



Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

Wirral Fire Cover Consultation

Consultation Document 2

December 2014

Introduction

On 3rd October Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) began consulting on a draft proposal to close West Kirby and Upton fire stations and build a new station in a more central location on Frankby Road, Greasby, as an alternative to the outright closure of West Kirby. This is known as a station merger. The consultation process is due to run until the 5th of January 2015.

This second consultation document has been produced to answer some frequently asked questions raised so far during the consultation and provide an update on the Greasby site.

Since the beginning of the consultation the Authority has held four public consultation meetings in Wirral; two in Greasby, one in Upton and one in West Kirby. There have also been three focus group meetings at Greasby, Upton and West Kirby and a stakeholders' meeting and forum will take place in December.

The meetings have generated many questions and requests for further information about the proposals and the consultation process in particular. There were strong objections at the Greasby meetings to the proposed site for the new station and the Chief Fire Officer has noted those views and discussed them with Wirral Council. As a result, the Frankby Road site has now been withdrawn.

After the conclusion of the current consultation, the Fire and Rescue Authority will decide the best way forward; but meanwhile the consultation will continue to seek the views of the people of West Wirral on the principle of a station merger without nominating particular sites.

Why the Fire and Rescue Service has to change

MFRA is responsible for providing fire and rescue services for Merseyside's 1.4 million people at 26 fire stations across the five districts. This currently includes delivering fire and rescue services in Wirral from six stations; Birkenhead, Bromborough, Heswall, Upton, Wallasey and West Kirby.

Over the last four years MFRA has had to make savings of £20 million as a result of Government spending reductions and now the Authority is required to make a further £6.3 million savings in 2015/16. It is also possible that future savings will be required – whichever party is in power: possibly up to £9.1 million in 2016/17 and up to £20 million in total by 2020.

MFRA has already had to make significant reductions in its support services and back office staff. The number of firefighters MFRA employs has reduced from 1,400 to 764, with fire appliances reducing from 42 to 28 across the county. All but two stations have only one appliance. What has not changed in more than 20 years is the number of

community fire stations (26) and the Authority will not be able to afford to maintain all of them in the future.

To save £6.3 million in 2015/16 the Authority aims to deliver £2.9 million from support services (such as Finance, Human Resources and Estates management) and technical areas such as debt financing. The remaining £3.4 million would then come from our emergency response and this will require the equivalent of at least four station mergers or outright closures.

The Authority is making these changes reluctantly, but the situation is such that the existing number of fire stations cannot be maintained in the future.

The options considered

Before making proposals to change fire cover in Merseyside, the Authority considered a number of other options and consulted the public about them.

The options were:

- Some outright station closures.
- Increasing the number of “Low Level of Activity and Risk” (LLAR) stations.
- Some station mergers.
- Crewing some stations only during the day.
- Using community retained firefighters to crew some stations.

The merger of stations was recognised by the public as the best option given the circumstances; with least impact on operational response. The closure of stations was preferred over changes to the way fire stations and fire engines are crewed (because they understood that it is firefighters and fire engines that save lives, not the fire stations).

Following this consultation, three possible mergers were identified as offering opportunities to replace old buildings with new facilities in locations which offer the best incident response coverage possible in the circumstances. The draft proposals were to:

1. Close the stations at Huyton and Whiston while building a new station at Prescott;
2. Close the stations at Upton and West Kirby while providing a new station at a central location (initially the Frankby Road site);
3. Close the stations at Eccleston and St Helens while providing a new station in the proximity of St Helens Town Centre.

Each of these merged stations would have two fire engines. In each case, one fire engine would be crewed 24/7 (as now) while the other would be a “reserve”, or “back-up” vehicle to be crewed by “wholetime retained” firefighters on a 30-minute recall basis for periods of exceptionally high demand.

A fourth merger in Liverpool has also been considered but given the age and proximity of stations it is proposed that outright closure of a station would be the most sensible option.

The Fire and Rescue Authority believes that each of these changes may be made safely and will provide significant savings. The information below gives more detail about why the Authority has approved the draft proposal for Wirral.

The information below is a detailed explanation of the alternative options to station mergers or outright closure and the operational rationale as to why these have been considered and discounted by the Chief Fire Officer at this time.

Context

1. *Paragraph 3.2 of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority scheme of delegation places the following responsibilities on the Chief Fire Officer;*

To control all matters of the day to day administration of the Fire & Rescue Service which shall include taking and implementing decisions that are:-

*(a) Concerned with maintaining the operational effectiveness of the Service,
(b) Matters incidental to the discharge of the Authority's functions which fall within a policy decision taken by the Authority.*

2. *The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England directs that 'The Fire and rescue authority must hold their Chief Fire Officer to account for the delivery of the fire and rescue service'.*
3. *The Chief Fire Officer is therefore responsible for all operational matters and is held to account by the Authority for decisions taken in this regard.*
4. *In 2015/16 the Authority must make savings of £6.3m in addition to the £20m savings required as a result to cuts in the Authority budget over the period 2011/12 – 2014/15.*
5. *The Authority has increased its council tax by the maximum amount it can (2%) without undertaking a referendum. A referendum is estimated to cost £1m.*
6. *The Authority has also identified all the non-operational savings available to it and adopted them in full. These total £2.9m. However this still means that of the £6.3m savings, £3.4m must be delivered from operational response. This equates to a reduction of around 90 wholtime equivalent (WTE) Firefighter posts. These posts will be lost through natural turnover as firefighters retire.*
7. *The Authority currently has 26 fire stations and 28 fire appliances. Of the 26 fire stations, 24 have 1 fire appliance and 2, Kirkdale and Southport, have 2 fire appliances. Kirkdale is the Operational Resource Centre for the Authority housing all of the non-Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) special appliances (which are located at Croxteth with the USAR team). The second appliance*

at Kirkdale operates as a support appliance to the special appliances. Southport has 2 fire appliances because of its geographic location and the travel distances involved for additional appliances responding from elsewhere on Merseyside.

8. Of our 26 stations, 10 are designated as Key Stations. From these stations we can provide a 10 minute response to all areas of Merseyside on 90% of occasions (our response standard).
9. The number of wholetime Firefighters employed directly equates to the numbers of fire appliances that can be staffed for an immediate response by fully trained Firefighters and therefore the numbers of fire stations the Authority can operate.
10. The removal of 90 Firefighter posts will result in the loss of 4 wholetime fire appliances. It is the view of the Chief Fire Officer that the Authority should maintain 2 appliances at Kirkdale and Southport, because of the location of Southport and the fact that Kirkdale is the Operational Resource Centre for Merseyside. In maintaining 2 appliances at Kirkdale and Southport the Authority can only staff enough appliances to maintain 22 fire stations on a wholetime basis. The Authority could as an alternative maintain 26 stations through altering the crewing arrangements on specific stations or across the Service. The reasons why these options have been discounted by the Chief Fire Officer in favour of station mergers or outright closures are detailed in paragraphs below.
11. The operational logic for station mergers is to close two adjacent stations (which each currently house one appliance on a wholetime basis) and build a new station (that would house one wholetime appliance and one appliance staffed on a wholetime retained basis). Building the new station at a location in between the two existing stations would deliver the best response times achievable in the circumstances from the one remaining wholetime appliance. Such an option is possible in Knowsley, Wirral and St Helens due to the age and proximity of the stations.
12. In each of the merged stations, the second appliance would be crewed on a "wholetime retained" basis. "Wholetime retained" crewing in this instance means wholetime Firefighters having a second retained contract whereby they provide cover on their days off to respond and crew the second appliance within 30 minutes of an alert- because a 30-minute response time delay would attract volunteers from sufficient numbers of existing staff to make the system viable.
13. The retained (second) appliance would only be called in during periods of high operational demand and they would not be used for immediate response to incidents in the station area. Its function is as part of a strategic reserve, not as a first line response until such time as the crew had been called in, which would take up to 30 minutes. The advantage of this option is that it uses wholetime firefighters rather than community retained firefighters (see paragraphs 33– 39 below).

14. There are no viable merger options in Liverpool due to the age and proximity of the stations across the city. An outright closure and the relocation of the wholetime appliance to be crewed on a wholetime retained basis at a neighbouring station has been proposed in these circumstances as it delivers the least impact on response times of all of the achievable options.

Low Level of Activity and Risk

15. The Low Level of Activity and Risk (LLAR) duty system is currently in operation at 4 of the Authority's 26 stations. The system consists of a 12 hour wholetime day shift followed immediately by a 12 hour retained night shift (spent off the station) where the crew must respond to an incident within 1 minute 54 seconds of an alert thus maintaining a comparable alert to mobile time as achieved by other wholetime staff during their night-time rest period.

16. Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to LLAR would deliver a saving of 8 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order to deliver the same savings as for a station merger 3 wholetime stations would need to convert to LLAR. Whilst this option would maintain an immediate emergency response (assuming it was possible to secure accommodation for the night time retained period separate from the station but within a 1 minute 54 seconds alert to mobile time) it is less resilient than wholetime crewing as the same staff cover the 12-hour wholetime period and the 12-hour retained period. For example, if a crew attends incidents during the night-time period they will then require a period of stand down time to recover during the day shift, meaning they are either not available to provide operational response or unable to undertake prevention work or normal scheduled duties. As the number of appliances reduces the ability for Fire Control to not mobilise LLAR appliances during the retained period is also reduced meaning they will attend more incidents and potentially no longer meet the Low Level of Activity and Risk threshold.

17. To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response the Authority would need to convert 12 wholetime appliances to LLAR in addition to the existing 4 LLAR appliances. This would result in 16 of the Authority's 28 appliances being crewed in this way.

18. In order to comply with working time regulations the Authority would be required to provide separate accommodation for the retained duty period that is within a 1 minute 54 second response from the stations in question. The cost of building accommodation at existing LLAR stations has been around £300k. Converting 12 appliances to LLAR would therefore require a capital spend of around £3.6m for accommodation. Of the 10 key stations only one, Formby, is currently crewed LLAR which is as a result of its geographic location and the very low numbers of incidents on the station ground and number of appliance mobilisations. In any other circumstances a key station would not be crewed on the LLAR duty system. Of the stations not designated as 'key' a number have appliance mobilisation numbers which exceed the LLAR threshold of 825 incidents to the station area agreed in 2006 (Kirkdale,

Kensington, City Centre and Birkenhead). A number also do not have sufficient space within the curtilage of the station to build separate accommodation necessary to make the 1 minute 54 seconds alert to mobile time during the retained period (Toxteth and Aintree).

19. There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew an additional 12 LLAR appliances. Whilst the Authority could recruit Firefighters directly on to the LLAR system this would result in crews on LLAR stations with a disproportionately high number of inexperienced Firefighters until such time as they were able to demonstrate competence in role. It would also invariably result in existing wholetime firefighters who did not wish to volunteer for the LLAR duty system being placed at risk of compulsory redundancy.

20. It is for these reasons that LLAR has not been proposed by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness at this time.

Day Crewing

21. The Authority does not currently operate the Day Crewing duty system at any station on Merseyside. This system consists of a wholetime day shift (typically 10 hours duration) immediately followed by a 14 hour retained night shift where a response is made by a Firefighter from home within 5 minutes of an alert.

22. Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to Day Crewing would deliver a saving of 10.8 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts (assuming a 10% retaining fee). In order to deliver the same savings as a station merger would, 2 wholetime stations would need to convert to Day Crewing.

23. To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response the Authority would need to convert 8 wholetime appliances to Day Crewing in addition to the existing 4 LLAR appliances. This would result in 12 of the Authority's 28 appliances either on Day Crewing or LLAR crewing. Day Crewing is less resilient than wholetime crewing for similar reasons as for LLAR as the same staff cover the 10 hour wholetime period and the 14 hour retained period. As the number of appliances reduces the ability for Fire Control to not mobilise LLAR or Day Crewing appliances during the retained period is also reduced.

24. This option would introduce a 5-minute delay in responding from 8 appliances for 14 hours each day. Assuming the 5-minute delay in responding in to the station and given the geography of Merseyside, it is likely that the nearest wholetime appliances would be able to attend an incident in at least the same time as the Day Crewing appliance if not quicker during the retained period.

25. There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew 8 Day Crewing appliances. Whilst the Authority could recruit Firefighters directly on to the Day Crewing system this would result in crews on Day Crewing stations with a disproportionately high number of inexperienced Firefighters until such time

as they were able to demonstrate competence in role. It would also invariably result in existing wholetime firefighters who did not wish to volunteer for the Day Crewing duty system being placed at risk of compulsory redundancy.

26. It is for these reasons that Day Crewing has not been proposed by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness. If as expected the Authority faces further cuts beyond 2015/16 this option may have to be reconsidered as a means of maintaining capacity during the daytime period.

Day only crewing

27. The Authority does not currently operate day only crewing at any station on Merseyside. This system involves Firefighters crewing the station for a 12-hour wholetime day shift only in order to maintain capacity to undertake training and community safety activities.

28. Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to day only crewing would deliver a saving of 12 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order to deliver the same savings as the station merger option 2 wholetime stations would need to convert to day only crewing.

29. To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response the Authority would need to convert 8 wholetime appliances today only crewing in addition to the existing 4 LLAR appliances. This would result in 12 of the Authority's 28 appliances either on day only crewing or LLAR crewing.

30. Whilst an immediate response to incidents would be achieved during the 12-hour day shift there would be no response at all during the 12-hour night-time period from day only crewed stations.

31. There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew 8 days only appliances. Whilst the Authority could recruit Firefighters directly on to day only crewing this would result in crews on day only stations with a disproportionately high number of inexperienced Firefighters until such time as they were able to demonstrate competence in role. It would also invariably result in existing wholetime firefighters who did not wish to volunteer for day only crewing being placed at risk of compulsory redundancy.

32. It is for these reasons that day only crewing has not been proposed by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness at this time. If as expected the Authority faces further cuts beyond 2015/16 this option may have to be reconsidered as a means of maintaining capacity during the day time period. It should be noted that these appliances would in all likelihood be used as a pan Merseyside resource to for example stand in at key stations to facilitate the key appliance crew attending the Training and Development Academy for crew-based training. It would make more financial sense therefore to relocate the day crewed only appliance permanently to a key station thus allowing the Authority to make permanent savings on

premises overheads (on average around £100k per year) through closing the non key station.

Retained

- 33. The Authority does not currently operate retained only crewing at any station on Merseyside. This system involves members of the community who live or work within 5 minutes of a fire station volunteering to be available for up to 120 hours per week for a retaining fee equivalent to 10% of a wholetime Firefighter's salary.*
- 34. Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to retained would deliver a saving of 22 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order to deliver the same savings as for a station merger 1 wholetime station would need to convert to retained crewing.*
- 35. To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response the Authority would need to convert 4 wholetime appliances to retained in addition to the existing 4 LLAR appliances. This would result in 8 of the Authority's 28 appliances either on retained or LLAR crewing.*
- 36. Pursuing this option would require the Authority to either seek volunteers from existing Firefighters who would be required to live within a 5-minute response time of the station (wholetime retained) or for the Authority to recruit members of the public who live or work within 5 minutes of the station.*
- 37. There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew 4 wholetime retained appliances on a 5 minute recall. That being so, the Authority would need to recruit almost a full crew of retained Firefighters. It is the view of the Chief Fire Officer that a retained Firefighter does not have sufficient contact (training) time within the Grey Book (Firefighters' nationally agreed conditions of service) retained contract to acquire and maintain the skills of an existing Merseyside wholetime Firefighter. Also, the Merseyside Trainee Firefighter course is currently 40 weeks long and the wholetime work routine allocates in excess of 20 hours per week to on station training. A retained firefighter has approximately 2/3 hours per week contact time at station for training, development and maintenance duties). If the Authority were minded to still pursue this option they would have to accept that the retained Firefighters would not be trained to the same level as their wholetime counterparts and it would take a long period of time to train the crew to a position whereby they were deemed fit to ride. Additionally to maintain retained appliance availability a minimum of 4 members of the crew including a driver and an officer in charge would have to be permanently available within 5 minutes of the station.*
- 38. With 3 hours contact time each week retained Firefighters would not be able to undertake any amount of community safety work.*

39. Assuming the 5-minute delay in responding in to the station and given the geography of Merseyside, it is likely that the nearest wholetime appliances would attend an incident in at least the same time as the retained crew if not quicker.

It is for these reasons that retained crewing has not been proposed by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness at this time.

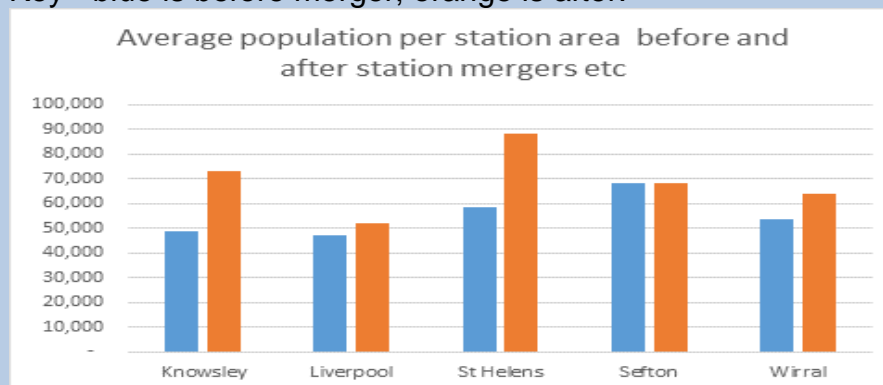
Frequently asked questions

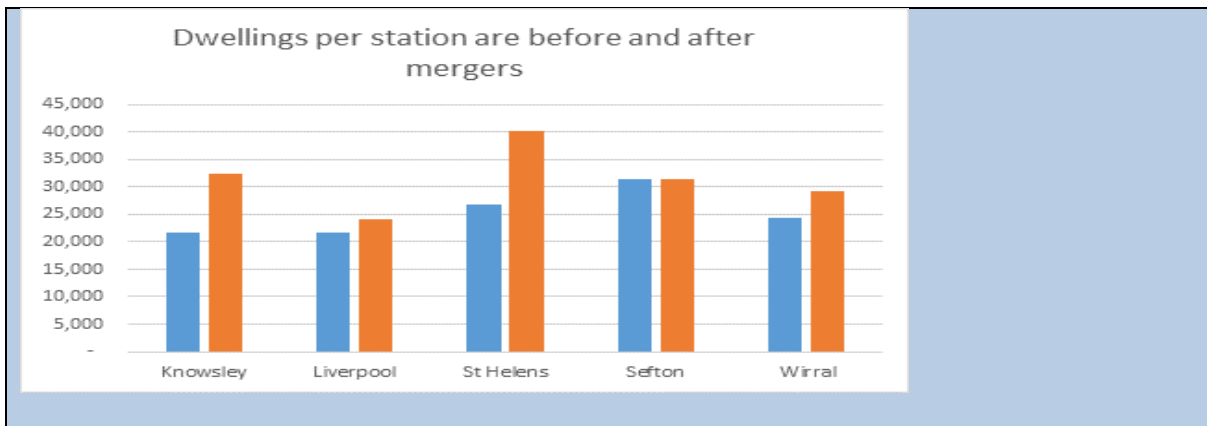
How do you provide emergency response in Wirral?

Of the six fire stations in Wirral two (Bromborough and Upton) are designated as key stations under our operational response model. This is because all of Wirral can be covered within 10 minutes from these locations, with the exception of a very small rural area in Hoylake. If we maintain at least one fire appliance in each area we can respond to an incident within our response standard for life risk incidents of 10 minutes on 90% of occasions. We apply the same logic across Merseyside with 10 designated key stations out of 26. It should be noted that the response standard applies only to the attendance time of the first appliance. The Authority mobilise a minimum of 2 appliances to a life risk incident and 3 appliances to any property fire where persons are reported to be trapped in the property.

As can be seen in the graphs below, even after any merger, the Wirral station areas will still serve a relatively low number of people and homes compared to other districts.

Key - blue is before merger; orange is after.





How quickly do you get to incidents in Wirral?

Whilst the Authority has set a 10-minute response target the actual average response standard to life risk incidents across Merseyside is 5 minutes and 24 seconds. The average response time on the Upton station area is 4 minutes 34 seconds. The average response time on the West Kirby station area is 5 minutes and 24 seconds.

What impact would the cuts have on attendance times?

If we were to close West Kirby outright the average response time to incidents on the West Kirby station area would increase to 8 minutes 43 seconds with the first response from Upton. If we were to close West Kirby and Upton and build a new station in a central location the average response time to the combined station areas would be 6 minutes 18 seconds. It is the Authority's aim to achieve, as far as possible, equal levels of average response for people in both station areas.

We could redevelop Upton in order to accommodate our colleagues from North West Ambulance Service who are interested in the location due to its proximity to Arrowe Park Hospital but this would be to the substantial disadvantage of emergency response cover in the West Kirby station area.

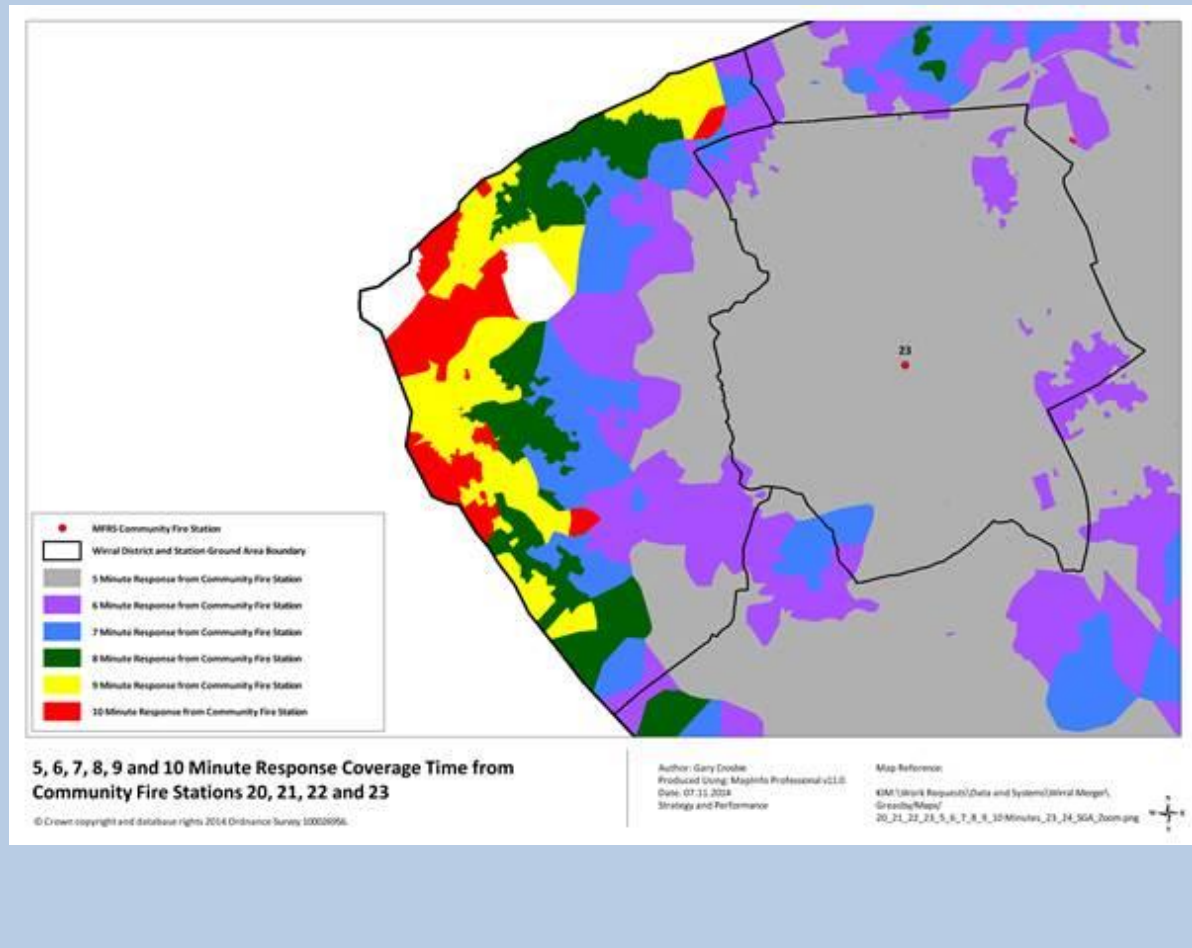
Accepting that we cannot leave the stations as they are (because of the savings we have to make) and that there is no option that can improve response performance, the option that would have the least impact on overall response times would be to build a new station at a central location.

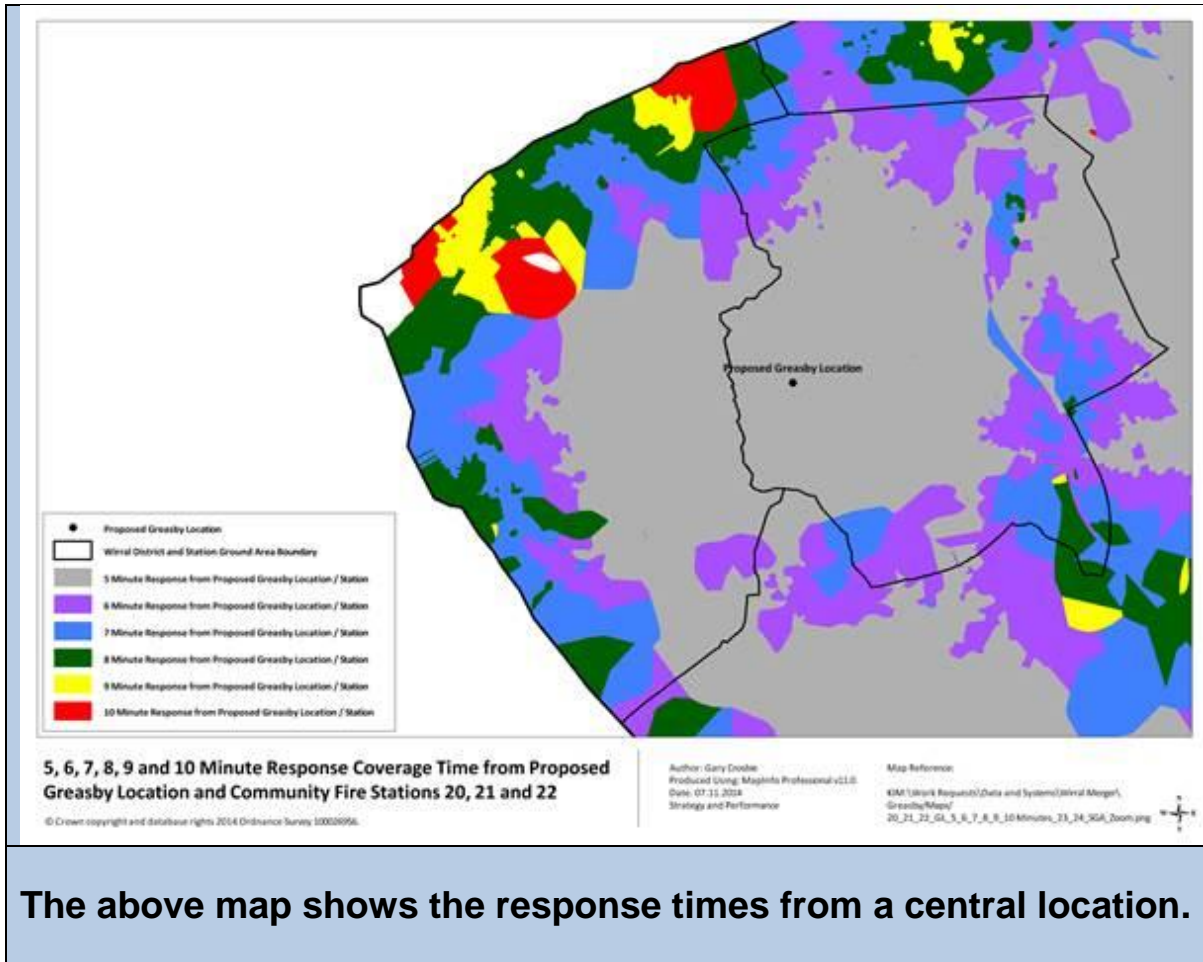
Whilst more incidents occur on Upton's area than on West Kirby's area, neither station is busy, but Upton is not quite as quiet as West Kirby.

The likelihood of a life risk incident in either area is low but the potential severity of any incident is high (there could be a fatality). In light of this, if the Authority were to knowingly accept a much slower response to West Kirby it would then be impossible to argue to maintain a faster response anywhere else on Merseyside.

The impact of moving to a more central location is shown below. The maps, on this page and the next page, illustrate how the response times are equalised across the area when the fire station is positioned more centrally. The maps use Frankby Road, Greasby, as this location illustrates the benefits of a more central location even though the exact site is not available.

Current Response times on West Wirral.





The above map shows the response times from a central location.

Why are attendance times so important in this consultation?

The duties of the Fire and Rescue Authority are to respond to fires, Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs), and Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Conventional Explosive (CBRNE), Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) and serious transport incidents

The Authority also has the power to respond to any incident where a person or animal may die, be injured or become ill.

The Secretary of State must prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework and Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA) must have regard to the framework in carrying out their functions.

As a result, the Fire and Rescue Authority sets out an attendance time standard in its Integrated Risk Management Plan, as this is one of the ways it shows how it plans to meet its duties.

Heswall Fire Station

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority has no plans to close Heswall fire station. Heswall responds into Neston and in fact provides the first response into that area under the mutual aid arrangements between Cheshire and Merseyside Fire and

Rescue Authorities. There has been some speculation about commercial interest in the Heswall station site in the past and it has been raised at some of our recent consultation meetings in West Wirral. The Chief Fire Officer has always pointed out that the station is not for sale.

The average response time from Heswall into the West Kirby station area is 10 minutes 38 seconds although the average response time to Hoylake specifically is 13 minutes 5 seconds.

Moving to Wholetime Retained in West Kirby

The Fire and Rescue Authority would need to change the crewing status of the West Kirby appliance from wholetime to wholetime retained (WTR) long before any new station was built as we simply would not have the numbers of wholetime Firefighters in the organisation by that time to crew the appliance on a wholetime basis.

Wholetime retained involves our existing wholetime firefighters providing cover on two of their days off, providing a 30-minute response to stations. This fire appliance would only be used during periods of very high demand and will not offer an immediate emergency response.

Is West Kirby available all the time now?

No. Although the Fire and Rescue Service employs enough firefighters, there are, at certain times, a number of them unavailable due to sickness or not fit enough to ride fire engines as they are recovering from an injury or illness. When that happens, operational decisions have to be taken not to staff fire appliances for shifts at a time. This always has to be a non-key station such as West Kirby. This is one of the reasons we are proposing to build a new station in a central location, because the current situation of responding from Upton on these occasions does not provide an equal emergency response for the people living in the West Kirby station area.

The location of a new station

Many questions have focussed on the Frankby Road site. As this site is no longer available to the Fire and Rescue Authority, these questions are no longer relevant and are not answered here.

The Authority will consider all the options open to it following conclusion of the consultation and agree further proposals in early 2015. Providing the most effective response to emergency incidents for all areas of Wirral, within the resources it has available, remains the Authority's priority.

How you can share your views during the consultation

The Authority is interested in how reasonable the public and other stakeholders consider our plans for Wirral are given the major cuts we continue to face. We are continuing with our consultation programme in Wirral before any final decisions are made.

Our online survey remains available on our website www.merseyfire.gov.uk on the page: <http://surveys.merseyfire.gov.uk/surveys/Wirral/wirralmergerconsultation.htm> and you can also email consultation2@merseyfire.gov.uk or write to us at Wirral Consultation, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Bridle Road, Bootle, L30 4YD.