



Draft Fire Station Proposals for the Wirral

**Report of Consultation by
Focus Groups and a Forum
with members of the public**

Opinion Research Services
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Acknowledgements

Opinion Research Services (ORS) is pleased to have worked with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) on the public consultation meetings reported here. The forum and focus group participants engaged with the issues under consideration and discussed their ideas readily, so we trust the report will contribute to service planning by MFRA at a time of serious financial constraints.

We thank MFRA for commissioning the project as part of its on-going programme of public and stakeholder engagement and consultation about its risk management planning. We particularly thank the senior officers and staff who attended the sessions to listen to the public's views and answer questions. Such meetings benefit considerably from the readiness to answer participants' questions fully and frankly, as in this case.

We are grateful to all the members of the public who took part in the four interesting meetings and shared their views readily with us. They were patient in listening to background information before entering positively into the spirit of open discussions about challenging topics, with some controversial aspects.

At all stages of the project, ORS's status as an independent organisation consulting the public as objectively as possible was recognised and respected. We are grateful for the trust, and we hope this report will contribute usefully to thinking about MFRA's development in difficult times. We hope also that ORS has been instrumental in continuing to strengthen MFRA's public engagement.

The ORS Project Team

Project Design and Management

Dale Hall

Kelly Lock

Fieldwork Management

Leanne Hurlow

Forum Facilitator

Dale Hall

Report Author

Dale Hall

Project Overview

The Commission

1. ORS was commissioned by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) to convene and facilitate four consultation meetings with local residents across three areas within the Wirral.
2. ORS's role was to recruit and facilitate the meetings and to report their opinions of MFRA's draft proposals to reduce the Wirral fire stations by providing a new community fire station at an identified site in Greasby before closing the existing Upton and West Kirby stations, a process sometimes described as merging the two stations. To conduct the meetings based on the fullest possible information for participants, ORS worked with MFRA to prepare informative stimulus material for the meetings before facilitating the discussions and preparing this independent report of findings.

Consultation Framework

3. The context and status of the meetings is important. MFRA has had an extensive 'engagement' with residents for a number of years and, in this context, ORS has facilitated both district-based and all-Merseyside forums regularly. Within this on-going framework, MFRA has conducted both 'listening and engagement' and 'formal consultation' meetings on a regular cycle.
4. The four consultation meetings reported here followed an earlier all-Merseyside 'listening and engagement' process that considered hypothetically a wide range of policies and options for the MFRA in the context of its reduced budget due to public expenditure reductions. Having taken account of those earlier meetings and all the other available evidence, the MFRA has formulated the current draft proposals for the Wirral.

Deliberative Research: Focus Groups and Forums

5. The four consultation meetings reported here used a 'deliberative' approach to encourage members of the public to reflect in depth about the fire and rescue service, while both receiving and questioning background information and discussing the proposals in detail. The meetings lasted for at least two-and-a-half hours and in total there were 32 diverse participants. The dates of the meetings and attendance levels by members of the public at each forum were as shown on the next page.

AREA OF WIRRAL	TIME AND DATE (2014)	TYPE OF MEETING AND NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
Upton	18.00 – 20.50 Monday 17 th November 2014	Focus Group 4
Greasby	18:00 – 20.45 Tuesday 18 th November 2014	Focus Group 8
West Kirby	18.00 – 20.45 Wednesday 19 th November 2014	Focus Group 9
All-Wirral	18.00 – 20.45 Tuesday 2 nd December 2014	Forum 11

6. The attendance target for each of the focus group meeting was between 7 and 10 people, and for the forums it was 15 – so it is somewhat disappointing that the attendance fell below the target in some cases. Within the on-going programme of consultation by MFRA this is unusual, since attendance expectations are normally exceeded and there seems no single or simple explanation of why numbers were lower in this particular programme. As usual, the participants were recruited by random-digit telephone dialling from the ORS Social Research Call Centre. Having been initially contacted by phone, they were written to – to confirm the arrangements; and those who agreed to come then received telephone or written reminders shortly before each meeting. Such recruitment by telephone is normally the most effective way of ensuring that all the participants are independently recruited.
7. In recruitment, care was taken to ensure that no potential participants were disqualified or disadvantaged by disabilities or any other factors, and the venues at which the forums met were readily accessible. People's special needs were all taken into account in the recruitment and at the venues. The random telephone recruitment process was monitored to ensure social diversity in terms of a wide range of criteria – including, for example: local authority area of residence; gender; age; ethnicity; social grade; and disability/long-term limiting illness (LLTI).
8. Despite the lower than normal attendance, there was a diverse range of participants from the local areas and, as standard good practice, they were recompensed for their time and efforts in travelling and taking part.

CRITERIA	UPTON FG	GREASBY FG	WEST KIRBY FG	ALL-WIRRAL FORUM	OVERALL
Gender	Male: 2 Female: 2	Male: 5 Female: 3	Male: 5 Female: 4	Male: 6 Female: 5	Male: 18 Female: 14
Age	16-34: 1 35-54: 1 55+: 2	16-34: 1 35-54: 3 55+: 4	16-34: 2 35-54: 3 55+: 4	16-34: 1 35-54: 5 55+: 5	16-34: 5 35-54: 12 55+: 14
Social Grade	AB: 1 C1: 0 C2: 1 DE: 2	AB: 1 C1: 4 C2: 1 DE: 2	AB: 2 C1: 4 C2: 2 DE: 1	AB: 1 C1: 4 C2: 4 DE: 2	AB: 5 C1: 12 C2: 8 DE: 7
Ethnicity	0 Non-White British	1 Non-White British	0 Non-White British	2 Non-White British	3 Non-White British
Limiting Long-term Illness	0	0	3	2	5

9. Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the four meetings reported here gave diverse groups of people the opportunity to comment in detail on MFRA's draft proposals. Because the participants were diverse, the outcomes of the meeting (as reported below) are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.

Background Information and Discussion Agenda

The Context

10. ORS worked in collaboration with MFRA to agree a suitable agenda and informative stimulus material for the four meetings. The first part of each meeting began, for the sake of context, with a short review of the background issues, including the:

Importance of prevention and risk-management policies – particularly via home fire safety checks

Established trend showing a reduction in risk when measured in terms of the number of critical and other incidents per year

Sources of funding of MFRA – from the government and from council tax

Impact of public spending reductions on MFRA – including the previous reduction of fire engines from 42 to 28, and the corresponding reduction of 180 fire fighter and 90 support staff posts

MFRA's current financial constraints in the context of public spending reductions.

11. The four meetings were also informed of the wide range of options considered by MFRA in order to reduce its expenditure, including the introduction of:
 - More low-level-activity-and-risk (LLAR) fire stations
 - Day-crewed fire stations
 - Community retained (RDS) fire stations
 - Closing some fire stations
 - Merging some fire stations.
12. In passing, it is worth noting that the (several months) earlier wide-ranging 'listening and engagement' meetings had demonstrated that, when faced with a broad choice between *either* keeping all stations and changing to cheaper duty systems *or* reducing stations while protecting current wholetime duty systems, the participants clearly favoured the latter option. That is, they made at least an implicit choice in favour of reducing stations rather than changing the way Merseyside is crewed. These 'conclusions' of the earlier meetings were not repeated to participants in the meetings reported here, but it is interesting to note them as general background.

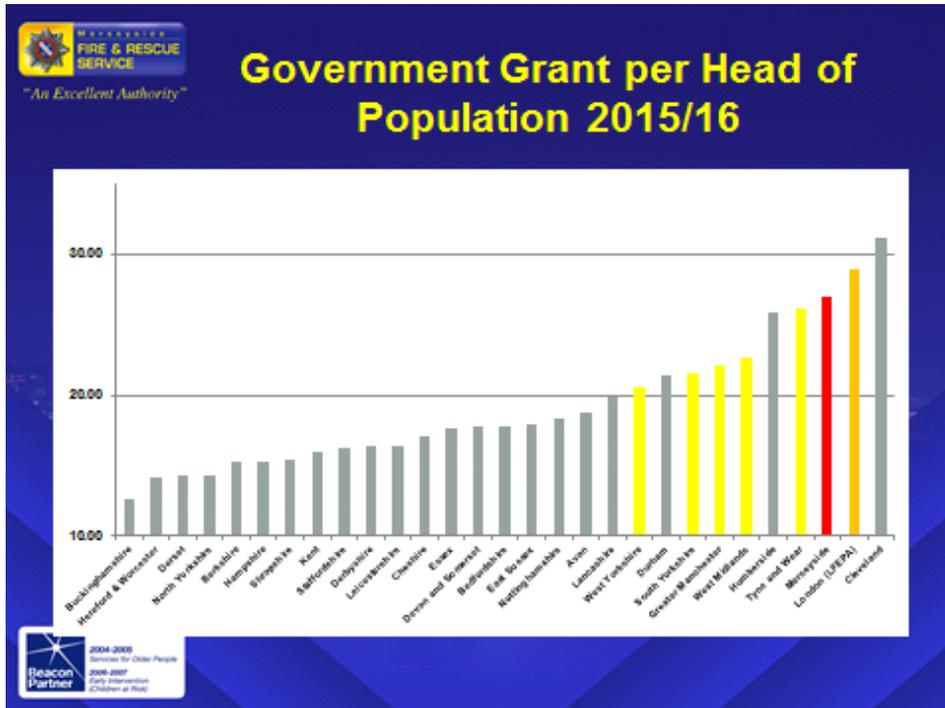
Financial Constraints

13. Following the short review of the range of options considered, the second part of each meeting briefly reviewed the implications of funding reductions that MFRA faces, including the:
 - Projected budget deficit of £6.3 million by the end of 2015/16, based on projections of current expenditure levels and known financial information
 - Projected deficit of £9.1 million by the end of 2017/18, based on projections of current expenditure levels and plausible financial assumptions.
14. These financial challenges were explained neutrally as constraints requiring substantial reductions in spending to be made on a progressive basis. In order to encourage free discussion, the financial position was not used as a repeated justification of the draft proposals: participants were invited to assess the proposals on their general merits, albeit within a generally constrained position.

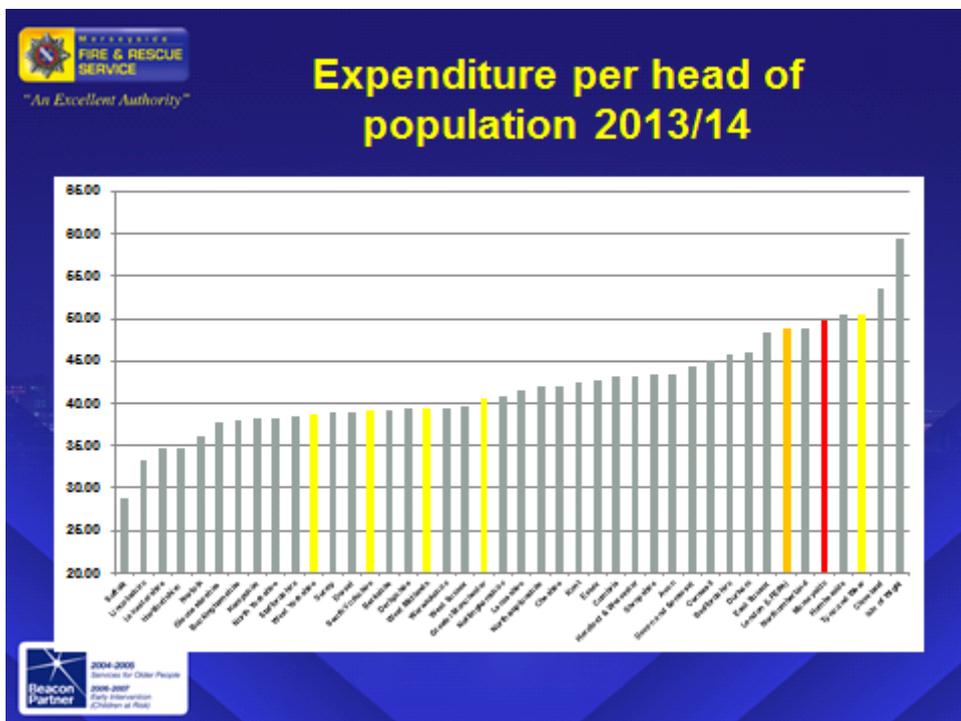
Taking Stock

15. In fact, in order to present a balanced picture, the ORS introduction to each meeting tried to 'take stock' of MFRA in terms of its much reduced risk levels (reduced by 53% over the last nine years) when measured in terms of the number of critical and other incidents, strategic roles and allocation of resources. Participants were shown comparative data on the (still relatively high) levels of government funding and the emergency cover resources that MFRA (and the other metropolitan fire and rescue services) continue to enjoy relative to other combined fire authorities.
16. For example, the following graphics were explained briefly – with Merseyside highlighted in red and the other big metropolitan authorities in yellow.

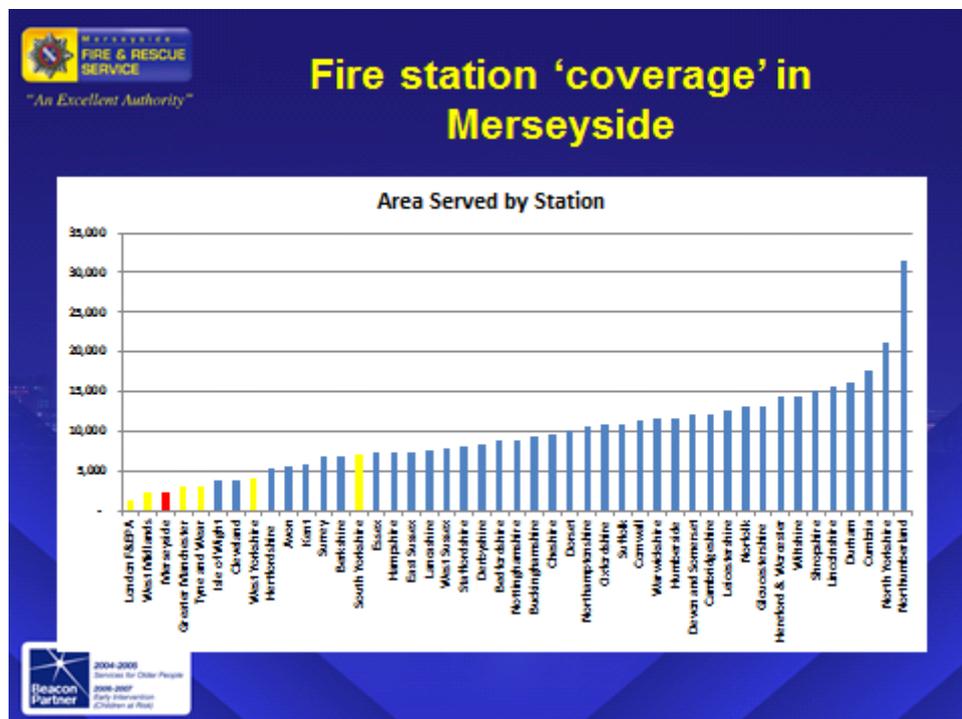
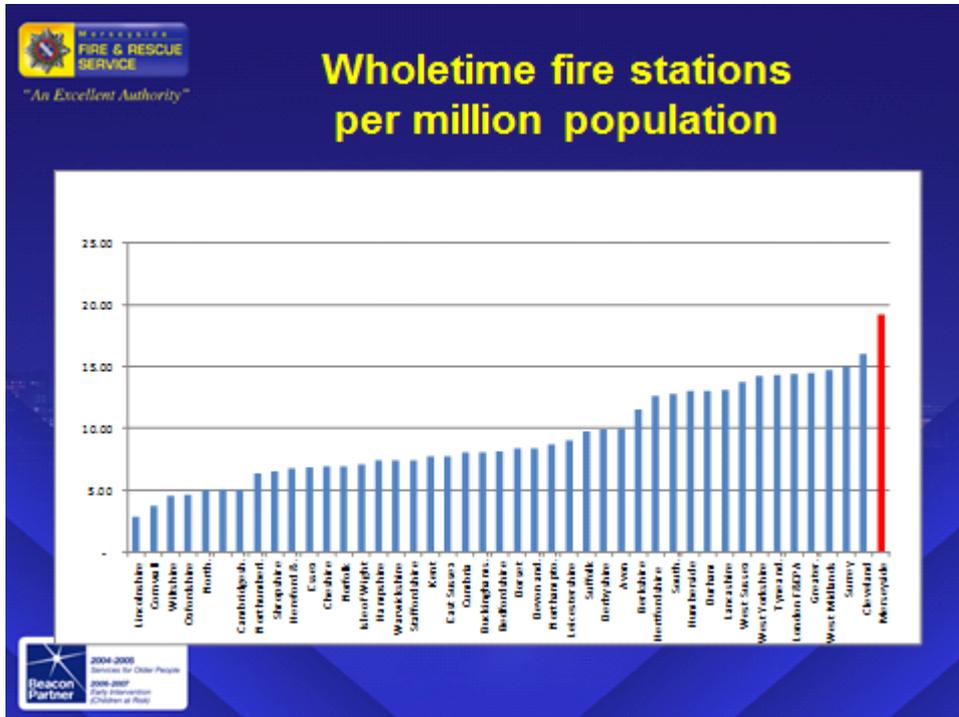
- 17. The chart below shows that, relative to most other fire authorities, Merseyside still receives a high proportion of its total funding from the government and raises a relatively small proportion through council tax.



- 18. Therefore, even in recent years, MFRA has been able to maintain a relatively high level of expenditure per head of population – as the chart below shows.

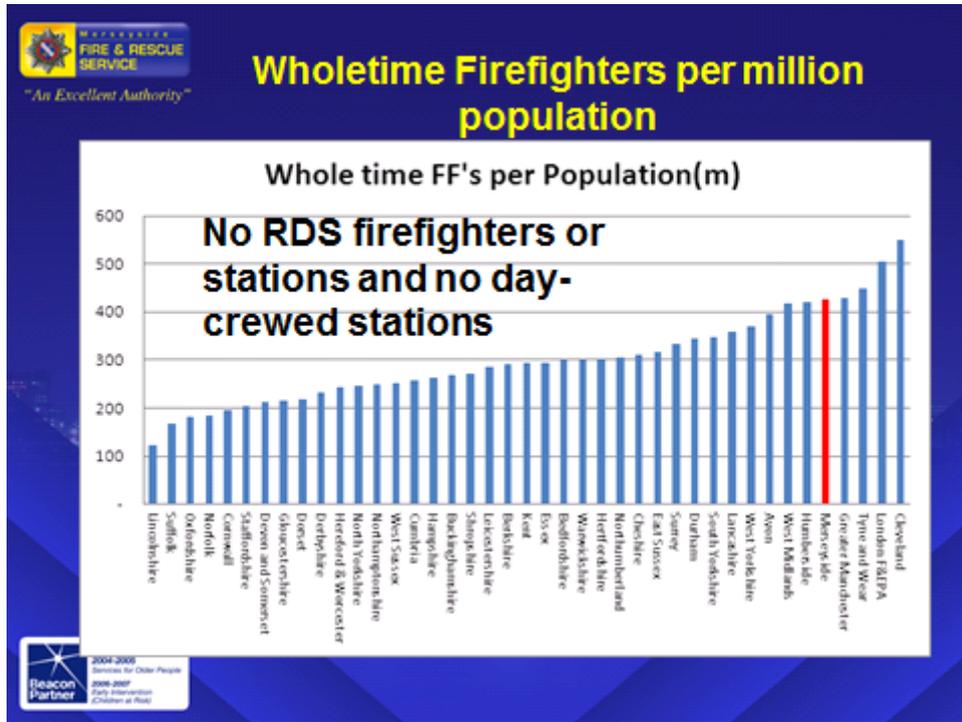


- 19. Due to its funding, and due to historical assessments of risk deriving from intensive bombing in WW2, Merseyside has had a large number of closely located fire stations (especially in Liverpool and the Wirral) in order to meet the statutory response time standards that prevailed from the 1950s to 2004 – as the two charts below illustrate.

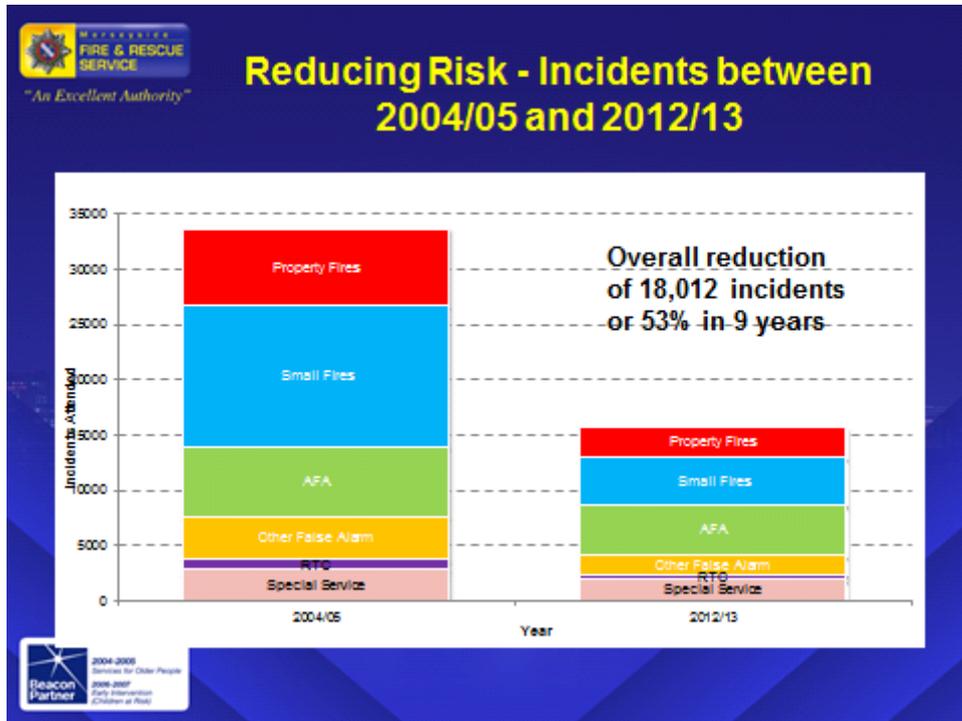


- 20. Indeed, on the basis of its population of about 1.4 million people, MFRA has more wholetime fire stations than any other area of the country, including London – and so, as the chart above shows, each of its 26 current stations covers a relatively small area.

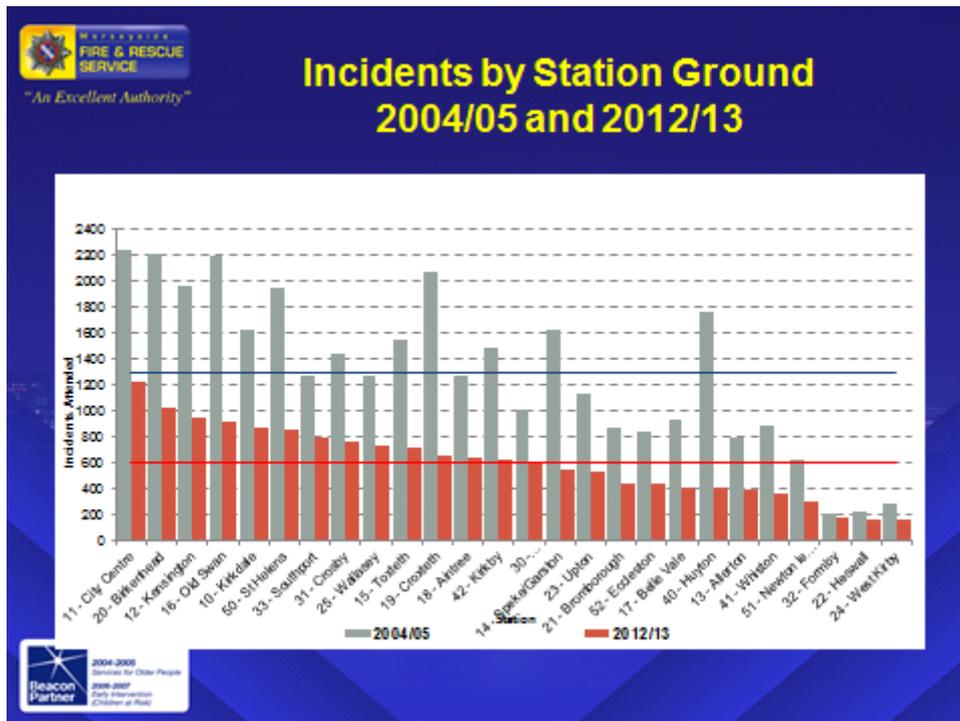
- 21. Given its high levels of fire stations and fire engines, MFRA has managed to maintain a relatively large number of wholetime firefighters compared with most other combined fire authorities – as the next chart shows.



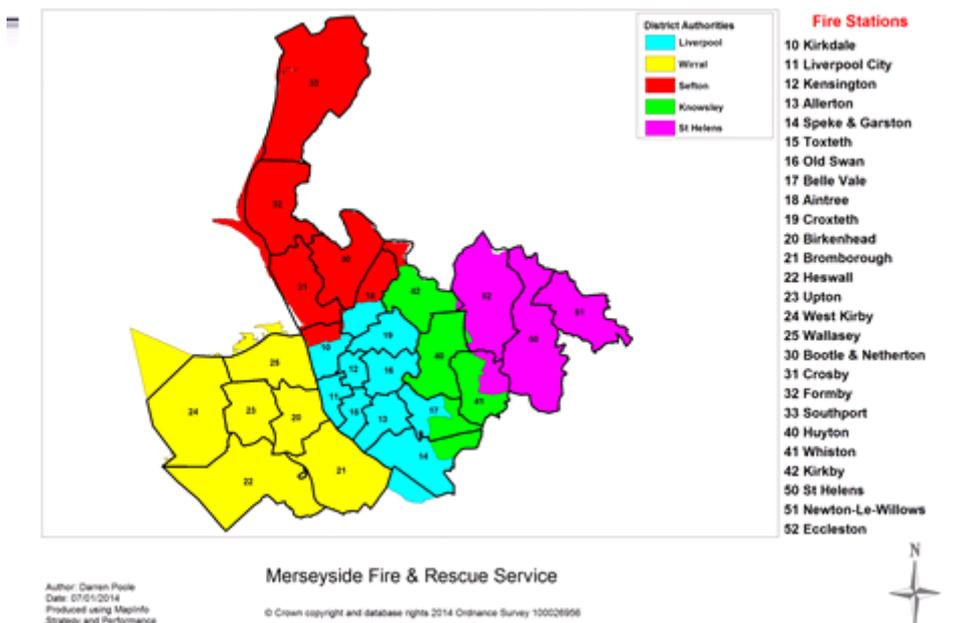
- 22. Partly as a result of MFRA’s very active preventative and educational work, all categories of incidents have reduced very significantly in Merseyside over the last nine years, as the chart below shows.



- 23. Not surprisingly, then, all of MFRA’s fire stations deal with many fewer incidents each year than they used recently to do – as shown below.



- 24. In the context of all the above data, the forums were shown the current distribution of MFRA’s fire stations with the following map.



Draft Emergency Cover Proposals for the Wirral

25. The final and longest part of each meeting was devoted to detailed discussion of the draft Wirral fire station proposals, which were summarised as follows:

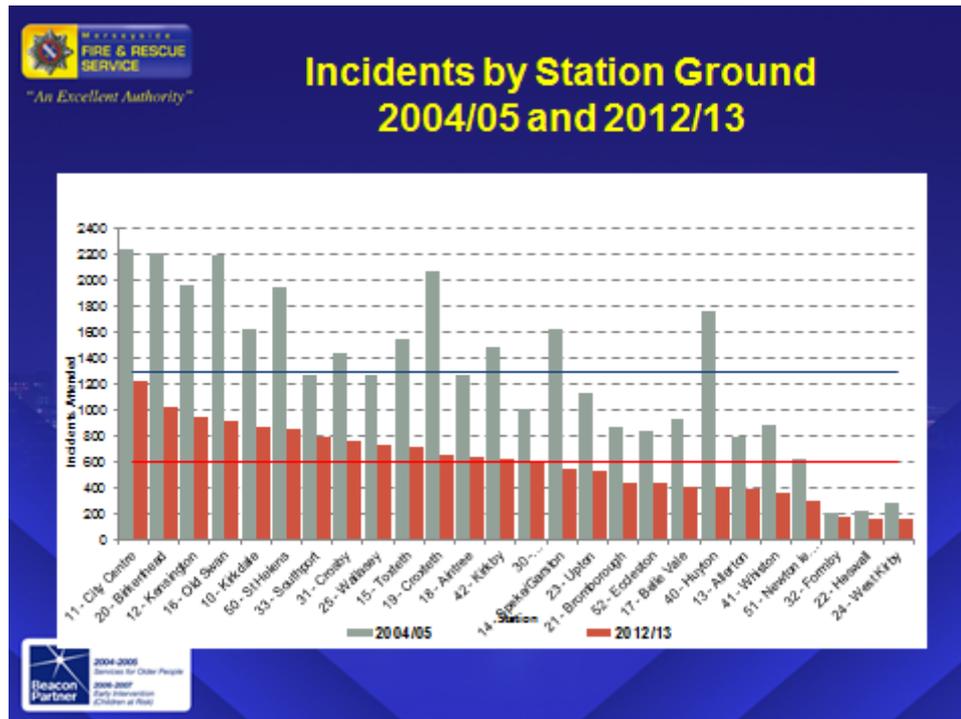
Building a new community fire station at Greasby

Then closing the one-pump stations at Upton and West Kirby

Greasby station then to have a single 24/7 pump, with another to be a reserve or back-up resilience vehicle and not normally crewed – with its crew subject to recall within 30 minutes in the event of exceptional incidents or spate conditions

The back-up crew for the reserve second pump would be wholetime firefighters with supplementary retained contracts to provide the support cover duties when required.

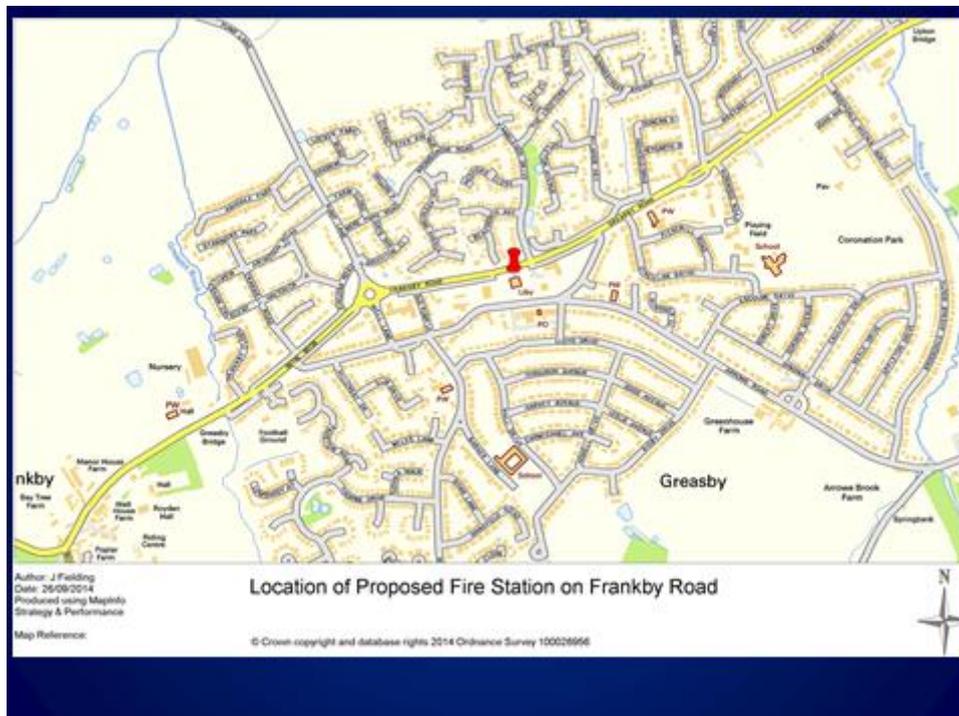
26. In other words, there were *two distinct issues* for consultation: (a) closing two fire stations while building a new one (in effect, merging two fire stations into one) *and also* (b) reducing the wholetime fire engines by one – by re-designating one of the current two engines as a reserve or resilience back-up vehicle for periods of exceptional demand.
27. In each meeting great care was taken to ensure that participants understood how the second (reserve) fire engine would be crewed and used as only a back-up reserve vehicle in the context of the closure of the two stations and their replacement by a new one.
28. The participants were also told that the merger and proposed crewing arrangements would save at least £863,000 per annum by allowing up to 22 fire-fighter posts to be phased out, probably without the need for compulsory redundancies.
29. As well as the financial context, the four meetings considered very carefully the relevant evidence about reducing risk levels and current response times in the three areas under consideration. For example, they reviewed the reduction in risk measured by the number of incidents – down over just five years by 48% in Upton and 24% in West Kirby – resulting in far fewer incidents for all fire stations (and with West Kirby as the quietest of all), as shown in the chart below.



30. In addition, the meetings considered MFRA's response time target (to attend critical incidents within 10 minutes on at least 90% of occasions) and they also compared the national average response time for domestic fires (7 minutes, 24 seconds) with MFRA's average time for critical incidents (5 minutes, 24 seconds).
31. Finally, but very importantly, the meetings were informed explicitly about the impact on response times of closing the two stations and covering their areas primarily with on full-time engine from a Greasby site. Currently, the average response times in Upton and West Kirby for critical incidents are 4 minutes, 30 seconds and 5 minutes, 24 seconds respectively; but with a single site in Greasby the overall average response time across the whole area is predicted to be 6 minutes, 18 seconds.

Greasby site

32. The first three meetings (the focus groups) were told that the fire station site for Greasby had provisionally been identified as the Frankby Road site – because the local authority had apparently indicated that the site (shown below) was available, and it was operationally very suitable.



33. However, the Greasby meeting revealed vehement opposition to this site from the local community; and to some extent (see below) their concerns were echoed in the other groups. Partly as a result of these strong sentiments, the local authority withdrew its offer of the site, and the MFRA decided not to pursue the issue – so it is arguable that the consultation process had a very immediate effect.
34. These changes happened between the three focus groups and the later forum. Consequently, in the final forum meeting, it was made clear that the Frankby Road site was no longer an option for MFRA and the discussions focused on the general issues, rather than on a specific site. However, it was possible also to ask if a greenfield site might be appropriate, given that it is not easy to identify an appropriate site that is agreeable to everyone.

Implications of not finding an appropriate site

35. The importance of finding a suitable site for the new fire station was explained in all four meetings – in particular because (if one is not found) the consequence would probably be to centralise the relevant fire cover resources at Upton station, with the consequence of lengthening emergency response times into West Kirby.

36. Due to the importance of this issue, the position was spelt out clearly in all four meetings. It was carefully explained that from a Greasby station site the average critical incident response time across the three station areas would be 6 minutes, 18 seconds; but if the West Kirby station were closed without building another in Greasby (or similar), and if the one 24/7 pump were based at a refurbished Upton station, then the consequent average response times to the West Kirby area would be extended to 8 minutes, 43 seconds – almost two-and-a-half minutes longer than from Greasby. Clearly, this is a difficult issue that MFRA will face if an appropriate location cannot be found for the new fire station.

Equality and diversity issues

37. While considering the draft proposals, participants in all the meetings were encouraged to consider whether the proposals have any adverse implications for any vulnerable people and in particular groups with ‘protected characteristics’: in other words, this question was not just a ‘footnote’ to the main discussion but an intrinsic part of the scrutiny of the draft proposals.

Overall context of the discussions

38. In the context of the financial challenges MFRA faces, it was made clear to the participants that, in addition to the Wirral draft proposals, similar plans are likely to be brought forward over the next two years in Knowsley, St Helens and Liverpool.
39. It was clear throughout the discussions that MFRA would not bring forward such proposals if it was not facing an urgent need to reduce expenditure in the context of reduced central government grant funding and restrictions on council tax increases. In response to questions, the proposal was described by senior MFRA officers as the ‘*least worst option*’ in the current situation. Nonetheless, the facilitator encouraged participants to consider the proposals *in principle* – on their merits in terms of suitability, sustainability, resilience and acceptability for the Wirral and Merseyside – rather than to just accept them without scrutiny as inevitable. In other words, financial issues were not the primary focus of the discussion: the proposals were examined carefully and at length. Participants were given extensive time for questions and discussion prior to being invited to make up their minds on each discussion topic.

The Report

40. This report concisely reviews the sentiments and judgements of participants about MFRA’s merger proposals for the two Wirral fire stations. Verbatim quotations are used, in indented italics, not because we agree or disagree with them – but for their vividness in capturing recurrent points of views. ORS does not endorse the opinions in question, but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly. While quotations are used, the report is obviously not a verbatim transcript of the sessions, but an interpretative summary of the issues raised by participants in free-ranging discussions.

Consultation Findings

Executive summary

41. The key overall findings regarding the draft proposals (a) to close two fire stations and to consolidate the emergency cover at one new station (the merger) and (b) to reduce the number of fully-crewed wholetime engines from two to one were as follows:

In Greasby

By a ratio of three-to-one the participants accepted that the closure of the two fire stations and their replacement with a new station (the merger) was reasonable

An absolute majority also agreed that it would be reasonable to designate one of the two current fire engines as a reserve vehicle in the context of the station changes (five in favour, two opposed, and one 'don't know')

A majority of the participants (but not all) were opposed to locating a new fire station at the then proposed Frankby Road site

In terms of other options, almost all members of the group favoured redeveloping Upton fire station and providing supplementary cover to West Kirby from Heswall.

Their discussion of equality and diversity issues focused on this site, because they felt a fire station on the Frankby Road site would be hazardous for children, the elderly and disabled people when crossing the road

In Upton

The participants all accepted that the proposed merger of two stations was reasonable in principle

They were also unanimous that the Greasby site was a suitable location for the new fire station

They all agreed that it was reasonable to designate one of the two current fire engines as a reserve vehicle in the context of the fire station changes

The group recognised that MFRA is well-provided with fire stations and they felt the Authority should consider their overall distribution, but no specific alternative options were raised

The group raised no specific equality and diversity issues.

In West Kirby

By a ratio of three-and-a-half-to-one the participants accepted that the closure of the two fire stations and their replacement with a new station (the merger) was reasonable

However the group was divided on whether it would be reasonable to designate one of the two current fire engines as a reserve vehicle in the context of the station changes (four in favour with five opposed)

Only one of eight participants was opposed to locating a new fire station at the then proposed Frankby Road site

The option (suggested in Greasby) of redeveloping Upton fire station while also providing supplementary cover to West Kirby from Heswall was opposed by all nine participants

Instead of that option, they proposed that MFRA should lobby the government for more funding and/or increase council tax

Their discussion of equality and diversity issues stressed the need to consider the number of elderly people in West Kirby, including any in nursing and residential homes.

In the all-Wirral Forum

There was almost unanimous support for the merger proposal (with only one 'don't know')

The forum was unanimous that it was reasonable to designate one of the two current fire engines as a reserve vehicle in the context of the station changes

Given the (by then known) unavailability of the Frankby Road site in Greasby, the forum considered the appropriateness of using a greenfield site instead: four were in favour (depending upon the site), one was opposed in principle and there were five 'don't knows'

In terms of other options, some suggested that MFRA might make more use of LLAR crewing – with West Kirby then being designated as an LLAR station rather than closed

The discussion of equality and diversity issues stressed the need to consider elderly people (especially in West Kirby) and any disadvantaged residents who live in flats.

Overall assessment

The Greasby site was strongly opposed *only in* the Greasby focus group, and then not by all participants

All the meetings clearly approved the merger proposal as reasonable

Three of the four meetings clearly approved the changes to the second fire engine – and opinion was about divided on this issue in West Kirby

A limited number of equality and diversity issues were raised, relating to the elderly, disabled and disadvantaged people.

Reasoning about the Proposals

Introduction

42. People's reasons for their views are obviously important – particularly because consultation is not just a 'numbers game' in which majority support or opposition counts for everything: the key issue is not numbers but the cogency of the arguments for or against the various options. Therefore, this section concisely reviews the various opinions, reasons, considerations and attitudes of the participants.
43. The preceding executive summary shows that the meetings broadly accepted the draft proposals in principle (following the withdrawal of the Greasby site). Of course, the participants did not accept the proposals 'blindly' or just 'on trust'. Indeed, most would not have reached the conclusions summarised above without being able to see and consider the evidence provided by MFRA – including all the comparative data on how MFRA fares in funding and resources alongside other fire authorities, and also how much risk and incident levels have been reducing, not only across Merseyside, but also on the Wirral and across other parts of the country.

General awareness and strategic issues

44. The early discussions showed that, not surprisingly, many people were unaware of how the fire and rescue service is run in detail. For example, there were factual questions about:
 - How dynamic emergency cover is managed when there are big or multiple incidents?
 - How fire engines are serviced and how long they last?
 - How fire engines are crewed?
 - How LLAR stations work compared with other wholetime fire stations?
 - The comparative death rates from fires and RTCs?
45. However, as the discussions continued, there was also considerable interest in the policy and more strategic context, with some participants asking, for example:
 - Why does Liverpool have so many fire stations and engines relative to its size and population?
 - Has the educational role of MFRA made a significant reduction to the number of small fires?
 - Is MFRA having to rationalise its resources and focus more on urban areas of higher risk?

- Are response times to RTCs even more important than to fires?
- How critical are response times in general?
- How will MFRA manage potential redundancies?
- Will the retirement age(s) of firefighters have a significant effect on the service?
- How does demand vary by time and intensity? Are there fewer incidents at night than by day?
- Have there ever been times when there were too few fire engines to cope with the level of demand?
- How does MFRA monitor and assess relative risk across Merseyside?
- Will station mergers lead to changes in MFRA's attendance and operational procedures? Will households continue to get the same level of attendance, with the same number of fire engines?
- Does the search and rescue function have an impact on MFRA's core roles?
- How well does MFRA liaise and work with the other emergency services?
- What are the likely future levels for MFRA's budget in the next few years?
- Could MFRA use some community retained firefighters, like Cheshire does?
- What kind of training do community retained firefighters get?
- Could MFRA use ex-firefighters as community retained firefighters?
- Is there a case for fire and rescue service mergers in order to save money, especially by merging support services and some operational roles?

46. There were some very positive references to prevention in general and to home fire safety visits in particular – for example:

My housing association encouraged me to contact the MFRS to check my smoke detectors and other things – and that was very helpful

Greasby site

47. It is largely irrelevant to report views on the Frankby Road site, since it is apparently no longer available. Nonetheless, it should be noted that while many (but not all) in the Greasby group strongly opposed the Frankby Road site, mainly on the grounds of:

Safety – for people crossing the site/roads near a fire station

Traffic congestion is severe around the site

Such development would spoil the 'village green' amenity of the site, which is currently the 'hub of the village'

A fire station tower would be unsightly

A fire station would be a precedent for the Police and Ambulance services also using the Frankby Road site

The motivation to use Greasby is financial, since the Council would give the site for free, while MFRA would sell its other two sites

It would be preferable to redevelop Upton, for West Kirby's response times (from there) would still be within MFRA's 10-minute target

Heswall could make a major contribution to the emergency cover in West Kirby

Responsibilities over the Cheshire border should be minimised.

48. However, the great majority of people in the other meetings thought the Frankby Road site would be a sensible location, and that a fire station would be an appropriate use. There were some robust comments in the non-Greasby meetings – for example, in Upton (with comparable comments at the other meetings, too).

It is the logical place – it's central and sensible – it's a mile and a half closer to West Kirby than Upton is!

If you base the service at Upton or West Kirby it will delay the response to other parts of the whole area

The complaints at Greasby are mainly about noise and NIMBYism!

Greasby is not an unspoilt village and the site is perfectly sensible

Community facilities at the fire station are very important – my charity has an office in Sefton

Greasby will benefit from this change in terms of access to the area when the streets are congested in Greasby – there is a network of roads that gets congested there

A lot of people are just concerned about how it will look – but the concerns I've heard are not really sensible or relevant

Greasby gives excellent access to the main roads and routes – there are good sets of lights already there

A lot of people in Greasby wanted to oppose it at the meetings – but the arguments were not relevant

The Greasby campaign has been very political – with local borough councillors campaigning as the election approaches

There is not a private site available and it would be expensive to buy another site – we should use the site that's available

The fire station could offer community facilities there, including exercise gyms

There's less chance of [Greasby] losing their services if they have a community base to centralise the services properly.

Reducing fire stations

49. Naturally, while having a wide-ranging discussion and review of the above issues, the four meetings focused on the two issues of reducing fire station and changing the crewing of the second fire engine. As we have shown, there was overwhelming support for the merger, even in Greasby (providing the Frankby Road site was not used). Some key supporting comments were as follows:

The cuts have to be made somewhere and it's been carefully considered – there has to be compromise somewhere

The reduction in risk makes it logical for the crewing of the second engine to work – this is a management decision (Upton)

The crewing of the second engine is reasonable – as long as there is back up from the next station – and the Wirral fire stations are relatively close

These are very well thought-out proposals

It is sensible to look at the MFRS area as a whole and to seek for mergers when they can be done safely, like in this part of Wirral

You will expect to see a continuing drop in the number of incidents as communities continue to get safer – the Wirral population is not projected to increase substantially in the near future – but it would stretch services if it did

We're lucky to have so many fire stations and fire engines – but if we have to reduce resources we can do so safely – and a merger is a good approach if the new facility has the important resources it needs to service the area

Second fire engine

50. The meetings were also able to accept the designation of the second fire engine as a reserve vehicle to be crewed only in exceptional circumstances by on-call wholetime firefighters. There were fewer explicit comments on the detail of this proposal, but the facilitator confirmed that all the groups understood the implications of the change before asking their opinions, which (as the executive summary shows) were in most cases favourable. One typical comment was:

The second engine would not be the immediate back up for the first fire engine – that would come from another station on Wirral – which is reasonable here because they are so close.

51. Some others said they could accept this particular change only *based on the money issues [that MFRS is facing]*.

Other options

Greenfield site possible

52. While approving the current draft proposals, some participants made some alternative suggestions that MFRA will wish to consider. Some meetings raised the issue of using a greenbelt site if the Frankby Road site was unacceptable or unavailable; and in the final forum (after the withdrawal by the Council of the Greasby site) this issue was asked explicitly.
53. In the final forum, when asked if it was reasonable to use a greenfield site, there was some uncertainty: only one person opposed the option, while four supported it; but there were also five 'don't knows'. There was also a specific suggestion:

Have you considered a site near the industrial estate between Moreton and Meols – that would be a suitable area before you come into West Kirby.

54. Earlier, in the Upton meeting, there was no 'vote' on the issue of a greenfield site in principle, but one influential (in the context of the meeting) comment was:

The government should not change its mind about building on green belt land – but it's OK to use it for public services – that's a legitimate use of some green belt land.

Redeveloping Upton (instead of West Kirby)

55. In Greasby, the prospect of redeveloping Upton rather than a opening new station on the Frankby Road site was supported in a ratio of seven-to-one. A typical comment was:

I'd have a 30 second response time if Greasby was the base, but I think Upton should be the main station because it has much better access to the motorways and other roads.

56. However, the one dissenting voice in the meeting said:

Even if the response time to West Kirby is within the 10-minute target time, it's still significantly longer than it would be if Greasby was the station base – so that's still detrimental to anyone there who's having a fire in their home!

LLAR stations and other possible closures

57. In West Kirby and the all-Merseyside forum, the prospect of making savings by increasing the number of LLAR stations was raised by a few participants. In most cases, this was seen as a possible option for the West Kirby station (as the quotations show), but MFRA may wish to consider this as a more general option. The typical comments were:

Could West Kirby be converted to a day-crewed or LLAR system instead?

West Kirby used to be an LLAR

How much would LLAR increase response times overall on the Wirral?

58. Participants recognised that in the medium term other stations might close in Merseyside, but in this case, in West Kirby, it was suggested that the Heswall station should be closed instead of West Kirby's – for example:

Could you not close Heswall instead? Is it really necessary as such a quiet station?

Heswall has cross-border responsibilities, but it could focus just on Wirral.

Community retained firefighters (RDS)

59. There was no spontaneous support for community retained firefighters, even though questions were raised about this option in the initial presentation and subsequent discussions. One influential and typical comment was:

I dislike the idea of community RDS firefighters [for Merseyside].

Council tax and the government

60. There were a few suggestions that MFRA should:

Lobby the government more!

Raise the council tax – I'd pay a lot more for the FRS!

Equality and diversity issues

61. Equality and diversity were 'mainstreamed' in the sense of being raised early in the discussions, as a context for people's reflections on the issues – and a range of important comments were made, mainly based on the importance of ensuring that vulnerable people get appropriate consideration. For example, it was claimed that the Frankby Road site is:

Not suitable for a village and children's use in the immediate area – school children/elderly/disabled have to cross the road near the site.

62. More generally, participants prioritised the same sorts of groups – for example:

The elderly and nursing and residential homes have to be taken into consideration – and that does not seem to be a primary focus yet

We have a lot of elderly

West Kirby has elderly people and there are some flats with social disadvantage

The aged and disabled people will have some impact from these changes.

63. There were a couple of positive comments in this context:

The council and the FRS are aware of the needs of the elderly and vulnerable

The FRS links up with the other agencies – it has to be a multi-agency approach.