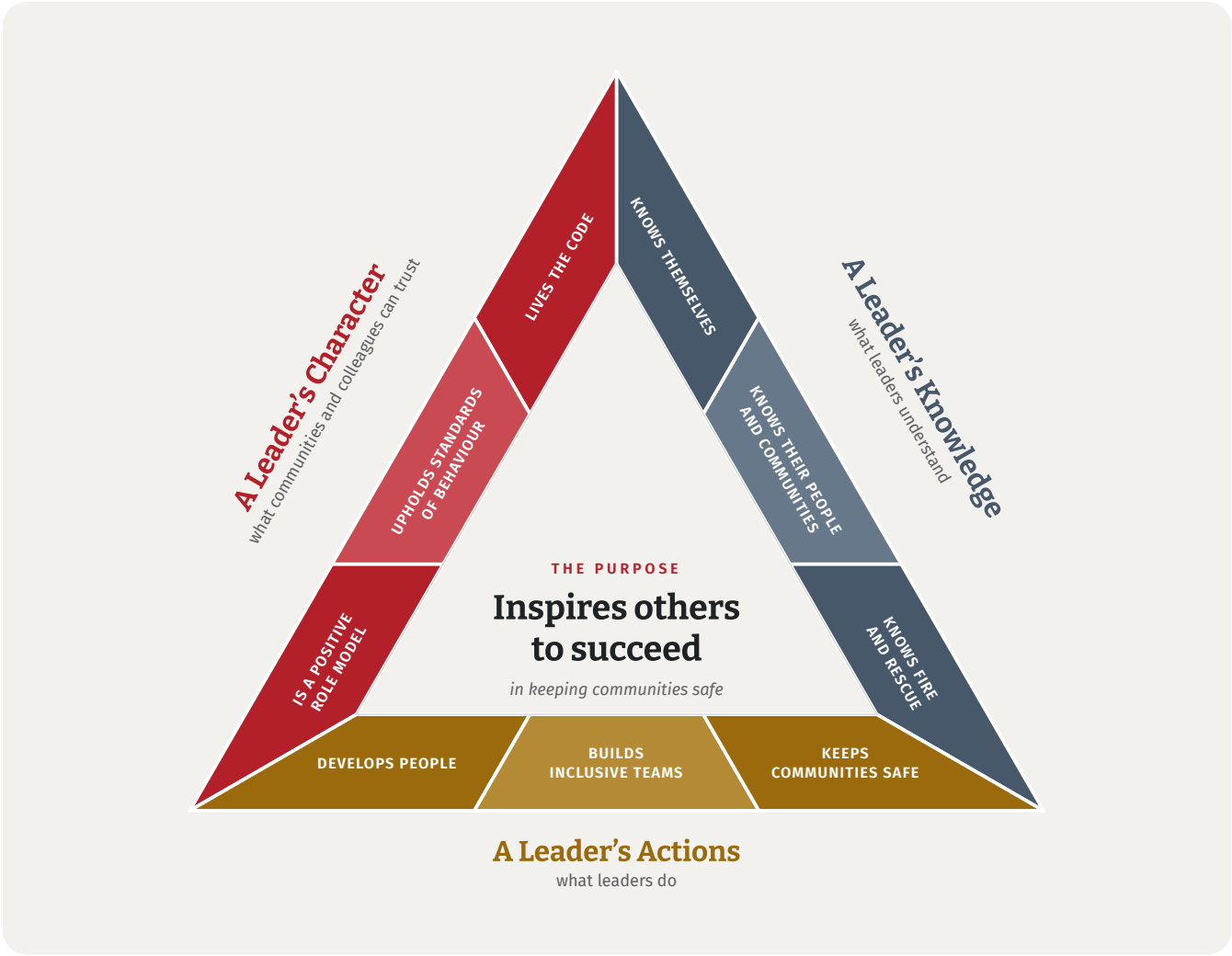
# The Courage to Lead

Character, knowledge and action: the leadership behaviours that keep communities safe and make every station, control room and office a place where everyone belongs.

VERSION 1.0 · 2026

MAPPED TO THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

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## ABOUT THIS FRAMEWORK

This framework describes the leadership that communities and colleagues can expect of everyone who works in fire and rescue: the character leaders bring, the knowledge they apply and the actions they take, shown in observable behaviours at every level. It is written for every role, wholetime and on-call, operational and professional, in fire control and at headquarters, because leadership is not a rank. It is how people conduct themselves and how they enable others.

It is designed to be used, not filed: in recruitment and promotion, in appraisal and one-to-ones, in coaching and development, in debriefs, and in the evidence a service gives its communities, its governing body and its inspectorate about its culture. Any service may adopt it as it stands or make it its own; page 47 shows how.

## ALIGNED TO THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

This framework is mapped, dimension by dimension and competency by competency, to the National Leadership Framework (NLF), a research- and evidence-informed standard for leadership. The NLF was developed from a comparative review of leadership frameworks across sectors, including the emergency services, and more than a thousand academic and practitioner sources. That is why the leadership themes fire and rescue already recognises, and the five principles of the Core Code of Ethics, map into this framework in full (pages 16 and 20). It complements the sector's own leadership products; it does not replace them. The NLF's framework, wording and logo are the intellectual property of the National Leadership Framework CIC; the alignment annex on page 45 shows the mapping.



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**How to read the behaviours.** Every behaviour in this framework begins with an active verb and describes conduct another person could observe. Where the law, guidance, command, policy, budgets or rank appear, the behaviour is always what the leader does as a person in that context: explains, role-models, invites, thanks, challenges, backs, steps in only when. The duties and the processes belong to law and policy; the leadership belongs to the people.

**A note on words.** "The service" means the fire and rescue service the reader works in. "Colleagues" means everyone who works in it: wholetime and on-call firefighters, fire control, prevention, protection and support staff, and volunteers. "The watch" stands for any watch, crew, on-call section, control room team or department. "The Core Code" is the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services.



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FOREWORD

# Physical courage was never in doubt. This framework is about the other kind.

People in fire and rescue go towards what others run from. They do it at three in the morning, in other people's worst moments, and most of them would say it is simply the job. The public knows this, which is why the service is trusted as few institutions are.

That trust has been tested. In recent years independent reviews, the inspectorate and two public inquiries have described a service whose people showed great bravery and whose leadership too often let them, and the public, down. Not through lack of skill, but through behaviour that was tolerated, concerns that were not heard, and lessons that were written down and not acted on.

The courage those reports ask for is a different kind from the courage it takes to enter a burning building. It is the courage to tell a friend on the watch that a joke was not a joke. To say on the incident ground that a plan does not look right. To report a colleague. To tell a chief officer what the front line really thinks. To be the chief officer who hears it. It is harder than it sounds, because it risks the thing people in this service value most: belonging.

This framework describes that leadership in plain behaviours, for every role and every level. It starts from what the sector has already chosen for itself, the Core Code of Ethics and the leadership themes it has worked to for years, and sets them in a structure with character at its foundation. It is not a description of an ideal leader. It is a description of what colleagues and communities have a right to see.

Everyone who works in fire and rescue is invited to read it, to find themselves in it, and to hold every leader, at every level, to it.

*A service adopting this framework may replace this foreword with its own.*



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It takes one kind of courage to walk into a burning building, and another to tell a friend on the watch that a joke was not a joke. A service needs both.



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1.0

# Purpose of the Framework

This framework gives everyone who works in fire and rescue a shared language and a clear standard for leadership. It rests on the belief that the quality of leadership decides the culture of a service, that culture decides how people are treated and how well communities are protected, and that leadership exists at every level: on the pump, on the call, on a fire safety visit and in the boardroom.

The framework has been shaped by leadership research, by the values and standards the sector already works to, and by the public evidence of what has gone wrong where leadership failed. It recognises that leadership is a career-long journey, asking for adaptability, reflection and continuous learning. No two careers are the same, and much of what is described here will already be familiar: leadership begins long before anyone is given a team or a rank.

At its core, the framework exists to strengthen leadership practice by making clear the values, knowledge and behaviours that enable individuals and teams to lead well. It establishes a shared understanding of what good leadership looks like in fire and rescue, and a consistent approach to developing it at every stage of a career, in every role.

At the individual level, it supports growth through reflection, feedback, coaching and mentoring. It helps leaders at every stage recognise their strengths, identify areas to develop and strengthen their practice over time.

At the level of the service, it gives a chief officer, a people team or a governing body a deeper understanding of leadership culture. By identifying strengths, patterns and gaps across stations and departments, a service can target development where it is needed and show its communities and its inspectorate how leadership serves the public.

It is deliberately about leadership, not management and not command. The sector has detailed guidance for both. What the reviews found missing was not a procedure. It was behaviour, and behaviour is what this framework describes.



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THE FRAMEWORK IS INTENDED TO GIVE A SERVICE

1. **Shared understanding**
   of effective leadership across every role, duty system, station and department

2. **Common values**
   the Core Code of Ethics made visible as the everyday conduct of leaders

3. **Reflection and growth**
   through self-assessment, coaching, mentoring and feedback at every career stage

4. **Recruitment to succession**
   informing how a service recruits, promotes, appraises, develops and plans ahead

5. **Clarity**
   about the behaviours expected of leaders, and the behaviours that undermine leadership

6. **A safe, inclusive culture**
   shown as leadership conduct, not only as policy, training or process

7. **One language**
   for operational and professional colleagues, at every level, in the same words

8. **Evidence**
   for communities, governing bodies and inspectors of how the service is led



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1.1

# Why Leadership Matters in Fire and Rescue

Fire and rescue is a service of teams. Almost nothing it does, from a home safety visit to a major incident, is done by one person alone, and nothing shapes a team more than how it is led.

The service is built on small, close groups: a watch that eats, trains and faces danger together, an on-call crew drawn from one village, a control room team on a long night. That closeness is the service's great strength. It produces trust, loyalty and a willingness to go further for one another than most workplaces ever see.

It is also where the risk lies. A close team with good leadership includes, protects and tells the truth. A close team with poor leadership closes ranks, tests newcomers and falls silent. The culture reviews of recent years did not find a service full of bad people. They found good people in teams where the wrong things had become normal and nobody with standing had said stop.

Leadership matters on the incident ground too. Guidance, equipment and training matter enormously, but at the moment of decision what protects crews and the public is a commander who listens, a firefighter who feels able to say that something has changed, and partners who share one picture of the risk.

It matters to the public in ways they rarely see. Communities are safer when a service prevents fires as seriously as it fights them, when it listens to residents who are worried about their building, and when it looks like the people it serves. Each of those depends on what leaders value, notice and reward.

Leadership in fire and rescue is a public trust. This framework sets out how that trust is kept.



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1.2

# What the Reviews Keep Finding

Since 2019 the leadership and culture of fire and rescue have been examined by public inquiries, by the inspectorate and by independent reviews. They looked at different services, for different reasons. What they say about leadership is strikingly consistent.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade**<br>2022 | Drew on the accounts of some 2,000 staff. Found bullying, misogyny and racism that had been tolerated for years, and people who did not trust the service to act if they spoke. |
| **Values and culture in fire and rescue services**<br>HMICFRS, 2023 | Examined every service in England. Found bullying, harassment and discrimination to some degree in all of them, a positive culture where leaders were visible, open and fair, and supervisors and middle managers who needed better preparation for leading people. |
| **Independent culture review, South Wales**<br>2024 | Found tolerance of sexual harassment and discrimination, weak handling of discipline, and failings of management at every level. Similar reviews followed in other services. |
| **Standards of behaviour: the handling of misconduct**<br>HMICFRS, 2024 | Found early signs of improvement, but too much unacceptable behaviour, staff who lacked confidence to raise concerns, and services that did not learn from their own misconduct cases. |
| **Grenfell Tower Inquiry**<br>PHASE 1, 2019; PHASE 2, 2024 | Found firefighters of great courage let down by preparation and training. Attributed the failure to learn the lessons of an earlier fatal fire to a lack of effective leadership, too much emphasis on process and a culture of complacency. |
| **Manchester Arena Inquiry**<br>VOLUME 2, 2022 | Found that the fire and rescue service did not arrive when it could have helped most. Pointed to failures of communication between agencies, of joint working and of decision-making under uncertainty. |
| **State of Fire and Rescue**<br>HMICFRS, ANNUAL | Has repeatedly asked services to improve leadership at every level and to build a positive culture, and now looks at leadership at all levels in every inspection. |

**The pattern.** Two kinds of finding recur. The first is about how people treat one another: behaviour that was known about and tolerated, and people who did not believe it was safe to speak. The second is about learning: warnings that were available and not acted on, knowledge held in one part of a service that never reached another, and process valued above judgement. Both are failures of leadership rather than of skill or bravery, and neither was confined to one rank.

**The response so far.** The sector has not stood still. It has a Core Code of Ethics, professional standards for leading the service and for leading and developing people, a national coaching and mentoring offer, supervisory leadership development and plans for a College of Fire and Rescue. The inspectorate has reported early signs of improvement.

**What this framework adds.** It writes the lessons as behaviours that can be seen, practised and assessed, and places them where they belong. Challenging what has become normal is in Challenges What Others Tolerate (01). Refusing to close ranks is in Is Loyal to Colleagues and Communities (04). Stopping banter and initiation is in Acts with Decency (08). Following a lesson through is in Takes Ownership (11). Sharing risk-critical knowledge is in Brings Operational and Professional Expertise (21). Protecting whoever raised a concern is in Makes It Safe to Speak Up (28).

The findings above are summarised from the published reports, which are listed on page 46. They are cited as evidence for the whole sector and not to single out any service.



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1.3

# What Fire and Rescue Is Held Accountable To

A fire and rescue service answers to the law, to national standards, to an inspectorate and to the public above all. Every one of those expectations is, at root, an expectation about the conduct of people. This framework is how a service meets them through leadership rather than through process alone.

Law, standards, guidance and policy are essential. They are the structure of a safe and accountable service. But structure does not act. People act. A code of ethics is only as good as the watch manager who lives it in the mess room. A speaking-up procedure is only as good as the manager who hears the concern. Operational guidance is only as good as the judgement, and the honesty, of the people applying it.

That is why this framework keeps leadership distinct from management and from command. Running a process is management. Holding a rank is authority. Explaining why a procedure exists, modelling it, thanking the colleague who raised a concern, owning the outcome when something fails: that is leadership, and it is what turns a sound standard into a safe service. The expectations below are the main ones for services in England; page 44 shows which competencies most directly support them.

**The Core Code of Ethics**
Five principles for everyone in fire and rescue in England, built on the Seven Principles of Public Life, with a Fire Standard that expects services to embed them.

**The Fire Standards**
Professional standards for services in England, including Leading the Service and Leading and Developing People, which set out what is expected of leaders and of how people are led.

**Inspection**
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services judges each service on effectiveness, efficiency and how well it looks after its people, including its culture and its leadership at all levels.

**The law and the National Framework**
The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England set the duties of fire and rescue authorities and what government expects of them.

**Safety**
The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the safe person principles that sit beneath every operational decision, and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 under which services protect the public.

**National Operational Guidance and JESIP**
The sector's shared guidance for operations and incident command, and the joint doctrine through which the emergency services work together.

**Equality and safeguarding**
The Equality Act 2010 and the public sector equality duty; safeguarding duties towards children and adults at risk, met in homes, at incidents and within the service.

**Reform**
The recommendations of public inquiries and the Government's work towards a College of Fire and Rescue, consulted on in 2026, to raise professional standards and strengthen leadership.



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1.4

# What Leadership Is, and Is Not

Leadership, management and command are three different functions. Most leaders in fire and rescue perform all three, sometimes within the same hour, and they support one another. But they are not the same thing, and a uniformed service is where they are most easily confused.

### Leadership

Influencing people, shaping culture, developing individuals and teams, creating purpose and direction, building commitment and enabling performance. Leadership is shared across the service; leading is the part each person plays.

### Management

Planning, organising, coordinating, monitoring and controlling resources and activities. Rotas, budgets, fleet, training records, performance data and policy. Essential, and not what this framework describes.

### Command

The legitimate authority to decide and direct, and the accountability that goes with it: the incident commander, the rank, the post. A context in which leadership happens, not a substitute for it.

**The rule applied to every line.** Duties, processes and rank are contexts in which leadership happens. The leadership is the behaviour of the person in them: how they model their character, and how they influence and enable others, while doing these things. So this framework never says “monitors compliance”, “allocates resources” or “directs the crew”. It says “explains why a safety procedure exists”, “raises breaches promptly and thanks colleagues who do the same”, “backs a reasonable decision made within intent and guidance”.

**Command has its place.** An incident needs clear, assertive command, and this framework does not question it. It asks something different: that the directness an incident demands is not carried into the mess room, the one-to-one or the meeting, where listening and persuasion achieve what rank cannot. The best commanders already know that a crew which trusts them, and will tell them the truth, is safer.

**Everyone can lead.** Leadership is a function of the whole service, uniting people around a common purpose. It does not depend on rank or role. The firefighter who tells a crew manager that conditions have changed is leading. The control operator who questions an address is leading. The new recruit who says a comment was out of order is leading. Excellent followership, contributing to the team’s leadership from within it, is itself a form of leadership this framework names and values.

**Leadership is grounded in values and shown in behaviour.** It can be seen, discussed, coached and developed. That is why the framework is written as observable behaviours rather than traits, and why development is lifelong and goes well beyond a course.



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2.0

# The Definition and the Framework

A DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP

**A combination of a leader's character, knowledge and action, displayed through their behaviours, that inspires others to succeed in keeping communities safe.**

The definition draws on the National Leadership Framework's definition, itself adapted from one proven in the most demanding environments: leadership as the combination of character, knowledge and action that inspires others to succeed. It keeps the three parts and the insistence that leadership is displayed through behaviours, and it names what fire and rescue is for.

The three domains are deliberately few. Character is what communities and colleagues can trust: the Code leaders live, the standards they uphold and the example they set. Knowledge is what leaders understand: themselves, their people and communities, and fire and rescue. Action is what leaders do: developing people, building inclusive teams and keeping communities safe. Adding domains for management, command or operational delivery would blur the line between who a leader is, what they know and what they do.

Each domain has three dimensions, nine in all. Beneath them sit 35 competencies and 357 observable behaviours. At the centre is the purpose of all of it: to inspire others to succeed in keeping communities safe.

## EIGHT PRINCIPLES THAT UNDERPIN THE FRAMEWORK

1. Leadership, management and command are separate, mutually supporting functions.
2. Leadership is shared across the service; leading is individual.
3. Everyone can contribute to leadership, at every level, whatever their rank or role.
4. Leader development is lifelong, grown through experience, relationships and reflection.
5. Development goes beyond training: it needs practice, feedback and a culture that supports learning.
6. Leadership practice is informed by evidence, evaluation and proportionate assurance.
7. Effective leadership is grounded in values, which guide judgement, behaviour and relationships.
8. Leadership involves character, knowledge and action, expressed through observable behaviours.

### WHY THE COURAGE TO LEAD

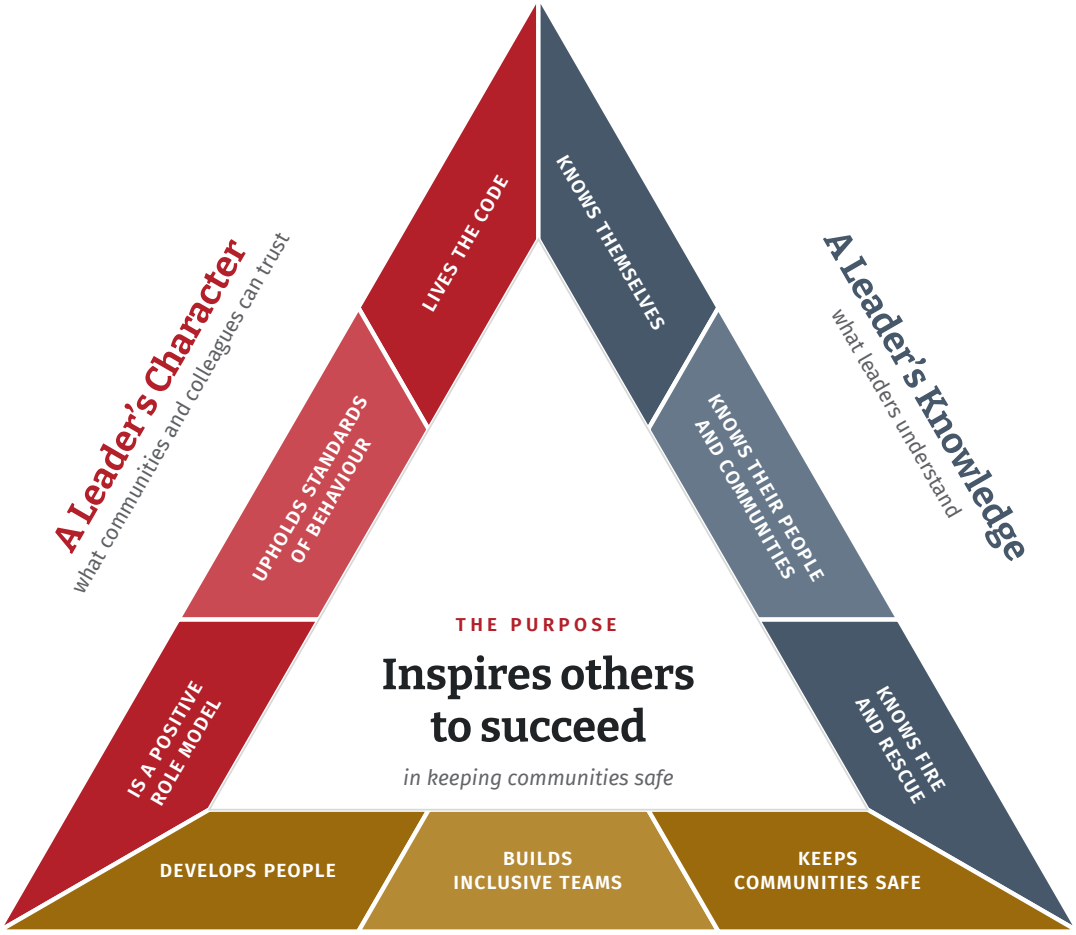
Nobody doubts the physical courage of people in fire and rescue. The courage this framework asks for is moral: to challenge a friend, to admit a mistake, to question a plan, to hear bad news and act on it. It is the first competency and the thread through all the others, and each level of leadership in section 6 says what it means in that sphere.



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THE LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

# Three domains. Nine dimensions. One purpose.




## A Leader's Character

What communities and colleagues can trust. The Code leaders live, the standards they uphold and the example they set.

## A Leader's Knowledge

What leaders understand. Themselves, their people and communities, and fire and rescue.

## A Leader's Actions

What leaders do. Developing people, building inclusive teams and keeping communities safe.



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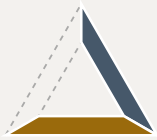
2.1

# Why a Triangle

Three domains of equal weight, each depending on the other two, make a triangle. It is the simplest shape that will stand, and it stops standing the moment one side is removed. That is the whole argument of this framework.

Leadership is not character alone, or knowledge alone, or action alone. A leader of fine character who does not understand their people or their profession will be liked and ineffective. A knowledgeable, energetic leader without character will get results and do damage. A leader with character and knowledge who does not act changes nothing.

People in fire and rescue will recognise the shape from the first weeks of their training, where a triangle shows the three things a fire needs and teaches that removing any one of them puts it out. The parallel is useful and is offered no further than that: leadership, too, needs all three of its elements present at once, and fails when one is missing. The examples below are drawn in general terms from what the reviews found.



WITHOUT CHARACTER

### Knowledge and action without character

A watch can be technically excellent and fast to respond, and still be a place where a new firefighter is humiliated and nobody says a word. Competence without character is what the culture reviews found.



WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

### Character and action without knowledge

A leader can be principled and decisive, and still commit crews to a plan that does not fit the building in front of them. Good intent does not replace understanding of risk, of people or of oneself.



WITHOUT ACTION

### Character and knowledge without action

A service can know exactly what went wrong at an earlier fire, and hold the right values, and still not change. A lesson identified and never applied is the pattern the public inquiries describe.

**Reading the graphic.** Each side of the triangle is a domain, made of three dimensions. Character is drawn in red because it is the foundation and because moral courage is the thread of the framework. The sides meet at mitred corners because the domains are joined, not stacked: Lives the Code meets Knows Themselves at the apex, and both rest on what leaders do.

**The space in the middle.** The centre is deliberately open. It holds the purpose, inspiring others to succeed, which no single competency delivers and all of them serve. It is the reason for the structure, in the way that a building is for the space inside it.



**The same triangle at every level.** The domains stay constant as responsibility grows; what changes is the reach of a leader's behaviour. The four levels in section 6 are shown as the same triangle widening, from leading yourself to leading the service. Behaviour is what sustains leadership once it has started, which is why every competency in this framework is written as conduct that can be seen.



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2.2

# Command and Leadership

Incident command has national guidance, training and assessment of its own. This framework does not add to it. It shows the leadership behaviours that make command work.

## THE DECISION CONTROL PROCESS, AND THE COMPETENCIES THAT CARRY EACH STAGE

### Situation

Gathering and understanding incident, resource and hazard information.

- 16 Questions Their Own Thinking
- 17 Notices What Is Not Said
- 21 Brings Operational and Professional Expertise
- 22 Knows Their Communities and Their Risks

### Plan

Setting objectives and choosing tactics from a shared picture of what is happening.

- 32 Sets Clear Purpose and Intent
- 34 Makes Sound Decisions Under Pressure
- 30 Communicates with Clarity

### Decision controls

A rapid check that the decision is appropriate and safe, and that the benefit justifies the risk.

- 16 Questions Their Own Thinking
- 07 Acts Lawfully and Safely
- 34 Makes Sound Decisions Under Pressure

### Action

Communicating the plan and controlling its delivery.

- 30 Communicates with Clarity
- 33 Empowers Within Clear Intent
- 29 Builds One Team Across Every Role

### Active monitoring

Watching for change throughout, and hearing it from anyone who sees it first.

- 28 Makes It Safe to Speak Up
- 34 Makes Sound Decisions Under Pressure
- 31 Sustains High Performance

## THE PRINCIPLES FOR JOINT WORKING

| | |
|---|---|
| **Co-locate** | 35 Works Jointly with Partners |
| **Communicate** | 30 Communicates with Clarity · 35 Works Jointly with Partners |
| **Co-ordinate** | 32 Sets Clear Purpose and Intent · 35 Works Jointly with Partners |
| **Jointly understand risk** | 22 Knows Their Communities and Their Risks · 34 Makes Sound Decisions Under Pressure |
| **Shared situational awareness** | 17 Notices What Is Not Said · 30 Communicates with Clarity |

**Initiative, within intent and guidance.** National guidance on incident command no longer provides for operational discretion to depart from procedure. Empowers Within Clear Intent (33) is written accordingly. It asks leaders to give clear intent, to trust judgement inside it, to want to be told at once when a plan does not fit what crews can see, and to back a reasonable decision made within guidance. It does not invite anyone to set guidance aside.



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2.3

# Built on What the Sector Already Values

Fire and rescue has worked to a national description of leadership since 2017. At the time of writing it is being refreshed. This framework does not depend on the structure or wording of any one edition. It carries the themes that have run through the sector's leadership work throughout and that any future version is likely to keep.

The National Leadership Framework was developed from a comparative review of leadership frameworks across sectors, the emergency services among them, and more than a thousand sources. The concepts those frameworks share are the ones it places most confidence in. The practical consequence is that the leadership themes fire and rescue recognises are already part of the NLF's foundations, and each is carried here by named competencies.

What this framework adds is structure and precision. It gives character a domain of its own, where earlier descriptions spread it across others. It separates leadership from management, so behaviours can be developed without being confused with tasks. It names what the reviews found missing: moral courage, psychological safety, followership and the refusal to close ranks. And it is mapped to a standard shared with other sectors, so a service can be independently assured against it.

## Sixteen leadership themes of the sector

AND THE COMPETENCIES THAT CARRY THEM

| | |
|---|---|
| **Ethics and values** | 01 Challenges What Others Tolerate · 02 Acts with Integrity · 07 Acts Lawfully and Safely · 09 Acts Professionally On and Off Duty |
| **Inclusion and diversity** | 03 Treats Everyone with Dignity and Respect · 08 Acts with Decency · 18 Understands How Their Team Works · 20 Understands Culture, Including Their Own · 29 Builds One Team Across Every Role |
| **Wellbeing and mental health** | 06 Leads with Compassion · 13 Shares the Load and the Credit · 15 Stays Composed Under Pressure |
| **Self-awareness and personal impact** | 10 Leads with Humility · 14 Knows Their Impact · 19 Builds Trust and Resolves Conflict |
| **Learning from mistakes; a learning organisation** | 10 Leads with Humility · 11 Takes Ownership · 16 Questions Their Own Thinking · 25 Never Stops Learning · 31 Sustains High Performance |
| **Coaching, mentoring and talent** | 26 Coaches with Support and Challenge · 27 Grows Future Leaders · 13 Shares the Load and the Credit |
| **Leadership at every level** | 29 Builds One Team Across Every Role · 33 Empowers Within Clear Intent · 27 Grows Future Leaders |
| **Open, two-way communication** | 17 Notices What Is Not Said · 28 Makes It Safe to Speak Up · 30 Communicates with Clarity |
| **Community outcomes and value for the public** | 05 Puts Communities First · 22 Knows Their Communities and Their Risks · 32 Sets Clear Purpose and Intent |
| **Evidence-based decisions and risk** | 16 Questions Their Own Thinking · 22 Knows Their Communities and Their Risks · 34 Makes Sound Decisions Under Pressure |
| **Working across boundaries** | 12 Leads by Influence, Not Rank · 35 Works Jointly with Partners |
| **Continuous improvement, innovation and change** | 24 Understands How the Service Works · 31 Sustains High Performance · 33 Empowers Within Clear Intent |
| **Accountability and ownership** | 11 Takes Ownership · 24 Understands How the Service Works |
| **Vision and the long-term view** | 23 Understands the National Picture · 32 Sets Clear Purpose and Intent |
| **Operational and professional competence** | 21 Brings Operational and Professional Expertise |
| **Being a role model and ambassador** | 04 Is Loyal to Colleagues and Communities · 08 Acts with Decency · 09 Acts Professionally On and Off Duty · 12 Leads by Influence, Not Rank |

**The four levels.** Leading Yourself, Leading Others, Leading the Function and Leading the Service are names the sector already uses, and are kept. When the refreshed national framework is published, a service can map it to these themes and competencies without changing anything in this document.



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2.4

# Using the Framework

The framework is a developmental tool, not a checklist or a compliance instrument. It supports reflection, feedback, coaching and leadership development over time. Leadership development is not linear: every leader will show different strengths across different dimensions depending on role, experience and context.

| 3 | 9 | 35 | 357 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Domains** Character, Knowledge, Action | **Dimensions** Three within each domain | **Competencies** Each with a one-sentence descriptor | **Behaviours** Observable, active, transferable |

**Mutually reinforcing.** Each behaviour sits where it is most strongly evidenced, but behaviours are not meant to be read or applied in isolation. Reflection strengthens decisions, relationships strengthen influence, expertise strengthens credibility. Empathy sits in Character and underpins the whole framework; communication is a competency in its own right and runs through every other.

**Levels.** The domains stay constant; their application shifts with responsibility, risk and complexity. Section 6 shows how leadership changes across four levels. Not every behaviour carries equal weight at every level, and misjudging behaviour against context is one of the ways leadership climates turn toxic.

**Everyone.** The framework applies to every role. It makes no distinction between the leadership expected of an operational colleague and of a professional or support colleague at the same level, and it is written so that both can be developed together. Page 40 shows what it asks in on-call sections, fire control and professional functions.

**Alongside competence.** Operational and technical competence is assessed through the sector's own standards and guidance. This framework sits beside them as the description of how a competent person leads. A service needs both, and should not promote on one alone.

**Alongside the Core Code.** The Core Code says what everyone in the service must uphold. This framework describes, behaviour by behaviour, what upholding it looks like for someone who leads, and how that develops across a career.

**A note on judgement.** Not every behaviour is needed in equal measure in every situation. A commander in the first minutes of an incident needs composure and clear direction more than a coaching conversation; the same leader at the debrief afterwards should be having that conversation. Reading the moment is itself part of the framework.



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USING THE FRAMEWORK

# The behaviours that undermine leadership

This framework describes the leadership fire and rescue wants to see. It also recognises the behaviours that undermine it, and expects everyone to recognise and challenge them. Naming them helps people spot the early signs of a toxic climate in any watch, station, department or leadership team.

- Narcissistic
- Authoritarian
- Abusive
- Manipulative
- Arrogance
- Unpredictable
- Intimidating
- Self-serving
- Incompetence (refusing to delegate or learn)
- Micromanagement
- Bullying
- Paranoia
- Favouritism
- Deceitfulness
- Lack of accountability
- Resistance to change
- Lack of empathy
- Isolationism

Every competency in this framework works against at least two of these behaviours, and each competency card shows which. Five are built to counter the patterns that the reviews found most often: **Challenges What Others Tolerate** against the silence that lets bullying and favouritism become normal; **Is Loyal to Colleagues and Communities** against closed ranks and the protection of reputation; **Acts with Decency** against banter, initiation and exclusion; **Makes It Safe to Speak Up** against intimidation and the fear of consequences; and **Takes Ownership** against blame and lessons that are recorded and not learned.

**The sector's own warning signs.** The sector's leadership guidance has long described behaviours that signal a leader may need support: inconsistency, blaming others, avoiding difficult conversations, stereotyping, working in isolation, dismissing ideas, overlooking inappropriate behaviour. Each is a milder form of a behaviour named above and is countered by the same competencies. They are prompts for a development conversation, not a charge sheet.

**Accountability and kindness together.** A culture that never holds anyone to account is as unsafe as one that blames. The framework asks leaders to respond to honest error with understanding (06), to treat a near miss as learning (28), and equally to deal with poor behaviour early and to hold people to account for conduct (11, 26). Fairness is what joins the two.

**How services use it.** In recruitment and promotion, in appraisal and one-to-ones, in the design of leadership programmes, in debriefs, in staff surveys and culture reviews, and in the evidence given to governing bodies and inspectors. Section 7 sets out these uses and the policy statement that sits behind them.

> **Challenge is everyone's job.** The Core Code asks everyone to challenge behaviour that falls short of it. This framework asks leaders for one thing more: to make that challenge safe for others, and to be seen to welcome it when it is directed at them.



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WHAT COMMUNITIES AND COLLEAGUES CAN TRUST

3.0

# A Leader's Character

The values leaders live, the standards they uphold and the example they set.

The public trusts firefighters more than almost any other profession. That trust was earned by generations of people who ran towards danger, and it is spent or protected every day by how people in the service behave when there is no emergency at all.

Character is the first side of the triangle because the reviews of the last few years found the same thing in service after service: technical skill and physical courage were rarely in doubt. What failed was the willingness to challenge a colleague, to tell an uncomfortable truth or to put a newcomer's dignity above the comfort of the watch.

This domain is anchored on the Core Code of Ethics. It describes what its five principles look like as the conduct of a leader, in thirteen competencies.

### Lives the Code
Six competencies that make the five ethical principles visible.

### Upholds Standards of Behaviour
Lawful, decent and professional conduct, on and off duty.

### Is a Positive Role Model
Humility, ownership, influence and selflessness, seen by others.



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3.1

# The Core Code and a Service's Own Values

The Character domain is anchored on the values fire and rescue has already chosen for itself. Where a service has values of its own, they sit here too, and the table at the foot of the page shows how.

## THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF THE CORE CODE OF ETHICS

### Putting our communities first

The interests of the public, the community and service users come first.

05 Puts Communities First · 22 Knows Their Communities and Their Risks · 32 Sets Clear Purpose and Intent · 34 Makes Sound Decisions Under Pressure · 35 Works Jointly with Partners

### Integrity

Open, honest and consistent in everything.

01 Challenges What Others Tolerate · 02 Acts with Integrity · 07 Acts Lawfully and Safely · 09 Acts Professionally On and Off Duty · 11 Takes Ownership

### Dignity and respect

Decisions made objectively, on evidence, without discrimination or bias.

03 Treats Everyone with Dignity and Respect · 06 Leads with Compassion · 08 Acts with Decency · 17 Notices What Is Not Said · 19 Builds Trust and Resolves Conflict · 28 Makes It Safe to Speak Up

### Leadership

Everyone a positive role model, showing flexible and resilient leadership and accountable for their behaviour.

10 Leads with Humility · 11 Takes Ownership · 12 Leads by Influence, Not Rank · 13 Shares the Load and the Credit · 15 Stays Composed Under Pressure · 25 Never Stops Learning · 26 Coaches with Support and Challenge

### Equality, diversity and inclusion

Standing against discrimination and promoting equality, good relations and difference.

03 Treats Everyone with Dignity and Respect · 18 Understands How Their Team Works · 20 Understands Culture, Including Their Own · 27 Grows Future Leaders · 29 Builds One Team Across Every Role

## THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

The Core Code is built on the Nolan Principles, which apply to everyone who serves the public, including those who govern the service.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Selflessness** | Puts Communities First (05); Shares the Load and the Credit (13) |
| **Integrity** | Acts with Integrity (02); Acts Professionally On and Off Duty (09) |
| **Objectivity** | Treats Everyone with Dignity and Respect (03); Makes Sound Decisions Under Pressure (34) |
| **Accountability** | Takes Ownership (11) |
| **Openness** | Acts with Integrity (02); Communicates with Clarity (30) |
| **Honesty** | Acts with Integrity (02) |
| **Leadership** | Challenges What Others Tolerate (01); Is a Positive Role Model, all four competencies |

## WHERE A SERVICE HAS ITS OWN VALUES, THEY SIT HERE

Many services hold values of their own alongside the Core Code. They do not need a separate framework; each maps onto the competencies that make it observable. Write each value in a box with the competencies that carry it, so that colleagues see the connection every time they use the framework. Two worked examples are shown.

**Example: Courage**
Challenges What Others Tolerate (01), Takes Ownership (11), Makes It Safe to Speak Up (28)

**Example: Teamwork**
Shares the Load and the Credit (13), Builds One Team Across Every Role (29), Works Jointly with Partners (35)

**Your value**
Competencies that carry it

**Your value**
Competencies that carry it

**Your value**
Competencies that carry it

**Your value**
Competencies that carry it



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# 3.2 Lives the Code

A LEADER'S CHARACTER · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION VALUES-DRIVEN

Leaders are guided by values that anchor their choices under pressure and in uncertainty. In fire and rescue those values are written down in the Core Code of Ethics; leaders are the people who show what they mean when they cost something.

*The Core Code of Ethics sets five principles for everyone in fire and rescue; leaders show what they look like under pressure.*

## 01 Challenges What Others Tolerate

NLF: MORAL COURAGE

*Does what is right when it carries personal cost, challenging behaviour, practice and decisions that others have learned to tolerate, on the station, in control and at headquarters.*

- Exercises sound moral judgement and chooses the ethically grounded course of action
- Makes difficult, principled decisions, including unpopular ones, and explains them
- Resists pressure, temptation or rationalisation when facing an ethical dilemma, including pressure from their own watch
- Challenges unethical, unfair or unjust behaviour in others, whatever their role, rank or length of service
- Reports wrongdoing by a colleague, on or off duty, and backs others who do
- Speaks up about an unsafe practice, plan or instruction at the time, at the station and on the incident ground
- Amplifies the voices of colleagues and members of the public who face injustice or unfair treatment
- Challenges practices, traditions and systems that produce unfair outcomes for some colleagues or some communities
- Acts despite personal fear when ethical action carries personal risk, including the risk of being left out
- Encourages and enables moral courage in others through support and personal example

WORKS AGAINST: BULLYING, FAVOURITISM, LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY, RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

## 02 Acts with Integrity

NLF: INTEGRITY

*Is open, honest and consistent in everything they do, keeping their word to crews and communities and holding themselves to the standard they expect of others.*

- Deals truthfully and honestly in every interaction with the public, colleagues and partners
- Does what is right even when no one is watching, on duty and off
- Holds themselves to the same standards they expect of colleagues, whatever their role or rank
- Honours commitments and follows through on promises made to communities and colleagues
- Communicates decisions openly, explaining the rationale with clarity and transparency
- Gives a full and candid account when something goes wrong, in debriefs, investigations, inquests and inquiries
- Aligns personal conduct with the Core Code and the service's values
- Upholds personal integrity when faced with competing interests, pressures or loyalties
- Reinforces a culture of honesty through clear expectations and personal example

WORKS AGAINST: DECEITFULNESS, UNPREDICTABLE, SELF-SERVING

## 03 Treats Everyone with Dignity and Respect

NLF: RESPECT FOR OTHERS

*Treats colleagues and the public fairly and without bias, making sure everyone has an equal chance to belong, contribute and progress.*

- Treats every person with respect and courtesy, at incidents, in people's homes, at the station and online
- Acts reasonably and judiciously, assuming good intent in colleagues and the public
- Applies fairness, impartiality and transparency in decisions that affect people, including postings, opportunity, recognition and discipline
- Opens access to development, opportunity and promotion fairly, across wholetime, on-call, control and support roles
- Promotes voice, participation and belonging for every colleague and every community
- Values individuality and diversity of perspective, background and experience
- Addresses behaviour that belittles, dismisses, marginalises or undermines others
- Cultivates inclusive and respectful conduct within their sphere of influence

WORKS AGAINST: BULLYING, FAVOURITISM, INTIMIDATING, ABUSIVE



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# 3.2 Lives the Code CONTINUED

A LEADER'S CHARACTER · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION VALUES-DRIVEN

## 04 Is Loyal to Colleagues and Communities

NLF: LOYALTY

*Stands by their people and their service, and shows it by speaking up for them, never by closing ranks to protect a watch, a colleague or a reputation.*

- Displays consistent commitment to the service's purpose, values and people
- Advocates for colleagues' interests and wellbeing, including when they are not in the room
- Supports colleagues' ideas and contributions appropriately in wider forums
- Offers constructive and responsible challenge to colleagues and senior officers when necessary
- Balances loyalty to individuals with duty to the public and the service
- Reconciles competing loyalties by putting communities and the collective purpose first
- Refuses to close ranks, putting the safety and dignity of people above protecting a colleague, a watch or the service's reputation
- Rejects blind or misguided loyalty that would compromise integrity or standards
- Commits fully to a decision once it is properly made, even when they argued for another course

WORKS AGAINST: FAVOURITISM, LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY, ISOLATIONISM

## 05 Puts Communities First

NLF: SERVICE

*Puts the interests of the public, the community and service users ahead of personal status, convenience or tradition, and stewards people, money and reputation for the long term.*

- Prioritises the interests of communities above personal status, benefit, convenience or short-term self-interest
- Stewards public money, equipment and people's time responsibly, balancing effectiveness with restraint and long-term sustainability
- Protects the service's interests and integrity against competing or misaligned agendas
- Enhances the reputation of the service through ethical, values-driven conduct in every public setting
- Promotes sustainable practices that preserve social, environmental and institutional resources
- Invests in others' development to strengthen the service's long-term capacity and resilience
- Supports prevention, education and community work that makes people safer before an emergency happens
- Privileges long-term public benefit over short-term gain or expediency
- Tests custom and tradition against what serves communities best, and lets go of what no longer does

WORKS AGAINST: SELF-SERVING, NARCISSISTIC

## 06 Leads with Compassion

NLF: HUMANITY AND COMPASSION

*Cares for the wellbeing of colleagues and the public, notices when someone is struggling, including after difficult incidents, and responds with kindness and patience.*

- Listens attentively and responds with empathy to others' feelings, needs and perspectives
- Shows kindness and appreciation beyond formal courtesy or role obligation
- Offers support proactively when a colleague or a member of the public is experiencing difficulty or strain
- Recognises signs of distress, trauma or vulnerability in colleagues and the public, and responds with care and sensitivity
- Checks on colleagues after a traumatic incident or call, and makes it normal to ask for help
- Communicates in language and tone that is constructive and encouraging
- Shows patience and tolerance toward differing experiences, views and emotional responses
- Responds to honest mistakes with understanding, focusing on learning rather than blame
- Fosters a climate of care and compassion within their sphere of influence

WORKS AGAINST: LACK OF EMPATHY, ABUSIVE



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# 3.3 Upholds Standards of Behaviour

A LEADER'S CHARACTER · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION UPHOLDS THE HIGHEST STANDARDS

Leaders champion high standards and protect the obligations on which trust is built: acting lawfully and safely, behaving with decency and meeting the expectations of a profession. They hold themselves to these first.

*The inspectorate has reported twice on standards of behaviour in fire and rescue; these are the standards leaders model and protect.*

## 07 Acts Lawfully and Safely

NLF: LAWFULNESS

*Works within the law, safety duties and national guidance, explaining why each matters so that others own them rather than merely comply, and raising breaches promptly.*

- Acts within the law, safety duties, national guidance and service policy, making the expectations clear to others
- Uses the authority of their role responsibly, so that decisions and actions are lawful and can be accounted for
- Explains why a safety procedure, policy or piece of guidance exists, so that colleagues understand and own it rather than merely comply
- Promotes respect for legal and safety obligations through personal example
- Challenges unlawful, unsafe or non-compliant behaviour through appropriate and proportionate channels
- Raises breaches and safety concerns promptly, and thanks colleagues who do the same
- Promotes safeguarding, equality and inclusion obligations as matters of conduct, not only of policy
- Models accurate, transparent and diligent record-keeping, including the reasons for decisions, so that others can trust them and learn from them

WORKS AGAINST: LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY, INCOMPETENCE

## 08 Acts with Decency

NLF: APPROPRIATENESS

*Keeps conduct, language and humour decent and inclusive, and stops "banter", initiation and exclusion that harm others, whoever is present.*

- Adjusts personal conduct to suit the context, audience and setting, at incidents, in homes, at the station, online and off duty
- Considers the impact of personal conduct on colleagues, on the public and on confidence in the service
- Refrains from undue assumptions, judgement or criticism of others
- Challenges inappropriate and unacceptable language and behaviour
- Challenges "banter", pranks, initiation and group messages that demean others, however they are excused
- Welcomes new starters and anyone joining the watch, and protects them from being tested or left out
- Intervenes to prevent or stop the mistreatment of others, including by colleagues
- Uses position and voice to include marginalised or underrepresented views

WORKS AGAINST: BULLYING, INTIMIDATING, ABUSIVE

## 09 Acts Professionally On and Off Duty

NLF: PROFESSIONALISM

*Upholds professional standards in person, online and in the community, avoiding conflicts of interest and decisions shaped by favour.*

- Aligns decisions and conduct with professional expectations, the Core Code and the service's values
- Consistently upholds codes of conduct and disciplinary standards, on and off duty and on social media
- Maintains personal and professional boundaries, especially with vulnerable people met through their role, avoiding over-familiarity and conflicts of interest
- Makes impartial decisions, free from bias, favouritism or improper influence
- Models a professional manner in tone, conduct, communication and personal bearing
- Represents the service responsibly, safeguarding public trust and credibility
- Promotes and encourages adherence to professional expectations and standards in others

WORKS AGAINST: FAVOURITISM, SELF-SERVING



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# 3.4 Is a Positive Role Model

A LEADER'S CHARACTER · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION MODELS EXEMPLARY BEHAVIOURS

Leaders are judged by what they do more than by what they say. Humility, ownership, influence without reliance on rank and selflessness make character visible and give others someone worth following.

*The Core Code asks everyone to be a positive role model; leaders are watched most closely of all.*

## 10 Leads with Humility

NLF: HUMILITY

*Admits what they do not know, seeks feedback, owns their mistakes in front of others and values the knowledge of every role.*

- Openly acknowledges their own limitations and mistakes, building trust and rapport
- Conscientiously seeks feedback and applies it to learn and improve
- Listens and engages attentively, valuing others' ideas, perspectives and experience, whatever their role
- Willingly seeks and accepts assistance, harnessing the strengths of others
- Welcomes inspection, peer review and community challenge as a source of learning rather than a threat
- Offers authentic gratitude and appreciation for the support of others
- Creates space for others' voices, encouraging input, challenge and participation
- Remains modest, avoiding self-promotion, arrogance or ego-driven behaviour

WORKS AGAINST: ARROGANCE, NARCISSISTIC, RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

## 11 Takes Ownership

NLF: ACCOUNTABILITY

*Accepts responsibility for their decisions and their team's outcomes, reports what went wrong as openly as what went right, and makes sure lessons are acted on.*

- Accepts responsibility for their own decisions and actions
- Takes accountability for team decisions and outcomes
- Delivers on agreed decisions and commitments
- Owns and addresses mistakes, failures and consequences, capturing the lessons
- Follows a lesson through until practice has changed, rather than treating it as closed once it is written down
- Communicates outcomes transparently, owning successes as much as failures
- Fosters a positive culture of accountability and ownership in others
- Clarifies responsibilities and accountability expectations for others

WORKS AGAINST: LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY, DECEITFULNESS

## 12 Leads by Influence, Not Rank

NLF: INFLUENCE

*Earns commitment through example, credibility and reasoned persuasion rather than rank, pressure or fear.*

- Projects confidence and conviction through calm, clear and reassuring communication
- Inspires confidence through assertive and decisive action, with measured self-assurance
- Persuades others ethically, building consensus around shared goals rather than relying on rank
- Inspires optimism, reframing setbacks as opportunities for growth and improvement
- Achieves buy-in by involving others in shaping decisions
- Engages communities, partners and representative bodies, building trust through collaboration
- Builds support for ideas and initiatives through relationships and networks
- Keeps the directness that command needs for the incident ground, and leads by listening and persuasion everywhere else

WORKS AGAINST: AUTHORITARIAN, MANIPULATIVE, INTIMIDATING

## 13 Shares the Load and the Credit

NLF: SELFLESSNESS

*Gives their time and effort to others, takes a fair share of the hard work, and passes credit to the people who earned it.*

- Offers time generously and proactively to support others, without expecting a return
- Willingly shares burdens to reduce pressure on others, accepting the impact on themselves
- Protects the efforts and wellbeing of others, even at personal cost
- Balances support for others with sustainable self-care, avoiding harmful self-sacrifice
- Models looking after their own wellbeing, so that others feel able to do the same
- Places collective success above self-recognition, redirecting praise to others
- Shares credit publicly, highlighting the contributions of others
- Steps back in success to let others' efforts shine

WORKS AGAINST: SELF-SERVING, NARCISSISTIC



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WHAT LEADERS UNDERSTAND

4.0

# A Leader's Knowledge

Themselves, their people and communities, and fire and rescue.

Fire and rescue has always prized competence. Nobody is trusted on the incident ground, in the control room or in a fire safety audit until they have shown they know their job.

This domain keeps that expectation and widens it. Leaders need to know themselves, because pressure and trauma change how people think and behave. They need to know their people and the communities they serve, because a watch can include or exclude. They need to know their profession and the system around it, because the hardest lessons of recent years were about knowledge that existed in one part of a service and never reached another.

Knowledge is the second side of the triangle: eleven competencies that turn good intentions into sound judgement.

### Knows Themselves
Self-awareness, composure and honest reflection.

### Knows Their People and Communities
Reading people, teams, relationships and cultures.

### Knows Fire and Rescue
Professional expertise, local risk, the national picture and the service itself.



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# 4.1 Knows Themselves

A LEADER'S KNOWLEDGE · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION KNOWS THEMSELF

Leaders develop insight into their own values, strengths, limits and habits of thought. They regulate their reactions under pressure, look after their own health and deliberately test their own reasoning.

*Fire and rescue work exposes people to trauma and sudden pressure; leaders who know themselves stay steady and know when to seek help.*

## 14 Knows Their Impact

NLF: SELF-AWARENESS

*Understands their values, strengths, limits and biases, and how their behaviour lands with others.*

- Identifies the personal values, ambitions, motivators and demotivators that shape their behaviour and decisions
- Analyses their strengths and limitations against the expectations of their role and their aspirations
- Evaluates their stress patterns, triggers, unhelpful habits and the effect of their emotional responses on others
- Recognises their own feelings, emotions and biases as they influence judgement and self-talk in the moment
- Seeks, integrates and reflects on feedback to evaluate the impact of their leadership on others
- Identifies blind spots in their leadership to prioritise areas for development
- Reflects on past experiences and interactions, drawing lessons to adjust future practice
- Distinguishes the impact they intended from the impact they actually had
- Uses assessment tools and 360 degree feedback to build objective self-knowledge

WORKS AGAINST: ARROGANCE, LACK OF EMPATHY

## 15 Stays Composed Under Pressure

NLF: SELF-MANAGEMENT AND RESILIENCE

*Regulates their reactions at incidents and in difficult conversations, recovers from setbacks and looks after their own health, seeking support when they need it.*

- Thinks before responding, regulating impulses to avoid emotionally reactive or destructive behaviour
- Anticipates how stress escalates from triggers, regulating their response to minimise the impact on colleagues and the public
- Reframes their own mistakes, setbacks and self-criticism as opportunities to learn, recover and grow
- Practises self-compassion to sustain confidence, self-efficacy and a positive self-narrative
- Moves forward constructively and with determination amid uncertainty, ambiguity or incomplete information
- Adapts their thinking and behaviour flexibly to new, changing or unexpected demands
- Sustains effort with optimism, humour and perseverance through challenge and adversity
- Recognises the cumulative effect of exposure to trauma and seeks support before it affects judgement or conduct
- Seeks support from relationships and networks when demands exceed their emotional capacity

WORKS AGAINST: UNPREDICTABLE, ABUSIVE

## 16 Questions Their Own Thinking

NLF: METACOGNITION AND REFLECTIVE THINKING

*Tests their assumptions, recognises decision traps and bias, and reflects on how their judgement could be wrong.*

- Identifies the thinking habits and systematic biases shaping their reactions and the quality of their reasoning
- Monitors how changing context influences their assumptions, problem-framing and judgement
- Sustains attention and focus under pressure through deliberate cognitive control
- Distinguishes material factors from noise when analysing complex information
- Interrogates data and evidence to challenge assumptions and inform reasoning
- Critically reviews decisions and their underlying logic to improve future judgement
- Names the decision traps they are most prone to and asks someone to check their reasoning when the stakes are high
- Asks what would have to be true for a familiar plan to be wrong, especially when "it has always worked"
- Judges when to rely on intuition, stable assumptions or analysis of data, and calibrates accordingly
- Evaluates others' ideas critically, deliberately integrating challenge and diverse perspectives
- Synthesises information from multiple sources into coherent understanding and conclusions
- Redirects unproductive rumination toward constructive analysis of next steps

WORKS AGAINST: ARROGANCE, PARANOIA, RESISTANCE TO CHANGE



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# 4.2 Knows Their People and Communities

A LEADER'S KNOWLEDGE · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION KNOWS OTHERS

Leaders see people, teams and relationships clearly. They understand the social and cultural dynamics that shape trust and belonging, in their own teams and in the communities they serve, and adapt how they lead.

*Watches, crews and control teams are close-knit; leaders understand how that closeness can include or exclude.*

## 17 Notices What Is Not Said

NLF: SOCIAL AWARENESS

*Reads mood, silence and withdrawal in their team, and notices whose voice is missing.*

- ▲ Distinguishes others' emotions from verbal and non-verbal cues, adjusting their own response
- ▲ Interprets observed social cues and anticipates their effect on team dynamics and climate
- ▲ Detects misalignment between words, tone and body language
- ▲ Notices silence, hesitation or withdrawal as potential signs of withheld views or discomfort
- ▲ Notices when a colleague is being left out, talked over or made the target of the joke
- ▲ Recognises when the collective mood changes across a watch, a station or a department, affecting interactions or performance
- ▲ Identifies informal patterns of influence that shape decision-making and participation
- ▲ Identifies whose contributions are ignored or marginalised, detecting missing perspectives
- ▲ Infers underlying concerns from recurring emotional patterns and tensions
- ▲ Considers others' perspectives before forming judgements in emotionally charged situations

WORKS AGAINST: LACK OF EMPATHY, ISOLATIONISM

## 18 Understands How Their Team Works

NLF: TEAM DYNAMICS

*Understands the strengths, pressures, norms and informal influence within a watch, crew or team, and how these help or hinder performance and inclusion.*

- ▲ Identifies individual strengths, weaknesses and potential within the team
- ▲ Identifies individual motivators, demotivators and biases affecting contribution and engagement
- ▲ Identifies how different colleagues respond to different stresses and pressures, including shift patterns, on-call availability and exposure to trauma
- ▲ Assesses role demands against individual strengths to align fit and contribution
- ▲ Identifies patterns of constructive and unproductive interaction affecting team effectiveness
- ▲ Identifies the watch norms that shape challenge, accountability and information sharing
- ▲ Analyses how roles interact to identify gaps, overlaps and collective blind spots
- ▲ Recognises individual workload or wellbeing factors constraining the team's performance
- ▲ Evaluates team climate, participation and cohesion to diagnose barriers to performance
- ▲ Identifies how differences in perspective shape participation, challenge and decision quality

WORKS AGAINST: FAVOURITISM, MICROMANAGEMENT

## 19 Builds Trust and Resolves Conflict

NLF: RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

*Spots early signs of tension or mistrust and addresses them fairly and directly before they harden.*

- ▲ Identifies areas of task, relationship or process conflict to manage tensions proactively
- ▲ Explores sources of tension affecting perceptions of fairness, equality and mutual respect
- ▲ Identifies tensions between individual needs and collective team objectives
- ▲ Identifies early warning signs of trust erosion and explores effective remedies
- ▲ Identifies individual biases that could affect trust, respect and relationship quality
- ▲ Listens attentively and without judgement to concerns raised in interpersonal exchanges
- ▲ Identifies and builds on common ground to strengthen rapport and alignment
- ▲ Communicates with tact and diplomacy, promoting reciprocity and mutual respect
- ▲ Holds the difficult conversation early and in person, rather than letting a grievance build
- ▲ Applies emotional and social awareness to strengthen empathy, rapport and relational trust

WORKS AGAINST: INTIMIDATING, ISOLATIONISM

## 20 Understands Culture, Including Their Own

NLF: CULTURAL AWARENESS

*Understands the cultures of the communities they serve and the sub-cultures of their own stations and teams, including the traditions that keep some people out.*

- ▲ Identifies how societal, community, service and watch cultures shape conduct, dynamics and performance
- ▲ Analyses differences in inter-generational needs and expectations among colleagues and the public
- ▲ Identifies verbal and non-verbal differences and adapts their communication accordingly
- ▲ Identifies how cultural norms influence emotional expression and interpretation
- ▲ Reviews assumptions and suspends judgement when working across cultural differences
- ▲ Adapts how they engage to fit the cultural expectations of the communities the service serves
- ▲ Seeks to deepen knowledge of the communities, faiths, languages and cultures in the service area
- ▲ Identifies which station traditions and unwritten rules build belonging and which exclude, and says so
- ▲ Anticipates cultural tensions and evaluates their impact on inclusion, team dynamics and performance
- ▲ Analyses how diverse cultural perspectives enhance problem-solving and organisational learning
- ▲ Demonstrates confidence, composure and humility in culturally diverse interactions

WORKS AGAINST: FAVOURITISM, RESISTANCE TO CHANGE, LACK OF EMPATHY



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# 4.3 Knows Fire and Rescue

A LEADER'S KNOWLEDGE · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION KNOWS THEIR PROFESSION

Leaders apply the professional, organisational and contextual knowledge that leadership depends on. They keep their expertise current, understand local risk and the national picture, and know how their own service really works.

*Operational and professional competence is what the sector has always asked of its leaders first; here it becomes knowledge every leader draws on.*

## 21 Brings Operational and Professional Expertise

NLF: PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

*Keeps their operational, technical and professional competence current and uses it with sound judgement, including in protection, prevention, control and support roles.*

- Demonstrates the breadth and depth of expertise their role demands, to underpin professional credibility
- Applies professional expertise with sound judgement in complex, fast-moving or high-accountability situations
- Maintains competence and currency through continuous learning and awareness of emerging risks, research, methods and technology
- Synthesises evidence, operational learning and peer expertise to inform judgement and contribute to best practice
- Shares risk-critical knowledge across response, protection, prevention and control, so that what one part of the service knows reaches those who need it
- Aligns professional decisions with the service's standards, goals and ethical expectations
- Evaluates how technical, policy and regulatory requirements must be integrated into plans for their area
- Interprets performance and outcome data to inform evidence-based improvement
- Anticipates the implications of changes in guidance, policy and regulation for practice and delivery
- Sustains professional credibility through consistent, competent and ethical conduct

WORKS AGAINST: INCOMPETENCE, ARROGANCE

## 22 Knows Their Communities and Their Risks

NLF: EXTERNAL CONTEXT AND STAKEHOLDERS

*Understands local risk, community needs, partners and inspection findings, and uses them to shape priorities.*

- Evaluates legal and regulatory governance requirements, including inspection and assurance findings
- Assesses local and regional policy shifts and priorities, including the community risk management plan, to align the service's work
- Assesses community and stakeholder needs and expectations, influencing the service's priorities
- Listens to residents and service users, including their concerns about safety, and weighs what they say in judgements about risk and service
- Assesses the practice of other services, sector leaders and trends to identify threats and opportunities
- Assesses alignment with the Fire Standards and the sector's governance arrangements
- Assesses volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in the environment to inform adaptive judgement and risk awareness
- Evaluates partnerships and operational dependencies, including with police, ambulance, local authorities, housing providers and health
- Assesses workforce, funding and supply constraints affecting resilience and continuity
- Monitors environmental and sustainability obligations shaping the service's practice

WORKS AGAINST: ISOLATIONISM

## 23 Understands the National Picture

NLF: STRATEGIC AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

*Understands national reform, inspection, building safety, resilience and public expectations, and what they mean for their service.*

- Evaluates political, economic and funding developments shaping long-term priorities
- Scans demographic, societal, climate and technological trends for strategic implications and opportunities
- Analyses power, authority and influence across government, governance, inspectorate, representative bodies and partners
- Evaluates the networks of services, national bodies, agencies and partners that shape the national system of fire and rescue
- Evaluates alignment with national priorities, regulatory expectations and public-value commitments
- Applies strategic frameworks and concepts to evaluate the service's choices and trade-offs
- Integrates the lessons of public inquiries, inspections and major incidents elsewhere into strategic judgement
- Evaluates emerging technologies, data and innovation for strategic disruption, opportunity and risk
- Assesses the service's strategic communications, narrative and sources of reputational risk
- Stress-tests the resilience of strategy and plans against plausible future scenarios

WORKS AGAINST: RESISTANCE TO CHANGE, ISOLATIONISM

## 24 Understands How the Service Works

NLF: ORGANISATIONAL SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

*Understands governance, risk, assurance and learning systems, and how decisions are really made, so they can improve them.*

- Evaluates the service's structures and interdependencies that enhance or constrain delivery
- Analyses formal and informal decision-making processes shaping outcomes
- Evaluates how governance, assurance and compliance systems sustain accountability
- Evaluates the service's risk frameworks, strengthening the capacity to anticipate and mitigate disruption
- Evaluates how resource allocation processes influence sustainability and effectiveness
- Interprets performance indicators and measures of effectiveness to identify systemic improvement
- Critiques internal processes to identify inefficiencies, unnecessary bureaucracy and operating constraints
- Evaluates the level of stakeholder influence and support affecting the service
- Assesses how policy and procedural requirements shape operating effectiveness
- Evaluates whether learning from incidents, debriefs, complaints and misconduct cases actually reaches practice

WORKS AGAINST: INCOMPETENCE, RESISTANCE TO CHANGE



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WHAT LEADERS DO

5.0

# A Leader's Actions

## Developing people, building inclusive teams and keeping communities safe.

Character and knowledge count for nothing until they are acted on. A lesson that is identified and never applied, a concern that is noticed and never raised, a talent that is seen and never developed: each is a failure of action.

This domain follows the three things every leader must attend to: the individual, the team and the task. Leaders develop people, starting with themselves. They build teams in which everyone belongs and anyone can speak. They deliver the outcomes communities depend on, in prevention, protection, response and resilience, through clear intent, trust and sound decisions.

Action is the base of the triangle: eleven competencies through which leadership becomes visible to others.

### Develops People
Learning, coaching and growing the next leaders.

### Builds Inclusive Teams
Safe to speak, one team, clearly communicated.

### Keeps Communities Safe
Performance, purpose, empowerment, decisions and partnership.



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# 5.1 Develops People

A LEADER'S ACTIONS · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION DEVELOPS INDIVIDUALS

Leaders build other leaders. They keep learning themselves. Through feedback, coaching, support and honest challenge, they help each person grow in confidence, skill and judgement.

*The sector's coaching and mentoring offer is one of its strengths; this dimension makes coaching a leadership habit at every level.*

## 25 Never Stops Learning

NLF: DEVELOPING THEMSELVES

*Takes ownership of their own development, seeks coaching and feedback, and applies what they learn.*

- Sets specific development goals linked to personal growth and leadership impact
- Diagnoses the priority knowledge and skill gaps affecting their effectiveness
- Creates purposeful development plans and routines to sustain personal learning
- Takes ownership of their development through self-motivation and accountability for continuous growth
- Applies new learning deliberately to improve day-to-day practice
- Learns from reviews, inquiries and inspection reports beyond their own service
- Seeks targeted coaching, mentoring and peer support to guide ongoing development
- Seeks multi-source feedback on their impact and integrates the insights
- Reflects critically on conduct, feedback and experience to identify areas for improvement
- Transfers learning across contexts, adapting behaviour after success, failure or change
- Maintains physical, mental and emotional routines for sustained health, wellbeing and performance
- Balances ambition with reality to sustain focus, energy and performance over time

WORKS AGAINST: INCOMPETENCE, ARROGANCE

## 26 Coaches with Support and Challenge

NLF: PROVIDING SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE

*Gives honest, timely feedback, coaches people through problems and setbacks, and balances encouragement with clear expectations.*

- Guides colleagues to translate needs and aspirations into actionable goals, plans and learning priorities
- Provides reassurance and steadiness during uncertainty, sustaining confidence and focus
- Provides timely, constructive feedback that reinforces strengths and promotes learning and growth
- Sets stretch objectives that link personal growth to collective goals
- Facilitates reflection on past experience to enhance learning and improvement
- Uses the debrief of an incident, an exercise or a call as a coaching conversation, not only a check
- Explores collaboratively how best to support others' growth and development
- Guides recovery and learning after a setback or failure, rebuilding confidence and adaptive performance
- Guides problem-solving to overcome obstacles and sustain performance under pressure
- Promotes physical, mental and emotional wellbeing to sustain energy and resilience
- Recognises others' effort, contribution and impact, strengthening confidence, motivation and self-efficacy
- Addresses poor performance or behaviour early and honestly through conversation, rather than letting it drift
- Reviews development progress continually, adjusting the balance of guidance, support and challenge
- Balances time on their own tasks with visible presence alongside the team

WORKS AGAINST: MICROMANAGEMENT, ABUSIVE, LACK OF EMPATHY

## 27 Grows Future Leaders

NLF: INSPIRING AND ENABLING OTHERS

*Spots and nurtures potential in everyone, gives fair access to opportunity, mentoring and stretch, and helps people progress.*

- Expresses belief in others' abilities and potential through sustained trust, time and encouragement
- Provides progressive responsibility and exposure that develops confidence and decision-making
- Provides mentoring and guidance that builds autonomy, independent confidence and professional judgement
- Creates meaningful opportunities for others to learn, broaden their skills and progress
- Aligns emerging talent with opportunities to maximise growth and contribution
- Identifies emerging strengths and development needs to inform long-term growth planning
- Develops others' habits of self-reflection to sustain independent, continuous learning
- Addresses under-performance through constructive dialogue and structured development planning
- Affirms growth and progress positively, clarifying next steps and opportunities to build self-belief
- Opens access to courses, temporary promotion, secondments and mentoring on transparent criteria, across every role and background
- Encourages strategic, bigger-picture thinking to broaden understanding, perspective and ambition

WORKS AGAINST: FAVOURITISM, INCOMPETENCE (REFUSING TO DELEGATE)



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# 5.2 Builds Inclusive Teams

A LEADER'S ACTIONS · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION BUILDS TEAMS

Leaders build cohesive, inclusive teams in which leadership is shared. They make it safe to speak, invite challenge before decisions and secure commitment after them, and communicate so that everyone understands.

*The culture reviews found that the closeness of watches can protect or exclude; leaders decide which.*

## 28 Makes It Safe to Speak Up

NLF: CREATING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

*Makes it safe for anyone to raise a concern, admit a mistake, report poor behaviour or challenge a decision, and responds well when they do.*

- Establishes clear and respectful norms that prevent belittlement, ridicule and exclusion
- Invites informed, constructive challenge of ideas and assumptions, reducing fear of consequences
- Responds with composure and tolerance when mistakes, risks or unwelcome information are raised
- Thanks and visibly protects colleagues who report poor behaviour or raise a concern, so that speaking up is seen to be safe
- Treats a near miss or an honest mistake as learning, and distinguishes it clearly from misconduct
- Invites candid discussion and shared learning once assumptions, freedoms and constraints are understood
- Examines ideas critically and respectfully, keeping debate on issues rather than individuals
- Gives fair, reasoned and courteous explanations when disagreeing or declining a suggestion
- Encourages inquisitive questioning to identify gaps in knowledge and build shared understanding
- Facilitates curiosity-led dialogue that supports creativity, critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving
- Creates a safe-to-fail environment in training and improvement work that enables purposeful experimentation, initiative and learning
- Actively seeks underrepresented perspectives and incorporates them into discussion
- Makes sure decisions reflect reasoned contributions from the team before moving forward
- Publicly acknowledges constructive challenge as a commitment to shared problem-solving

WORKS AGAINST: INTIMIDATING, BULLYING, AUTHORITARIAN, PARANOIA

## 29 Builds One Team Across Every Role

NLF: CULTIVATING TEAMSHIP

*Builds shared ownership across wholetime, on-call, control and support colleagues, invites challenge before decisions and expects everyone to hold each other to shared standards.*

- Affirms leadership as a shared endeavour with interdependent roles and responsibilities, whatever the rank or role
- Clarifies decision authority and accountability to set role expectations and reduce ambiguity
- Enables colleagues' agency, autonomy and influence in addressing shared challenges
- Invites constructive dissent, feedback and independent, critical thought
- Willingly defers to others when their expertise best serves the team and the public
- Balances authority with openness, encouraging participation and challenge before decisions are taken
- Builds consensus, commitment and shared ownership around collectively agreed decisions
- Recognises and celebrates cooperation and co-creation that contributes to collective success
- Creates opportunities for others to lead within their areas of expertise, whatever their role or rank
- Treats wholetime, on-call, control, prevention, protection and support colleagues as one team of equal standing, in word and in practice
- Encourages peer-to-peer accountability for upholding shared values and standards
- Facilitates collective reflection and debriefing to strengthen leader and follower effectiveness over time
- Secures commitment once decisions are made, distinguishing destructive dissent from constructive criticism

WORKS AGAINST: FAVOURITISM, AUTHORITARIAN, ISOLATIONISM

## 30 Communicates with Clarity

NLF: COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

*Communicates clearly and honestly, adapts to the audience, and checks understanding, on the incident ground as well as in the office.*

- Listens actively and attentively to understand perspectives before responding or deciding
- Uses effective questioning to confirm and deepen understanding
- Confirms the intent of a communication and the needs of the audience before delivering key messages
- Uses clear, concise and unambiguous language, free of jargon, to convey key messages
- Adapts language, tone and style to suit residents, colleagues, partners and the media
- Provides relevant context to aid understanding and alignment with the service's objectives
- Explains decisions and rationale honestly and transparently, including unwelcome ones
- Briefs clearly before a task and confirms that the brief has been understood, at incidents and at the station
- Integrates verbal and non-verbal cues to reinforce meaning and authenticity
- Chooses delivery method and timing to match audience, message complexity and sensitivity
- Communicates with positivity, conviction and optimism to inspire collective support

WORKS AGAINST: DECEITFULNESS, MANIPULATIVE



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# 5.3 Keeps Communities Safe

A LEADER'S ACTIONS · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION ACHIEVES OUTCOMES

Leaders turn intent into coordinated action and lasting results. They set clear purpose, empower others within it, decide well under pressure, work jointly with partners and keep improving.

*Prevention, protection, response and resilience are the outcomes by which communities judge the service.*

## 31 Sustains High Performance

NLF: BUILDING AND SUSTAINING HIGH PERFORMANCE

*Agrees high standards with their team, builds pride in doing the job well, and keeps improving through practice, debrief and learning from others.*

- Clarifies roles, responsibilities and expectations in line with knowledge, skill, experience and specialism
- Defines and agrees shared values and standards of behaviour with the team to promote collective accountability
- Establishes a healthy, competitive team spirit that stretches capability and sustains high standards
- Builds collective identity, belonging and community grounded in mutual respect and shared values
- Builds cohesion and shared belief through collaborative problem-solving and celebrating success
- Agrees consistent routines with the team that sustain performance, focus and momentum, reviewing them together as needs change
- Leads honest debriefs after incidents and exercises, and sees that what is learned changes what the team does
- Guards against complacency by asking what the team has not prepared for, and practising for it
- Facilitates high intellectual friction through respectful challenge and evidence-informed debate
- Reduces social friction by focusing on the problem, not the person
- Draws on collective insight to identify opportunities to improve effectiveness
- Encourages bold but disciplined innovation to drive improvement
- Adapts their leadership approach dynamically to sustain performance through challenge or change
- Energises teams under pressure by reinforcing shared purpose, resilience and mutual support

WORKS AGAINST: RESISTANCE TO CHANGE, INCOMPETENCE

## 32 Sets Clear Purpose and Intent

NLF: DEFINING AND ALIGNING PURPOSE

*Explains what the service is trying to achieve and why, so that everyone can connect their own work, and their decisions in the moment, to the outcome for communities.*

- Articulates a compelling purpose for the team's work from which shared commitment can be built
- Communicates intent, objectives and priorities to clarify individual and collective focus
- Integrates ends, ways and means to keep strategy coherent and effort aligned
- Translates intent into achievable objectives and meaningful outcomes that sustain motivation and momentum
- Engages others in co-creating goals and outcomes, strengthening shared ownership and accountability
- Reinforces the purpose regularly by connecting everyday work, in prevention, protection, response and support, to safer communities
- Reconciles routine choices and decisions with real progress toward the collective purpose
- Frames barriers and challenges accurately, discerning their causes and their effects on outcomes
- Balances ambition with reality when prioritising under constraint or uncertainty
- Reviews and adjusts priorities as context shifts to keep purpose relevant and achievable

WORKS AGAINST: UNPREDICTABLE, ISOLATIONISM

## 33 Empowers Within Clear Intent

NLF: EMPOWERING OTHERS

*Agrees freedoms and boundaries, trusts people to use their judgement and initiative within intent and national guidance, and steps in only when it is needed.*

- Clarifies delegated freedoms, operating constraints, decision rights and risk tolerance
- Confirms understanding of intent, tasks and outcomes, giving room for clarifying questions
- Delegates meaningful responsibility matched to individual competence and context
- Determines which decisions can be delegated, shared or retained, and explains why
- Entrusts delegated responsibilities with clear ownership and accountability for outcomes
- Provides the information and context needed for effective independent decision-making
- Demonstrates faith in others' judgement through proportionate oversight and support
- Backs a reasonable decision made within intent and guidance, even when the outcome was poor, and says so
- Encourages people to say at once when a plan or procedure does not fit what they see in front of them
- Intervenes only when deviation threatens safety, shared purpose, standards or the service's integrity
- Promotes resourceful initiative and new ideas within agreed freedoms and boundaries
- Credits sound judgement exercised within delegated authority, reinforcing confidence and trust
- Recalibrates delegated authority as competence, confidence and context evolve

WORKS AGAINST: MICROMANAGEMENT, AUTHORITARIAN



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# 5.3 Keeps Communities Safe CONTINUED

A LEADER'S ACTIONS · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION ACHIEVES OUTCOMES

## 34 Makes Sound Decisions Under Pressure

NLF: MAKING EFFECTIVE DECISIONS

*Makes timely, proportionate and evidence-informed decisions, weighs risk honestly, reviews them as the situation changes and explains the reasoning afterwards.*

- Frames problems collaboratively, integrating diverse sources of information, experience and feedback
- Distils complexity and ambiguity into clear, intent-aligned options
- Identifies areas of uncertainty, assumptions and information gaps that could undermine the analysis
- Balances data and evidence with intuition and experience when forming judgements
- Evaluates the feasibility, proportionality, risk and resource implications of options
- Generates and evaluates alternative courses of action, weighing trade-offs and consequences
- Tests reasoning and assumptions independently to reduce bias and groupthink
- Applies creative and analytical thinking to design adaptive and innovative solutions
- Makes timely, reasoned and proportionate decisions, avoiding emotional or ego-driven reactions
- Weighs the risk of acting against the risk of not acting, so that caution does not delay help to people in danger
- Monitors evolving situations, adapting decisions as conditions, information and risk change
- Reviews progress and emerging outcomes to confirm the decision remains valid
- Integrates feedback from diverse sources to improve future judgement and decisions

WORKS AGAINST: UNPREDICTABLE, INCOMPETENCE, RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

## 35 Works Jointly with Partners

NLF: CULTIVATING COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

*Builds trusted relationships with partners and other services, shares information and risk openly, and works to a common picture, at incidents and beyond them.*

- Aligns purpose, priorities and values across services, agencies and partners to achieve shared outcomes for communities
- Anticipates risks and system interdependencies to align joint planning and problem-solving
- Co-designs governance, roles and decision rights to enable coordinated delivery
- Creates cross-boundary psychological safety so partners raise concerns early
- Builds trusted networks across emergency services, local authorities, housing, health and the voluntary sector through honesty, reciprocity and consistency
- Promotes fairness, equity and transparency in shared decisions and the allocation of resources
- Shares timely, accurate and relevant information to enable collective understanding and alignment
- Seeks out partner commanders early at an incident, shares what they know and builds a joint understanding of risk
- Resolves partnership conflicts constructively while safeguarding shared principles
- Acknowledges partner contributions and shares credit for collective achievements
- Leverages diversity across organisations to generate innovation and shared learning
- Reviews partnership outcomes and adapts agreements as conditions evolve

WORKS AGAINST: ISOLATIONISM, SELF-SERVING



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6.0

# Levels of Leadership

Leadership grows as responsibility, risk and complexity grow. The domains stay the same; what changes is how they are applied. The four levels, whose names the sector already uses, show the widening reach of a leader's behaviour. Roles are shown as a guide, not a gate: a firefighter can lead at the second level and a chief fire officer must still lead at the first.

LEVEL 1 · TRUST

### Leading Yourself

Their own conduct, their crew and the people they meet

LEVEL 2 · CULTURE

### Leading Others

A watch, crew, control room team or section

LEVEL 3 · ALIGNMENT

### Leading the Function

Several teams, a station group or a department

LEVEL 4 · LEGITIMACY

### Leading the Service

The whole service, its partners and its public standing

| THIS FRAMEWORK | NLF LEVEL | TYPICAL ROLES, AS A GUIDE |
|---|---|---|
| **Leading Yourself** | Self | Firefighters, wholetime and on-call; fire control operators; prevention, protection and support staff; apprentices and volunteers |
| **Leading Others** | Team | Crew and watch managers; on-call crew and watch managers; fire control supervisors; team leaders and first-line managers in every department |
| **Leading the Function** | Organisation | Station and group managers; heads of department; senior managers in prevention, protection, control, people, finance and other professional functions |
| **Leading the Service** | Strategic | Area managers; principal officers; chief fire officers; directors and other members of the executive team |

The levels are not a hierarchy of worth. Leading yourself well is the foundation on which every other level stands, and the most senior leaders continue to model it. With each level comes a wider sphere of influence, greater complexity and heavier consequences, and therefore the need for more sophisticated judgement.

They are also not the levels of incident command. Command levels describe authority at an incident. These levels describe leadership everywhere else as well, and apply equally to colleagues who will never command an incident. Operational and professional colleagues lead at every level, and the behaviours are the same for both.



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6.1

# Leading Yourself



**TYPICAL ROLES**
Firefighters, wholetime and on-call; fire control operators; prevention, protection and support staff; apprentices and volunteers

**SPHERE OF INFLUENCE**
Their own conduct, their crew and the people they meet

**PRIMARY IMPACT**
Trust

Everyone in fire and rescue leads. At this level leadership is personal: the standards a person keeps, the way they treat colleagues and the public, the courage to speak, and the care they take to stay competent and well.

## KEY PILLARS

### Lives the Code
Honest, respectful and reliable, on duty and off, in person and online.

### Speaks up
Raises concerns about safety and behaviour at the time, and backs others who do.

### Stays competent and well
Owns their own learning, fitness and wellbeing, and asks for help.

### Follows well
Contributes to the team's leadership: questions, supports and commits.

## LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES AT THIS LEVEL

### Character
- Treat every colleague and member of the public with dignity
- Challenge banter and exclusion
- Own mistakes and learn from them

### Knowledge
- Know their own triggers and limits
- Know their station ground and its risks
- Keep operational and professional competence current

### Action
- Seek feedback and act on it
- Speak up and listen in debriefs
- Use initiative within the brief

## COMPETENCIES MOST IN FOCUS AT THIS LEVEL

**01** Challenges What Others Tolerate · **02** Acts with Integrity · **03** Treats Everyone with Dignity and Respect · **08** Acts with Decency · **14** Knows Their Impact · **15** Stays Composed Under Pressure · **21** Brings Operational and Professional Expertise · **25** Never Stops Learning · **30** Communicates with Clarity

## HOW LEADERS DEVELOP AT THIS LEVEL

Induction and probation, watch-based training and debriefs, a mentor or buddy, feedback from the watch manager, and the sector's coaching and mentoring offer. Development planning starts here, not at promotion.

**THE COURAGE TO LEAD**

The courage to lead at this level is the courage to be the one who says something.

**Progression.** Readiness for Leading Others shows in people who already influence the watch for the better without a role that requires it.



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6.2

# Leading Others

**TYPICAL ROLES**
Crew and watch managers; on-call crew and watch managers; fire control supervisors; team leaders and first-line managers in every department

**SPHERE OF INFLUENCE**
A watch, crew, control room team or section

**PRIMARY IMPACT**
Culture

First-line leaders create the conditions in which others perform. They set the tone of the watch every day: what is praised, what is joked about, what is challenged and what is safe to say.

## KEY PILLARS

**Sets the standard**
Models the Code and deals with poor behaviour early and fairly.

**Makes it safe**
Welcomes concerns and mistakes, and protects whoever raised them.

**Coaches**
Gives honest feedback, uses the debrief to develop people, opens opportunity fairly.

**Gives clear intent**
Briefs clearly, trusts judgement and backs reasonable decisions.

## LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES AT THIS LEVEL

### Character

- Never close ranks
- Hold the difficult conversation
- Share the load and the credit

### Knowledge

- Read the mood and notice who is left out
- Know each person's strengths and pressures
- Understand the watch's unwritten rules

### Action

- Coach through support and challenge
- Lead honest debriefs
- Build one team across duty systems and roles

## COMPETENCIES MOST IN FOCUS AT THIS LEVEL

**04** Is Loyal to Colleagues and Communities · **08** Acts with Decency · **11** Takes Ownership · **17** Notices What Is Not Said · **18** Understands How Their Team Works · **19** Builds Trust and Resolves Conflict · **26** Coaches with Support and Challenge · **28** Makes It Safe to Speak Up · **31** Sustains High Performance · **33** Empowers Within Clear Intent

## HOW LEADERS DEVELOP AT THIS LEVEL

A structured first-line leadership programme before or on appointment, coaching skills, practice in difficult conversations, 360 degree feedback, and time with peers from other stations and departments.

**THE COURAGE TO LEAD**

The courage to lead at this level is the courage to challenge your own watch, and to protect the person who challenged you.

**Progression.** Readiness for Leading the Function shows in leaders whose people grow, whose watch welcomes newcomers and who look beyond their own station.



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6.3

# The Watch Manager

## Where the culture of a service is made

Ask most firefighters what the service is like and they will describe their watch. The watch or crew manager decides, more than any policy, whether a new starter is welcomed or tested, whether a concern is heard or mocked, whether a debrief is honest, and whether the standards on the wall are the standards in the mess room.

The inspectorate has said plainly that supervisors and middle managers need better preparation for this. Many are promoted for operational skill and then asked to lead people they have worked beside for years, sometimes friends, with little training in feedback, conflict or inclusion. It is the hardest transition in the service and often the least supported.

The same is true of the on-call crew manager, the fire control supervisor and the team leader in a professional department. Each is the service, as far as their team is concerned.

### WHAT THE FRAMEWORK ASKS OF A SERVICE FOR ITS FIRST-LINE LEADERS

**Prepare before promotion**
Leadership development before or on appointment, not years later.

**Protect time to lead**
Time for one-to-ones, coaching and debriefs treated as the job, not an extra.

**Back them**
Visible support from the next level when they challenge behaviour in their own watch.

**Give them feedback**
Regular 360 degree feedback and a coach or mentor of their own.

**Promoted from within the watch.** Leading people who were peers last month is a test of several competencies at once: Acts with Decency (08), Builds Trust and Resolves Conflict (19), Coaches with Support and Challenge (26) and Is Loyal to Colleagues and Communities (04). A service that prepares people for that moment protects them and their teams.



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6.4

# Leading the Function



**TYPICAL ROLES**
Station and group managers; heads of department; senior managers in prevention, protection, control, people, finance and other professional functions

**SPHERE OF INFLUENCE**
Several teams, a station group or a department

**PRIMARY IMPACT**
Alignment

Leaders at this level connect the front line and the top of the service. They lead other leaders, join up functions, and are where a service's values either reach every station or stop.

## KEY PILLARS

### Leads leaders
Coaches first-line leaders and holds them to the same standards everywhere.

### Joins things up
Works across stations, duty systems and departments, sharing risk-critical knowledge.

### Makes learning stick
Follows lessons from incidents, debriefs and misconduct cases through to practice.

### Translates
Explains the why behind decisions and carries the truth upward.

## LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES AT THIS LEVEL

### Character
- Be visible, open and fair
- Own outcomes without passing blame down
- Welcome scrutiny

### Knowledge
- Understand differences between stations and teams
- Know how decisions are really made
- Understand local risk and partners

### Action
- Grow future leaders on fair criteria
- Empower within clear intent
- Work jointly with local partners

## COMPETENCIES MOST IN FOCUS AT THIS LEVEL

**10** Leads with Humility · **11** Takes Ownership · **12** Leads by Influence, Not Rank · **20** Understands Culture, Including Their Own · **22** Knows Their Communities and Their Risks · **24** Understands How the Service Works · **27** Grows Future Leaders · **29** Builds One Team Across Every Role · **32** Sets Clear Purpose and Intent · **35** Works Jointly with Partners

## HOW LEADERS DEVELOP AT THIS LEVEL

Middle leadership development, mentoring outside the service, secondments and project leadership, action learning with peers, and coaching qualifications so they can coach others.

**THE COURAGE TO LEAD**

The courage to lead at this level is the courage to tell senior leaders what they need to hear, and to act on what the front line tells you.

**Progression.** Readiness for Leading the Service shows in leaders who think about the whole service and its communities, and who leave teams stronger than they found them.



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6.5

# Leading the Service



**TYPICAL ROLES**
Area managers; principal officers; chief fire officers; directors and other members of the executive team

**SPHERE OF INFLUENCE**
The whole service, its partners and its public standing

**PRIMARY IMPACT**
Legitimacy

Strategic leaders are stewards of the service's purpose, culture and public trust. They decide in uncertainty with long consequences, and their own conduct is the clearest statement of what the service will tolerate.

## KEY PILLARS

### Sets the tone
Lives the Code in public and in private, and is seen to protect those who speak up.

### Holds the long view
Balances today's pressures with the service communities will need in ten years.

### Listens
Seeks out the truth from every part of the workforce and from communities.

### Leads the system
Builds trust with governance, partners, representative bodies and government.

## LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES AT THIS LEVEL

### Character
- Be candid when the news is bad
- Put communities before reputation
- Model humility and rest

### Knowledge
- Understand the national picture and reform
- Read the culture of the whole service
- Know where the service's systems produce unfair results

### Action
- Set clear, lasting purpose
- Build a leadership pipeline that reflects communities
- Lead partnerships and resilience

## COMPETENCIES MOST IN FOCUS AT THIS LEVEL

**01** Challenges What Others Tolerate · **02** Acts with Integrity · **05** Puts Communities First · **10** Leads with Humility · **16** Questions Their Own Thinking · **23** Understands the National Picture · **28** Makes It Safe to Speak Up · **32** Sets Clear Purpose and Intent · **34** Makes Sound Decisions Under Pressure · **35** Works Jointly with Partners

## HOW LEADERS DEVELOP AT THIS LEVEL

Executive leadership development, an external coach or mentor, peer review with other services, learning from other sectors, and regular unfiltered contact with the front line.

**THE COURAGE TO LEAD**

The courage to lead at this level is the courage to hear the worst about your own service and to say so publicly.

**Continuing.** Leadership at this level includes preparing successors and leaving a culture that does not depend on any one person.



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6.6

# Every Role, One Service

A fire and rescue service is far more than its wholetime stations. This framework is written for all of it. The behaviours are the same for everyone; these notes show what leadership asks in parts of the service that leadership frameworks have often overlooked.

| | |
|---|---|
| **On-call** | On-call firefighters serve their own communities alongside another job and a family. Their leaders build a team from people who are rarely all together, keep standards and belonging alive on one drill night a week, and speak up for crews who can feel like an afterthought. Builds One Team Across Every Role (29) applies to the service as much as to them. |
| **Fire control** | Control staff are the first leaders at every incident, taking decisions with partial information and often staying on the line with someone in danger. Their leaders need the same development, the same recognition and the same attention to trauma as any operational leader. Stays Composed Under Pressure (15) and Leads with Compassion (06) apply in full. |
| **Prevention and protection** | The people who keep homes and buildings safe before a fire starts hold risk-critical knowledge. Their leaders make sure it reaches crews, and that residents' concerns are listened to. Brings Operational and Professional Expertise (21) and Knows Their Communities and Their Risks (22) are central. |
| **Professional and support functions** | People, finance, fleet, digital and other specialists lead in their own right. Parity of esteem is a leadership behaviour: who is invited, who is thanked, whose expertise is deferred to. |
| **Volunteers, cadets and apprentices** | Leading yourself begins on the first day. Those who lead volunteers and young people set the first impression of what the service stands for. |



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6.7

# Governance and Oversight

Fire and rescue services answer to the public through those who govern them: fire and rescue authorities, police, fire and crime commissioners, mayors and their deputies. They are not managers of the service, but they are leaders of it, and the reviews have shown what follows when oversight is weak or too close.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Set the tone** | Model the Core Code and the Seven Principles of Public Life in their own conduct, in public and in private. |
| **Ask about culture, not only performance** | Seek evidence of how people are treated and whether they feel safe to speak, and visit the front line to hear it. |
| **Support and challenge** | Give the chief fire officer honest support and honest challenge, and respect the line between governance and operational leadership. |
| **Own the hard news** | Receive inspection findings, complaints and misconduct data openly, and ask what has changed as a result. |
| **Appoint for character** | Recruit and appraise senior leaders against these behaviours as well as against results. |

**Elsewhere in the United Kingdom.** This document refers to the standards, inspection and governance arrangements of England. Services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland work to their own frameworks and oversight, and adopters there should substitute them; the behaviours do not change.

**Standards and regulation.** The Government consulted in 2026 on a College of Fire and Rescue to raise professional standards and strengthen leadership, including whether it should hold a list of people barred from working in the sector. Whatever is decided, a barred list deals with the few who fall furthest below the standard. A leadership framework is for the many, and it is the better protection: a service whose leaders live these behaviours is one in which serious misconduct is noticed, challenged and reported early.



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7.0

# Leadership in Practice

A framework is only as good as its use. These are the places where this one is designed to do its work, so that a service's policies, programmes and everyday conversations all reinforce the same behaviours in the same words.

**Recruitment and promotion**
Values-based selection at every level, with questions and exercises drawn from the behaviours, so that people are promoted for how they lead as well as what they know.

**Appraisal and one-to-ones**
A shared language for regular conversations about conduct and growth, not only about tasks and competence.

**Development programmes**
A syllabus for supervisory, middle and executive development, and for coaching and mentoring, at each of the four levels.

**Debriefs and learning**
A lens for incident and exercise debriefs: what did leadership look like, who spoke up, what will change.

**Culture and staff surveys**
Questions that test whether people see these behaviours in their leaders, tracked over time and by station and department.

**Standards of behaviour**
A positive description of what is expected, used alongside the Core Code when addressing conduct and when recognising people.

A MODEL LEADERSHIP POLICY STATEMENT

The Service defines leadership as the combination of a leader's character, knowledge and action, shown through everyday behaviours, that inspires others to succeed in keeping communities safe. Leadership is a shared function of the whole Service, distinct from management and from command, and everyone can contribute to it, whatever their rank or role. Leaders at every level are expected to live the Core Code of Ethics, to uphold standards of behaviour and to be positive role models. The Service will review its people, conduct, wellbeing, learning and governance policies so that they reinforce this framework, and will develop leaders at every level through practice, feedback and coaching, not training alone.



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7.1

# Developing Leaders

A framework describes; people develop through practice, feedback and support. The sector already has a strong development offer, and this framework is designed to sit behind it as the common description of what all of it is for.

### Coaching and mentoring

The sector's national coaching and mentoring offer matches people with trained coaches and mentors across services. The behaviours give coach and coachee a shared language; Coaches with Support and Challenge (26) makes coaching part of every leader's job.

25 Never Stops Learning · 26 Coaches with Support and Challenge · 27 Grows Future Leaders

### First-line leadership programmes

Structured programmes for new and existing supervisory leaders. Level 2, Leading Others, and the watch manager page describe what they are preparing people for.

08 Acts with Decency · 19 Builds Trust and Resolves Conflict · 26 Coaches with Support and Challenge · 28 Makes It Safe to Speak Up

### Middle and executive development

Programmes for those leading functions and services. Levels 3 and 4 give their behavioural outcomes.

12 Leads by Influence, Not Rank · 23 Understands the National Picture · 32 Sets Clear Purpose and Intent · 35 Works Jointly with Partners

### Talent and career pathways

Talent management and learning pathways help people plan a career. Grows Future Leaders (27) asks that access to them is fair and transparent.

03 Treats Everyone with Dignity and Respect · 27 Grows Future Leaders

### 360 degree feedback

Multi-source feedback aligned to the behaviours shows leaders the difference between the impact they intend and the impact they have.

10 Leads with Humility · 14 Knows Their Impact · 25 Never Stops Learning

### Secondments, projects and action learning

Experience beyond one's own station or service builds the wider view. Never Stops Learning (25) expects leaders to seek it.

20 Understands Culture, Including Their Own · 24 Understands How the Service Works · 25 Never Stops Learning

### Debriefs and organisational learning

The debrief is the sector's oldest development tool. Used as a coaching conversation, it develops leaders every shift.

11 Takes Ownership · 26 Coaches with Support and Challenge · 31 Sustains High Performance

**A note on courses.** Leadership is not defined by the courses attended or the qualifications gained, but by the difference a leader makes to the people around them. Courses contribute. Practice, feedback, coaching and a culture that supports learning do most of the work.



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7.2

# Leadership and What the Service Is Asked For

Inspectors, governing bodies, inquiries and the public expect certain things of every fire and rescue service. This page maps the main expectations to the competencies that most directly support them. The behaviours remain leadership behaviours: the way leaders approach their duties, not the duties themselves, which belong to law, standards and policy.

| WHAT IS EXPECTED | WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE | COMPETENCIES THAT MOST DIRECTLY SUPPORT IT |
|---|---|---|
| **A positive, inclusive culture** | Leaders who are visible, open and fair; teams in which everyone belongs. | 03 Treats Everyone with Dignity and Respect · 08 Acts with Decency · 20 Understands Culture, Including Their Own · 28 Makes It Safe to Speak Up · 29 Builds One Team Across Every Role |
| **Standards of behaviour and misconduct** | Poor behaviour challenged early; concerns raised with confidence; cases handled fairly and learned from. | 01 Challenges What Others Tolerate · 04 Is Loyal to Colleagues and Communities · 07 Acts Lawfully and Safely · 08 Acts with Decency · 11 Takes Ownership · 28 Makes It Safe to Speak Up |
| **The Core Code of Ethics embedded** | The five principles visible in everyday conduct and decisions. | 01 Challenges What Others Tolerate · 02 Acts with Integrity · 03 Treats Everyone with Dignity and Respect · 05 Puts Communities First · 09 Acts Professionally On and Off Duty |
| **Leadership at every level** | Supervisory and middle leaders prepared and supported; leaders who develop other leaders. | 12 Leads by Influence, Not Rank · 26 Coaches with Support and Challenge · 27 Grows Future Leaders · 29 Builds One Team Across Every Role · 33 Empowers Within Clear Intent |
| **Learning from incidents and reviews** | Lessons followed through until practice changes; guarding against complacency. | 10 Leads with Humility · 11 Takes Ownership · 16 Questions Their Own Thinking · 24 Understands How the Service Works · 31 Sustains High Performance |
| **Safe and effective operations** | Competence kept current; sound decisions under pressure; concerns about safety raised at the time. | 01 Challenges What Others Tolerate · 07 Acts Lawfully and Safely · 21 Brings Operational and Professional Expertise · 34 Makes Sound Decisions Under Pressure |
| **Joint working and resilience** | A shared picture of risk with partners, at incidents and in planning. | 22 Knows Their Communities and Their Risks · 30 Communicates with Clarity · 35 Works Jointly with Partners |
| **Understanding and serving communities** | Local risk understood; residents listened to; prevention and protection valued. | 05 Puts Communities First · 20 Understands Culture, Including Their Own · 22 Knows Their Communities and Their Risks · 32 Sets Clear Purpose and Intent |
| **Wellbeing and trauma** | People looked after before, during and after difficult incidents. | 06 Leads with Compassion · 13 Shares the Load and the Credit · 15 Stays Composed Under Pressure · 26 Coaches with Support and Challenge |
| **Fairness, equality and progression** | Opportunity, development and promotion open to all on transparent criteria. | 03 Treats Everyone with Dignity and Respect · 09 Acts Professionally On and Off Duty · 18 Understands How Their Team Works · 27 Grows Future Leaders |
| **Governance and public accountability** | Candour with those who govern, inspect and fund the service, and with the public. | 02 Acts with Integrity · 09 Acts Professionally On and Off Duty · 11 Takes Ownership · 23 Understands the National Picture |

**Using this page.** When preparing for inspection or reviewing culture, start from behaviour. Ask where the service can show these competencies in action: in its promotion processes, its staff survey, its debriefs, what happened after its last serious incident or misconduct case, and what staff and communities say when asked.



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7.3

# Alignment to the National Leadership Framework

The National Leadership Framework (NLF) sets out three domains, nine dimensions, 35 competencies and 323 observable behaviours, applied across four levels of leadership (Self, Team, Organisation, Strategic). This framework carries every NLF dimension and every NLF competency, one to one, in the language of fire and rescue, with the NLF's behaviours considered and translated and 34 behaviours added for the sector. This table is the mapping an NLF award assessor would use.

| DOMAIN | NLF DIMENSION | THIS FRAMEWORK | COMPETENCIES (NLF COMPETENCY CARRIED) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Character | Values-Driven | **Lives the Code** | 01 Challenges What Others Tolerate *(Moral Courage)*<br>02 Acts with Integrity *(Integrity)*<br>03 Treats Everyone with Dignity and Respect *(Respect for Others)*<br>04 Is Loyal to Colleagues and Communities *(Loyalty)*<br>05 Puts Communities First *(Service)*<br>06 Leads with Compassion *(Humanity and Compassion)* |
| Character | Upholds the Highest Standards | **Upholds Standards of Behaviour** | 07 Acts Lawfully and Safely *(Lawfulness)*<br>08 Acts with Decency *(Appropriateness)*<br>09 Acts Professionally On and Off Duty *(Professionalism)* |
| Character | Models Exemplary Behaviours | **Is a Positive Role Model** | 10 Leads with Humility *(Humility)*<br>11 Takes Ownership *(Accountability)*<br>12 Leads by Influence, Not Rank *(Influence)*<br>13 Shares the Load and the Credit *(Selflessness)* |
| Knowledge | Knows Themself | **Knows Themselves** | 14 Knows Their Impact *(Self-Awareness)*<br>15 Stays Composed Under Pressure *(Self-Management and Resilience)*<br>16 Questions Their Own Thinking *(Metacognition and Reflective Thinking)* |
| Knowledge | Knows Others | **Knows Their People and Communities** | 17 Notices What Is Not Said *(Social Awareness)*<br>18 Understands How Their Team Works *(Team Dynamics)*<br>19 Builds Trust and Resolves Conflict *(Relationship Management)*<br>20 Understands Culture, Including Their Own *(Cultural Awareness)* |
| Knowledge | Knows Their Profession | **Knows Fire and Rescue** | 21 Brings Operational and Professional Expertise *(Professional and Technical Expertise)*<br>22 Knows Their Communities and Their Risks *(External Context and Stakeholders)*<br>23 Understands the National Picture *(Strategic and National Perspective)*<br>24 Understands How the Service Works *(Organisational Systems and Processes)* |
| Action | Develops Individuals | **Develops People** | 25 Never Stops Learning *(Developing Themselves)*<br>26 Coaches with Support and Challenge *(Providing Support and Challenge)*<br>27 Grows Future Leaders *(Inspiring and Enabling Others)* |
| Action | Builds Teams | **Builds Inclusive Teams** | 28 Makes It Safe to Speak Up *(Creating Psychological Safety)*<br>29 Builds One Team Across Every Role *(Cultivating Teamship)*<br>30 Communicates with Clarity *(Communicating Effectively)* |
| Action | Achieves Outcomes | **Keeps Communities Safe** | 31 Sustains High Performance *(Building and Sustaining High Performance)*<br>32 Sets Clear Purpose and Intent *(Defining and Aligning Purpose)*<br>33 Empowers Within Clear Intent *(Empowering Others)*<br>34 Makes Sound Decisions Under Pressure *(Making Effective Decisions)*<br>35 Works Jointly with Partners *(Cultivating Collaboration and Partnerships)* |

**Levels.** Leading Yourself = Self · Leading Others = Team · Leading the Function = Organisation · Leading the Service = Strategic.

**Coverage.** Nine of nine dimensions and 35 of 35 competencies carried. Of the NLF's 323 behaviours, 320 are carried as their own line and three in concept within the same competency: addressing breaches promptly (07), inviting questions to confirm understanding (30), and bold but disciplined risk-taking, written as disciplined innovation and initiative within boundaries (31 and 33) because risk-taking has a specific operational meaning in this sector. No gaps identified.

**Acknowledgement.** The National Leadership Framework, its wording and its logo are the intellectual property of the National Leadership Framework CIC and are used with acknowledgement. This framework is NLF-informed work in the voice of fire and rescue; NLF concepts are translated under the NLF's encouragement to adapt language to context while preserving the integrity of its core concepts. The Core Code of Ethics, National Operational Guidance, the Fire Standards and the JESIP doctrine belong to their publishers and are referred to by name only.



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8.0

# Sources and Acknowledgements

This framework is informed by the research base of the National Leadership Framework, by the ethics, standards and leadership work of fire and rescue in England, and by the public inquiries, inspections and independent reviews that have examined leadership and culture in the sector. The sources below are those that most directly shaped it.


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This framework was developed by the National Leadership Framework CIC for the fire and rescue sector as an example of how the NLF translates into a profession's own language. It draws on the public work of the National Fire Chiefs Council, the Fire Standards Board, the inspectorate and the inquiries and reviews listed. It is not endorsed by any of them and is not a publication of any of them. Any fire and rescue service may adopt it, adapt it and make it its own; page 47 shows how.




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9.0

# Making This Framework Your Own

This framework is written so that any fire and rescue service can pick it up and use it. It is not branded to any service, and it is deliberately yours to adapt. Six steps make it your own without losing the alignment that gives it its rigour.

**1 Add your name, vision and voice**
Name your service on the cover and add your own foreword. If you wish, rewrite the framework in the first person ("we", "our") so that it reads as your own. The structure and behaviours stay the same.

**2 Place your values**
Use the table on page 20 to show how each of your values, alongside the Core Code, is carried by the competencies.

**3 Translate the roles**
Replace the typical roles at each level with your own ranks, grades and structures, so that every colleague can find themselves in a level.

**4 Connect what you already use**
Keep your appraisal process, your promotion pathway and national programmes. Use pages 16 and 43 to show how they fit together.

**5 Adopt the policy statement**
Take the statement on page 42 to your governing body, adopt it, and review your people, conduct and learning policies against the eight principles.

**6 Keep what gives it rigour**
Keep the three domains, nine dimensions and 35 competencies, keep the behaviours observable, and keep the acknowledgement of the National Leadership Framework.

FROM FRAMEWORK TO PRACTICE

## A framework alone does not make good leaders. People do.

This document describes the leadership a service can ask of its people. What turns it into leadership that colleagues and communities can feel is the way a service brings it to life through its people processes: how it recruits and inducts, how it promotes, how it holds conversations about conduct and practice, how it develops and coaches, how it recognises, how it governs and how it learns from what goes wrong. That work belongs to the service. Supporting, guiding and assuring it is what the National Leadership Framework exists to do.

The NLF is an independent, not-for-profit, third-party assurance body. It helps organisations review their leadership policy and framework against the NLF's principles, align their people processes so that they reinforce the same behaviours, and evidence the result. The NLF Awards, at Bronze, Silver and Gold, give independent assurance that an organisation's leadership framework and its implementation are sound, and a recognised mark of that commitment.

**Interested in an NLF Award, or in adopting this framework?** Speak to the NLF: **www.nlf.org.uk**



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# The Courage to Lead

A LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR FIRE AND RESCUE · VERSION 1.0 · 2026

A combination of a leader's character, knowledge and action, displayed through their behaviours, that inspires others to succeed in keeping communities safe.

National Leadership Framework

Mapped to the National Leadership Framework
www.nlf.org.uk

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