



Essex County
Fire & Rescue Service



People Strategy
2020 – 2024



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Introduction

Our People Strategy is key to delivering our Fire and Rescue Plan. It is also a major part of delivering the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) which sets out our core services: prevention, protection and response. Our People Strategy describes how we will continue to attract, develop, value, involve and care for our colleagues, so that we have a safe and diverse workforce who we can support to perform well and who have access to excellent training.

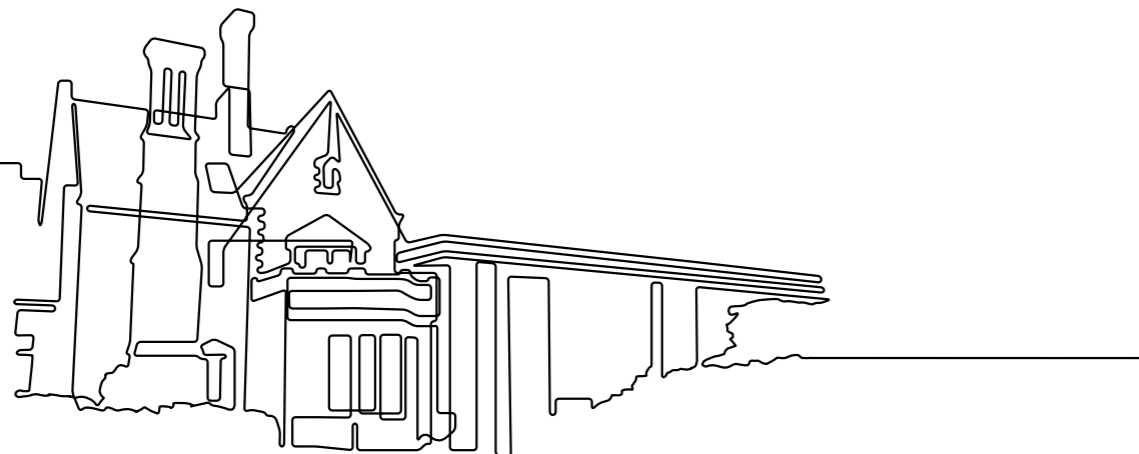
We do these things so that we have a modern, forward-looking and innovative service that works together to anticipate and meet the changing needs of our communities. We want to continue to benefit from the skills and experiences of everybody who works in our service.

This strategy sets out our aims and the specific steps that are in place, or being developed, to support you in being the best at what you do so that we can support the communities we serve. At all times, our strategy aims to support our service values:

- We are open, honest and trustworthy
- We are courageous in everything we do
- We work as one team
- We are always professional
- We value the contribution of all

We have included input from the following in this strategy.

- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) national and local feedback on good practice and areas of development
- The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) People Strategy
- NFCC Guidance – leadership framework and core learning pathways
- The people strategies of our blue-light partners
- Our Fire and Rescue Plan for Essex
- Our Integrated Risk Management Plan
- Feedback from our Everyone Matters listening exercise



The elements of our People Strategy

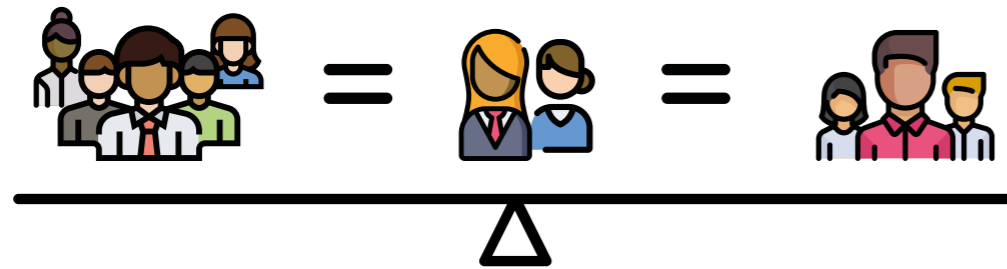


Principles

Our values describe the characteristics we expect from our colleagues. They are guidelines that should direct how we behave and how we interact with others. The principles of our People Strategy take this a step further.

We use these principles to:

- guide our decision-making;
- make flexible and fair decisions at all times (this does not mean treating everyone the same, it means creating an environment where people are treated fairly);
- help people understand how and why we reach decisions; and
- encourage professional judgement and personal responsibility.



People

- Everyone matters – our decisions value and include all of our colleagues, our stakeholders and our community
- Open and transparent – while respecting people’s privacy, we make decisions that are open and transparent because we know this encourages trust
- Fair – our decisions are fair (we know that this is not the same as being equal)

Our approach

- We do our best to simplify our processes
- We are flexible in our use of policy and guidance
- The technology we use focuses on the users’ needs
- We aim to take a ‘digital first’ approach
- We communicate in a variety of ways to reach all of our colleagues
- We encourage self-awareness and positive behaviours that drive results

Continuous improvement

- We focus on performance
- We encourage you to be responsible and accountable
- We encourage innovation
- We encourage you to make decisions based on evidence



Culture: involved and valued

Our Fire and Rescue Plan says we are committed to promoting a positive and kind culture. This is so we encourage a modern, forward-looking and innovative environment where we work together to anticipate and deliver the changing needs of our communities.

Our **Continued Culture Change Strategy sits within the People Strategy** [CLICK TO A LINK \(appendix 1\)](#) and explains how we aim to develop a positive work culture.

We know that when you are genuinely valued in the workplace you are more likely to be committed to your work and to be a good representative of our service. We recognise that we need to continue refreshing and reinforcing our expectations of behaviours.

These areas have become the workstreams of our Culture Change Plan [CLICK TO A LINK \(appendix 1\)](#).

We will:

- promote strong positive values through every level of our service, making sure they are at the centre of what we do and how we do it;
- recognise our colleagues who make our service better – whether that’s through the job they do or the way they show their commitment to living up to our values;
- encourage two-way engagement and make sure all communication is swift, open and transparent;
- continually improve our services and the processes which support them;
- support managers to motivate you and manage your performance;
- reflect the diversity of the communities we serve, aiming for an inclusive workplace that uses the wide-ranging talents of our workforce;
- support and recognise strong and effective leadership and develop talent;
- make sure you feel safe and valued;
- encourage you to speak up and make sure we listen to you; and
- identify ways to make sure it is easy to get things done and that we do the basics well.



Working relationships

We will continue to work together with our colleagues and our representative bodies.

We will:

- recognise common interests and joint purposes;
- behave respectfully towards each other at all times;
- accept the need to take part in joint consultation or negotiation with representative bodies where appropriate;
- set a timescale for discussion right from the start;
- respect the confidential nature of sensitive information;
- work together to build trust and a mutual respect for each other’s roles and responsibilities;
- be open, honest and transparent in our communications;
- make sure our service leaders are committed to our principles;
- be positive and constructive when working with representative bodies;
- commit to early discussion of emerging issues and ‘keep talking’ so there are no surprises;
- aim for successful outcomes following consultations and negotiations and
- if appropriate, aim to agree a joint position between our service and the representative body.



Fair, kind and inclusive workplace

We believe that every employee has the right to be treated fairly and inclusively and with kindness, equality, dignity and respect. We are committed to providing a supportive and inclusive working environment to promote this.

Our **Continued Culture Change Strategy** explains this further. [CLICK LINK](#)

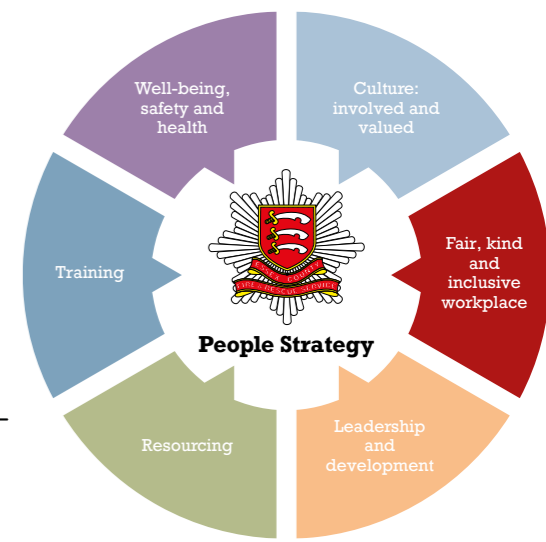
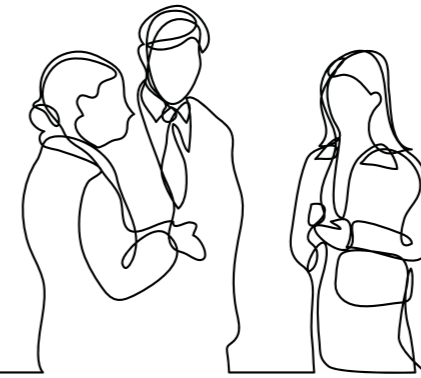
We want you to feel confident that our service meets your needs. We want to remove barriers to equal opportunity in recruiting and retaining staff, and in progression and development. We recognise the value of all our colleagues.

We will:

- inform and educate you so that you are able to respond well to neurological difference, such as dyslexia and autism, you understand diversity and inclusion, and you can challenge inappropriate language and behaviour;
- take positive action so that our workforce becomes more diverse and so more representative of the communities of Essex;
- have clear information about workforce diversity to allow us to make evidence-based decisions
- continuously monitor, review and improve our approach to recruiting and retaining staff, so that it is accessible and supports increased diversity and inclusion;
- review how our policies affect you;
- use external measures to assess our progress and achievement;
- create an environment that encourages you to speak up, be heard, and feel safe and valued;
- support all staff networks to thrive so they can share their own first-hand experiences with colleagues;
- hold regular meetings of the Inclusion and Diversity Action Group, chaired by our Chief Fire Officer or Chief Executive Officer;
- promote and support flexible working where practical and promote different ways of working, such as mixed crewing;
- tackle bullying, harassment and discrimination quickly and consistently;
- create a fair and accessible whistle-blowing and grievance policy so you can raise concerns without fearing the consequences; and
- involve, consult and inform you so that you understand how you can contribute to our service.

Our **Dignity at Work Policy** [HERE](#) describes what an inclusive workplace looks like and how our leaders, managers and colleagues, including Dignity at Work Supporters, all have a vital role to play.

Our commitment to the public sector equality duty as part of the Equality Act 2010 is demonstrated by our **Equality Objectives** [HERE](#), which are published on our website [HERE](#).



Wellbeing, safety and health

We are committed to creating better working lives by creating a safe workforce where we value health and wellbeing. We know this is critical to making Essex a safe place to live, work and travel. Investing in wellbeing will help us achieve better performance and increased productivity.

Our approach to wellbeing will be reflected in the work that you do, the environments you work in, the working relationships you have and the demands placed on you. We will also consider how change affects your working life, how we manage this change and how we will reward and recognise effort and contribution. Each element of this People Strategy supports this.

We want you to enjoy your work, have a fulfilling career in our service and live well, feel well and work well.

Our high-level plan has more details about these. [CLICK HERE](#)

We will:

- include wellbeing priorities in our service culture;
- make sure our policies and approaches to wellbeing and health are consistent;
- work locally and nationally with partners to make sure we share and develop good practice, experience and learning; and
- continue to develop our services, which include the following:

Health and safety

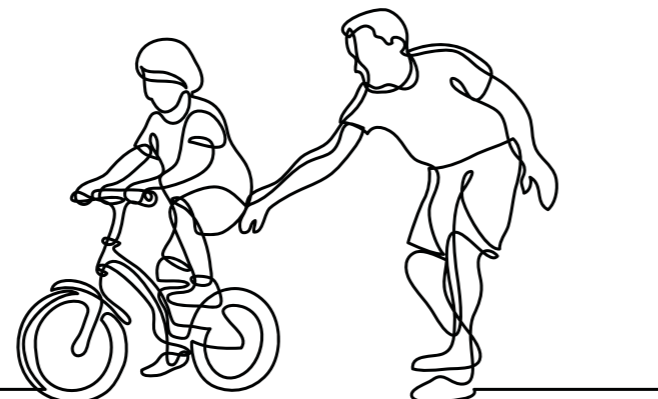
- Physical health
- Mental health
- Physical safety

Financial wellbeing

- Flexible benefits
- Employee discounts
- Retirement planning

Good lifestyle

- Fitness
- Healthy eating



Our wellbeing, safety and health plan will continue to have three main parts.



- **Informing and reassuring by providing information and resources:** Supporting you to make the best choices you can about your wellbeing and encouraging you to ask for help when you need to.
- **Educating and supporting by developing people’s knowledge:** This is particularly important for our managers and supervisors – those who are in day-to-day contact with their teams and who interact with them both in work and, at times, in social settings.
- **Supporting and treating through intervening early to help you recover:** Supporting you to return to the workplace with the necessary help. We will also work with the NHS where appropriate to make sure you get the best medium-to long-term care.

You can find the action plan for delivering this [HERE](#) (appendix 2).

We will:

- do all that we can to support you to manage your physical and mental health;
- continue to provide a professional occupational health service, including health screening, occupational health and medical referrals, fitness advice and support, counselling, advice and health promotions;
- aim to improve and maintain the physical and psychological wellbeing of our workforce, encouraging you to take personal responsibility for your wellbeing and mental health;
- encourage open conversations about mental health and what support is available if you are struggling;
- provide good working conditions so you have a healthy work-life balance and opportunities for development;
- support effective line management and supervision;
- monitor your physical health, mental health and wellbeing, and encourage you to feel confident and comfortable in reporting this; and
- work with our partners to be able to give support around financial wellbeing.

Resourcing

We are committed to making sure we have the right people and skills to deliver the best service to our communities.

To do this, we will deliver the commitments in our Fire and Rescue Plan and focus on making sure that we:

- deal with staffing challenges in critical areas and make sure that we have enough staff; and
- make direct entry into the fire service possible and encourage fast-track development and progression.

Our aim is to be an employer of choice.

We will:

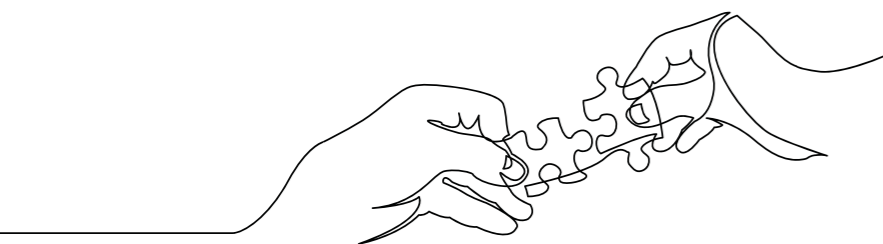
- develop workforce plans and approaches to predict demand and to attract and retain the right people with the right skills (you can find our latest workforce plan **HERE (appendix 3)**);
- review and update all recruitment, resourcing, aspiring leader and pre-employment policies and practices that meet the needs of our service;
- use technology and a 'digital first' approach and put applicant tracking in place to provide an efficient experience for candidates and recruiters;
- base our decisions on resourcing and managing aspiring leaders on evidence so that we can measure improvements to our service; and
- identify whether we need to make, buy or reduce resources.

Attracting aspiring leaders

People will feel that our service is a place where aspiring leaders are recognised and supported.

We will:

- have in place clear and straightforward online applications and online material for new starters;
- make sure our language and branding attracts candidates whose personal qualities, values and attributes match our service values;
- improve candidates' experience and how we recruit and retain staff; and
- be consistent in how we advertise roles.



Assessment

We will:

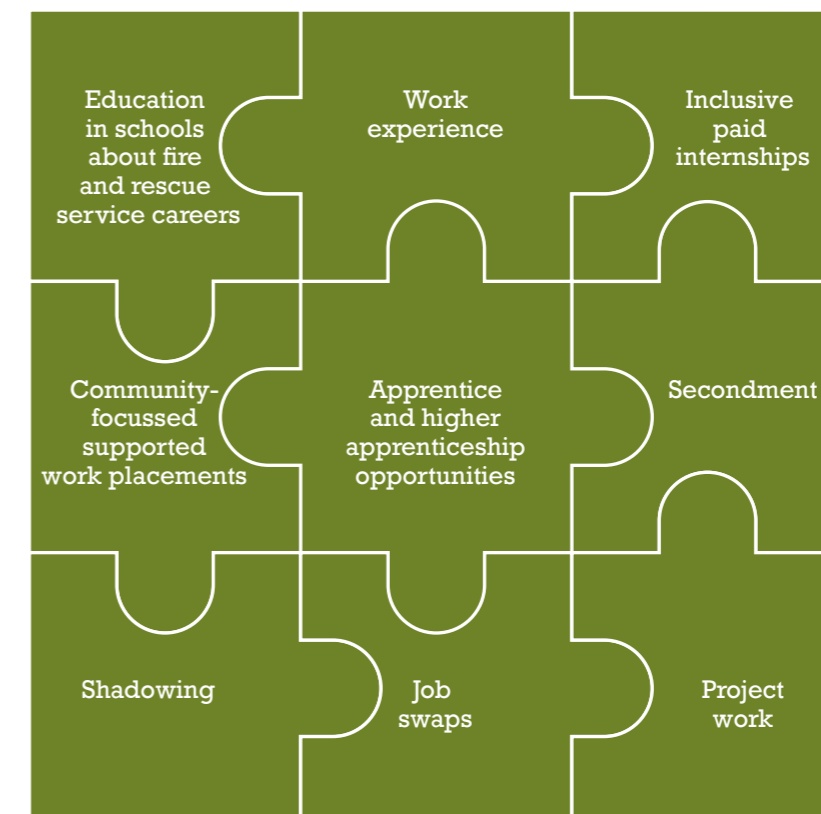
- continue to develop and put in place materials and methods for assessing all candidates for vacancies in an inclusive and diverse way;
- make sure our selection methods place values, leadership capability and technical skills at the centre of our assessment process; and
- regularly review our selection methods, taking into account external research and findings and how appropriate assessment methods are for each role.

Growth and development

We will:

- review our aspiring leader pool process, to create a clear distinction between recognised potential and people ready for the next role;
- design and develop internal and external 'aspiring leader pipelines', including work experience, interns, apprentices and community placements, alongside experienced internal and external candidates; and
- give you access to a range of development activities, including internal and external secondments, shadowing and project work.

You can find the plan for doing this HERE (appendix 3).



Leadership and development

We will support and develop you so we have strong and effective leaders now and in the future.

Our leaders and managers will be positive role models and have effective management and communication skills.

You can find the plan for developing this [HERE](#) (appendix 4).

We will:

- adopt the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) leadership framework and core learning pathways;
- offer development opportunities that link to each part of the leadership framework and core learning pathways;
- run a programme that introduces managers to a people-centred philosophy that prioritises positive behaviours, staff motivation, involvement and accountability;
- include feedback on performance at all levels, so that managers are encouraged to understand and reflect on how they and others influence people around them;
- commission the next phase of our leadership and management development training, including feedback, coaching and focusing on solutions;
- explore opportunities, such as a direct-entry scheme and fast-track internal development, to deal with future leadership challenges in specific areas of our service;
- make sure all staff have the right operational skills and competencies; and
- be open and fair when identifying, developing and supporting colleagues who have the potential to be aspiring leaders.



Training

We are committed to making sure that we have a competent workforce and that we can reassure you of this. We offer training to give you the skills and behaviours you need to flourish and stay safe. Our training includes development activities such as coaching, mentoring, learning events, secondments, face-to-face training and e-learning. We will provide training to all colleagues so that they can promote a positive culture and respond well to concerns around behaviour, bullying or harassment.

We will always keep to the following main principles.

- The training we offer will be suitable for everyone.
- We will develop the skills our service needs now and in the future.
- We will support your continuous professional and personal development.
- We have a system in place that offers regular assurance and proof of competence at all levels of our service.

We offer training in four areas.

- 1. Leadership development** – Developing leaders and managers to be role models for positive behaviours and have effective management and communication skills.
- 2. Professional development** – Developing you in your role. This includes opportunities in inclusion, diversity and committing to our values and behaviours. We will offer these opportunities alongside development linked to our talent pool or professional qualifications required for career development within existing professional groups.
- 3. Personal development** – Development that is not required for your current role but is relevant to our service and your career aims within our service.
- 4. Core training** – Statutory and mandatory training that is directly relevant to your current role or that is a qualification or skill listed as essential in the current personal specification.

These four areas, together with the operational training described in our Operational Training Strategy, make sure all of our colleagues have the skills and training they need to flourish and stay safe in their roles.

We will:

- develop new training programmes and review them each year to make sure they meet development needs identified through appraisals and department planning;
- review our training plans so that we can offer essential skills to do with, for example, inclusion, diversity, behaviours, performance management, industrial relations and handling disciplinary hearings and grievances;
- gather and listen to feedback from our learners through the Learning and Development Advisory Group and other feedback methods;
- offer training that suits a variety of learning styles;
- use our **Quality Assurance Framework CLICK THROUGH (appendix 5)** and our people impact assessments to guarantee that all training across our service is inclusive and of a high quality;
- explore ways of using technology more effectively so that we can offer training and development opportunities at the most suitable time;
- support succession planning by developing people who have the potential to fill key roles; and
- review mandatory training.



Operational skills training

The three parts of our Operational Training Strategy are training, assessment and verification. Together with the work of the Director of Operations and our operational assurance colleagues, these make sure all firefighters are competent.

You can find the **Operational Training Strategy** here **CLICK THROUGH (appendix 4)**.

We will:

- continue to deliver the operational training plan, which you can find **HERE**;
- provide our operational workforce with the appropriate training and development to support you to show that you are competent in your role;
- assess the competence of the operational workforce against the relevant standards, for example, role maps and National Occupational Standards (NOS); and
- verify that our training and assessment means our operational workforce is competent.

We have invested in our operational training so that we can:

- make sure most of our training is delivered at local stations; and
- deliver core acquisition and specialist training centrally, with group trainers supporting local station-based training.



Performance outcomes and indicators

Element	Aim	Measures
Culture: Involved and valued	We have a positive, modern, forward-looking and innovative culture that anticipates and meets the changing needs of communities in Essex	<p>Staff survey – There is an increase in our employee engagement index, as shown in our employee survey.</p> <p>Staff survey – There is an increase in positive responses to the statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘I feel valued and recognised for the work that I do by senior managers’ • ‘In the last week, I have received thanks or praise for doing good work’
Fair, kind and inclusive workplace	Our employees are treated fairly and inclusively and with kindness, equality, dignity and respect.	<p>Staff survey – There is an increase in positive responses to the statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Bullying, harassment and discrimination are not tolerated at ECFRS’ • ‘I feel ECFRS treats people fairly, regardless of ethnic background, gender (including transgender), religion, sexuality, disability, pregnancy or age’ • ‘ECFRS promotes a culture of openness and transparency’ <p>We have improved diversity within our workforce, measured through self-classification data. This diversity will become more representative of the community we serve.</p>
Wellbeing, safety and health	We have a safe workforce and support health, safety and wellbeing.	We have measured our levels of sickness absence and these have decreased.
Resourcing	We deal with resourcing challenges in critical areas to make sure our service is staffed efficiently.	<p>We have good workforce planning, measured by a reduction in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the rate of vacancies; and • the number of temporary promotions.

Element	Aim	Measures
Leadership and development	We have strong and effective leadership in place.	<p>Staff survey – There is an increase in positive responses to the statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Members of the leadership team provide a clear vision of the overall direction of ECFRS’ • ‘Senior managers do what they say they are going to do’ • ‘I have confidence in the future of ECFRS’ • ‘I trust the Service Leadership Team (SLT)’ • ‘I feel able to make decisions without fear of being blamed if things go wrong’
Training	We have a training plan in place which supports leadership and professional and personal development, alongside core training.	<p>Staff survey – There is an increase in positive responses to the statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘I have the right opportunities to learn and grow at work’ • ‘My last appraisal meeting was useful in helping me improve how I do my job and show where I’m performing well’ • ‘I have received the right development to perform my management role well’

Governance model

The People Strategy Board meets every three months and provides advice on and oversight of our People Strategy, policy and practice, to make sure our service is being managed effectively in line with our core vision and values.

Review

We will review this People Strategy every year, in line with our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

Further information

You can find the high-level plans that transform this People Strategy into action [HERE](#).

If you have any questions about any part of this People Strategy, please contact your line manager or your Human Resources Business Partner.



Essex County
Fire & Rescue Service

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www.essex-fire.gov.uk

No smoking in this area
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