

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY		
DATE:	11 NOVEMBER 2021	REPORT NO:	CFO/058/21
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	DEB APPLETON	REPORT AUTHOR:	JACKIE SUTTON
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM		
TITLE OF REPORT:	OUTCOMES FROM CONSULTATION - CROXTETH AND AINTREE FIRE STATIONS		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX 1: CONSULTATION DOCUMENT APPENDIX 2: ORS PUBLIC CONSULTATION REPORT APPENDIX 3: ONLINE SURVEY REPORT APPENDIX 4: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT
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### Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of the outcomes of the twelve-week public consultation regarding the draft proposals to combine Aintree and Croxteth fire stations into a new superstation, including development of a Training and Development Academy and National Resilience Centre of Excellence, at a new site on Long Lane, Aintree.

### Recommendation

2. That Members;
  - a. Note the outcomes of the comprehensive and informative public consultation process undertaken in relation to the proposals to combine Croxteth and Aintree fire stations, particularly the options for emergency fire cover in the Croxteth and Aintree area.
  - b. Take account of those outcomes when considering the **FORMAL PLANNING APPLICATION FOR THE LONG LANE SITE** report on this agenda today including development of a new Training and Development Academy and a National Resilience Centre of Excellence

### Introduction and Background

3. The twelve- week public consultation process commenced on 15<sup>th</sup> July and concluded on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021. The consultation process was held in order for the Authority to gain an understanding of the views of the residents of Aintree and Croxteth and other stakeholders about the proposal to combine Aintree and Croxteth fire stations into a new superstation, including development of a

Training and Development Academy (TDA) and National Resilience Centre of Excellence, at a new site on Long Lane, Aintree. The details of the proposals considered are outlined below:

- Creating a new multi-pump superstation and state of the art TDA at a site on Long Lane in Aintree
  - Combining the two stations and increasing the number of fire engines from 3 to 4
  - Creating a National Resilience Centre of Excellence
4. Full details of the proposal can be found in Appendix 1.
  5. The consultation plan included an online questionnaire, three externally facilitated online deliberative focus groups (two for residents of Aintree and Croxteth station areas and one all-Merseyside group - to consider the wider implications of our proposals), three open public meetings (two online and one face to face at Service Headquarters), an external stakeholder meeting and several staff and individual stakeholder meetings including three with local ward councillors.
  6. More details about the consultation process are set out below.

### **Promoting and marketing the consultation**

7. Following Authority approval on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021, a consultation document and on-line survey were published on the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority website on 15<sup>th</sup> July. Facebook, Twitter and a press release were used to launch the consultation.
8. Consultation documentation was printed and distributed widely across the Aintree and Croxteth areas, published on the Authority website and promoted via social media and the press. Consultation documents were placed in public buildings including libraries, one stop shops and community centres and supermarkets across the two station areas.
9. The consultation document was sent by email to the offices of all local Members of Parliament, Merseyside Police Chief Constable, Northwest Ambulance, Police and Crime Commissioner, City Region Mayor Steve Rotheram, Liverpool City Region, all local ward councillors and the Democratic Services teams at each of the five local councils.
10. Authority social media accounts were used during the consultation period to direct people to information and encourage participation in the consultation process.
11. The Chief Fire Officer consulted with a number of local ward councillors in the two station areas to explain the authority's proposals and to seek their views.

12. The Chief Fire Officer has discussed the plans with the City Region Leaders, Mayor and the Mayor of Liverpool.
13. Stakeholders, including 22 businesses surrounding the proposed new site on Long Lane and 11 major sites in both station areas (including Aintree Hospital and HMP Altcourse), were invited to Service Headquarters to hear our proposals, ask questions and give their views.
14. The Chief Fire Officer spoke to staff at the affected stations to understand their views on the proposals.

### **The consultation events**

15. The consultation events that took place are detailed below. Due to the social distancing constraints of Covid 19 it was decided it was safer for public meetings to take place online (via Zoom) with just one face to face meeting planned for those who did not have access to the internet:
  - Aintree station area focus group meeting – Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> September
  - Croxteth station area focus group meeting – Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> September
  - All Merseyside focus group meeting – Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> September
  - All Merseyside online public meeting – Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> September
  - All Merseyside online public meeting – Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> September
  - All Merseyside (face to face) public meeting – Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> September – Service Headquarters, Bridle Rd, Bootle
  - Stakeholders (face to face) meeting – Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> September – Service Headquarters, Bridle Rd, Bootle

### **Outcomes from the consultation**

#### **Three Focus Groups (Aintree, Croxteth, All Merseyside)**

16. Full information about the focus groups, which were carried out on the Authority's behalf by Opinion Research Services (ORS) to ensure objectivity, can be found at Appendix 2. The following paragraphs provide an overview.
17. As usual, the participants were recruited by random-digit telephone dialling from the ORS Social Research Call Centre and by face to face on-street recruiters. Having been initially contacted they then received a letter confirming arrangements and those who agreed to attend (via Zoom) then received either a telephone or written reminder shortly before each meeting.
18. The meetings lasted for around two hours and in total there were 41 diverse participants. The dates of the meetings and attendance levels by members of the public at each focus group are as shown in the table below.

FOCUS GROUP	DATE	NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
Aintree Fire Station area	14 <sup>th</sup> September 2021	11
Croxteth Fire Station area	15 <sup>th</sup> September 2021	7
Cross-Merseyside	16 <sup>th</sup> September 2021	23

19. In recruitment, care was taken to ensure that no potential participants were disqualified or disadvantaged by disabilities or any other factors. The recruitment process was monitored to ensure social diversity in terms of a wide range of criteria including, for example: gender; age; working status; and disability/limiting long-term illness (LLTI). Overall, as demonstrated in the table overleaf, participants represented a broad cross-section of residents.

GENDER	AGE	WORKING STATUS	LIMITING ILLNESS OR DISABILITY	ETHNIC GROUP
Male: 20 Female: 21	16-34: 8 35:54: 16 55+: 17	Working full- or part-time: 31 Not working/ retired: 10	7	White British: 39 BAME: 2

20. Although, like all forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the three meetings that took place gave diverse groups of people from affected areas the opportunity to comment in details on the Authority's proposals for the Aintree and Croxteth fire station areas. As a result, ORS are satisfied that the outcomes of the meetings (as summarised below) are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.
21. The focus groups began with a presentation (delivered by Chief Fire Officer) of some contextual background information around the 'story so far' in terms of MFRS's ambition, direction, plans and performance.

The subsequent presentation then focused on the proposal itself, with participants firstly being informed that:

- The existing Aintree and Croxteth Fire Stations opened in 1926 and 1962 respectively, and neither can provide the accessible, larger modern facilities firefighters and the local community need;
- The existing TDA, which opened in 1967 and was redeveloped in 1999/2000, is now too small for MFRS's needs and is landlocked by development on both sides, which restricts the Service's ability to

develop training facilities in line with the risks firefighters face locally, nationally, and internationally; and that

- MFRS has undertaken an extensive review of many potential sites for a combined fire station and identified Long Lane, Aintree (which is large enough to accommodate a new fire station, TDA and National Resilience Centre of Excellence and is almost equidistant between the existing stations) as the optimum available option.
- The final section of the presentation focused on response times. In particular, the methodology used by MFRS for managing the proposed station merger process, and participants were told that:
- The predicted overall response time under the existing arrangements is attendance at life-risk incidents within ten minutes 93.7% of time (an average attendance time of 5 minutes 52 seconds from alert to in attendance), whereas that predicted from Long Lane is attendance at life-risk incidents within ten minutes 93.9% of the time (an average attendance time of 5 minutes 50 seconds from alert to in attendance); and
- More locally in Aintree and Croxteth, MFRS simulated the response time to each life-risk incident in those station areas during 2019/20 from the proposed site on Long Lane, which showed that the average response time of 3 minutes 55 seconds is 34 seconds quicker than from the current stations<sup>1</sup>.

22. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and make comments throughout, and the meetings were thorough and truly deliberative in listening to and responding openly to a wide range of evidence and issues.

### **Overall conclusions of the Focus Groups**

- **Initial reactions to the proposal were generally positive, but there were many questions – mainly around response times and firefighter numbers**
- **After hearing MFRS’s reasoning and evidence for the proposed merger, participants were universally supportive of it**
- **Participants were also universally supportive of the proposed new Training & Development Academy and National Resilience Centre of Excellence**
- **It was agreed that the site should be iconic, and something the area can be proud of**
- **The Long Lane site was supported for its centrality within the wider area (notwithstanding some concerns about traffic and congestion)**

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this reduction is attributable to the fact the new station would have an appliance available at night, whereas Aintree is currently staffed during the day and relies on surrounding stations for incidents at night.

23. After a presentation of MFRS's reasoning for the proposed fire station merger and the evidence underpinning it, participants were universally supportive (all but one strongly agreed, with the remaining person tending to agree). Comments included:

***"I strongly agree. It will be better for the community, the firefighters, the youth, and the areas as a whole. I can't see any downside" (Aintree)***

***"The station will be open 24 hours, also the morale of the firefighters will improve, the response times will improve which is only a good thing" (Aintree)***

24. The proposed new Training & Development Academy was strongly supported: it was acknowledged that the Service has outgrown its current Croxteth site and must have space to expand its training facilities to accommodate the wider risks today's firefighters face. Comments included:

***"We've outgrown that one in Croxteth and it needs modernising. Just invest in a new building and be done with it" (Croxteth)***

***"Great investment in the local community. Modern amenities to have the best training facilities in the Fire Service" (Cross-Merseyside)***

25. The development of a National Resilience Centre of Excellence would, it was said, further consolidate MFRS's reputation as a leading fire and rescue service and benefit its role as the lead authority for such activity in the UK.
26. Notwithstanding the aforementioned concerns around traffic and congestion, the preferred site at Long Lane was generally supported for its centrality within the wider area.

***"Location seems strategic due to location to East Lancs, Longmoor Lane, etc." (Cross-Merseyside)***

27. Overall, despite some initial concerns, the **three focus groups overwhelmingly supported the proposed combination of Aintree and Croxteth Fire Station into one super-station at Long Lane.**

### **Online questionnaire**

28. Full analysis of the online questionnaire results can be found at Appendix 3. The following paragraphs provide an overview.
29. There were 47 responses to the online survey (not all respondents answered every question).
30. A significant majority (78% or 37 out of 47) agreed it was reasonable for the Fire Authority to make the proposed changes by closing Aintree and Croxteth fires stations; building a new super-station at a site on Long Lane as part of the development of a new Training and Development Academy and National Resilience Centre of Excellence.
31. When asked if they supported including community facilities at the proposed station 100% of respondents (25 of 25) agreed. Likewise, when asked if they supported the possibility of sharing the proposed station with other blue light services 88% (21 of 24) agreed.
32. When asked their views on what the new station would look like, including any particular design features or facilities they would like to see, comments included:  
  
‘Similar build to Saughall Massie with modern environmentally friendly facilities’  
  
‘Community room to offer services for various age groups, Duke of Edinburgh, youth engagement, Fire Cadets, Safe Haven, etc.’  
  
‘Should be a bold statement and like no other. The flagship of the organisation’
33. The majority of respondents to the questionnaire were members of the public (71% 22 of 31)

### **Public Meetings**

34. Three public meetings (two via Zoom and one face to face) were widely publicised and despite initial interest for the first and second meeting nobody attended, the third meeting was cancelled when no members of the public expressed an interest in attending. Three members of staff were among those who expressed an interest in attending, but as these meetings were intended for the public and staff were able to access information in a number of other ways it was not thought appropriate to proceed. However, the Chief Fire Officer offered to meet the staff if they wished.

35. It is believed that the lack of interest in the public meetings is down to the proposals being generally uncontentious (ORS also had difficulties recruiting for the focus groups). As a result, officers are entirely confident that feedback from the three deliberative focus groups and the online survey are more than sufficient to indicate the views of the public.

### **Stakeholder meeting**

36. All the businesses (22) surrounding the Long Lane site and significant risks in the Croxteth and Aintree station areas (11) including Altcourse Prison, Aintree Hosiptal, Aintree racecourse, Jacobs and The Walton Centre were invited by letter and later by phone and email to attend. Five people attended, representing Aintree Hospital, The Walton Centre and Jacobs.
37. The format for the stakeholder meeting was a formal presentation by the Chief Fire Officer giving the reasons for the changes being proposed and details of the plans for the proposed site and its likely impact on the Authority's operational activities.
38. This was followed by an invitation for attendees to ask questions of the Chief Fire Officer. The people who attended were appreciative of the update on our proposals and broadly supportive of our plans.

### **Other meetings with staff and interested stakeholders, groups and individuals**

39. The Chief Fire Officer held two meetings (27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> July. No councillors were able to attend the third planned meeting) with ward councillors in the affected station areas and 10 Councillors attended. They were shown a presentation explaining the background to the proposals and anticipated benefits. In summary, the councillors expressed that they had had most of their questions answered by the presentation and they were reassured by the amount of work being done and consideration being given to the proposals.

One councillor asked "Does MFRS discuss the other Emergency Services' plans with them when creating our own?" The Chief Fire Officer confirmed we have a Collaboration Committee with the Police and Ambulance Services that looks at how we can work together and how organisation's plans might impact on others. We also have NWAS present on seven MFRS sites.

40. Some concerns were expressed about the traffic at the junction with Longmoor Lane (similar points were also raised in survey responses and the focus groups). The CFO explained that some conversations have taken place with Liverpool City Council and that engineered options are available including the potential for a "Green Wave" which would change the traffic lights in favour of the fire appliance. These operate successfully elsewhere on Merseyside and will be one of the options considered should the Authority progress to the planning permission stage. Although raising such concerns is understandable, Members are asked to note that the consultation was intended to specifically seek the

views of stakeholder on the proposed operational response changes, with the intention always being to deal with traffic related concerns at a future planning stage. That said, the insight was useful.

41. The Fire Brigades Union, when consulted, confirmed that their the key area of interest is related to people issues affecting their members, about which the Service has begun conversations (pending Authority approval to progress the proposals) . The FBU have no comment around the public consultation or views around the building of the station. Representative bodies will be involved in any future consultations around moving the stations to the proposed site and staffing.
42. The Chief Fire Officer spoke to staff at Aintree and Croxteth regarding the proposals and summarised their views as follows:
  - Croxteth: Staff were thrilled with the proposals and look forward to opportunities provided by the new training facilities. They welcomed the enhanced National Training potential and understood the benefits.
  - Aintree: Staff recognised the potential improvements to response times for Aintree residents, particularly during the night time period when the proposals would deliver increased resources. They looked forward to the new training facilities and the opportunities to enhance their specialist skills.
  - On both stations, staff welcomed the replacement of two old, unfit for purpose stations with new facilities that would provide improvements for staff and the community.

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### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

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43. The updated Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached at Appendix 4.
  - In summary attendees at consultation meetings were 51% female and 49% male which approximately reflects the gender breakdown for the Liverpool area (50.1% female, 49.9% male).
  - 41% were over 55, 39% between 35-54 and 20% were in the 16-34 year-old age group. 76% were working full or part-time 24% not working or retired.
  - 17% had a limiting illness or disability this closely reflects the average for Liverpool district where 13% of residents have activities limited a lot.
  - 2 attendees identified as being Black and Minority Ethnic this is lower than the 15% of Liverpool residents who are not 'White British'. (BAME and 'White other' make up this group).
44. The figures above reflect the average profile of residents in Liverpool and this allows us to feel comfortable that the views of different groups of people have been considered when using the consultation for decision making purposes.
45. While considering the draft proposals, participants in the deliberative focus groups were encouraged to consider whether the proposals have any adverse

implications for any vulnerable people and in particular groups with 'protected characteristics'. No negative equality, diversity and inclusion impacts were raised: participants could only see positives in terms of accessibility and inclusivity for station staff and the communities of Aintree and Croxteth.

46. A total of 47 responses to the consultation questionnaire were received, the questionnaires were treated as an information gathering exercise rather than the outcome of specific deliberations such as those that occurred in the focus groups. The questionnaires have been analysed in terms of Equality Monitoring (30 of the 47 respondents completed the Equality Monitoring questions) this shows:
- 80% of respondents were male, 16.67% female and 3.33% preferred not to say. This is lower proportion of females when compared to the gender breakdown of the census 2011.
  - There were a wide range of ages responding to the survey, the largest group of respondents – 24% were from the 30-39 age group. The fewest responses came from 70-79 years 3% and there were no responses from the over 80's.
  - 17.24% identified themselves as disabled which is slightly higher than the Liverpool average of 13%.
  - 96.67% identified as White English, one respondent stated other ethnic group but did not state which group. 4.2% of the population of the Aintree and Croxteth area are of black, Asian, minority ethnic origin based on 2011 Census data.
47. Stakeholders were also consulted through individual meetings including local Ward Councillors, local businesses, large risks in the Croxteth and Aintree station areas including Aintree Hospital, The Walton Centre and Jacobs and feedback did not identify any negative issues in relation to protected groups.

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### **Staff Implications**

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48. Aintree and Croxteth staff have been specifically engaged with throughout the process and a number of staff also completed the online survey.

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### **Legal Implications**

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49. It is considered that in carrying out the extensive twelve-week consultation in the manner that it has MFRA has fully complied with the legal requirements and best practice guidance.

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### **Financial Implications & Value for Money**

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50. The total costs associated with the consultation were as follows:

Focus Group facilitation - £ 9335 ex VAT

51. All costs were met from existing budgets and there was no additional costs arising from staff attendance at evening meetings.

52. As detailed in the report, it is considered that the deliberative forums offer value for money, as relying solely on open public meetings would not have provided Members with sufficient information about the views of the public to enable them to make an informed decision about how to proceed.

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### **Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications**

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53. It is considered that MFRA has reduced corporate risk by carrying out extensive meaningful consultation and considering the outcomes of that consultation before making any final decisions on the proposals. There are no health and safety or environmental implications arising from this report.

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### **Contribution to Our Vision: *To be the best Fire & Rescue Service in the UK.***

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Our Purpose: *Here to serve, Here to protect, Here to keep you safe.*

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54. Entering into a period of twelve-weeks meaningful consultation in the Croxteth, Aintree and Merseyside area allowed the public, staff and other stakeholders to carefully consider the implications the proposed changes to operational response and contribute valuable opinions that will be considered by the Authority when it makes its final decision.

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### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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### **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

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