

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY		
DATE:	30 JUNE 2015	REPORT NO:	CFO/059/15
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	DCFO PHIL GARRIGAN	REPORT AUTHOR:	DEB APPLETON
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT GROUP		
TITLE OF REPORT:	WIRRAL FIRE COVER CONSULTATION 2 OUTCOMES		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX 1: CONSULTATION DOCUMENT APPENDIX 2: CORRESPONDENCE – PUBLIC APPENDIX 3: CORRESPONDENCE –COUNCILLORS APPENDIX 4: PUBLIC MEETING OUTCOMES APPENDIX 5: FOCUS GROUPS/FORUM & POSTAL SURVEY OUTCOMES APPENDIX 6: ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE OUTCOMES APPENDIX 7: PUBLICITY POSTER APPENDIX 8: PRESS ARTICLES APPENDIX 9: EIA FOR MERGERS AND CLOSURES
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Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of the outcomes of the twelve week public consultation regarding the draft proposal to merge Upton and West Kirby fire stations at a new station on Saughall Massie Road, Saughall Massie as an alternative to an outright closure of West Kirby fire station and re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime appliances as "wholetime retained".

Recommendation

2. That Members;
 - a) note the outcomes of the comprehensive and informative Wirral public consultation
 - b) take full and carefully considered account of those outcomes when considering report CFO/058/15 relating to the possible future options for fire cover in West Wirral

Introduction and Background

3. In January a 12 week consultation process regarding a proposal to merge West

Kirby and Upton fire stations at a new station on Frankby Road, Greasby, as an alternative to the outright closure of West Kirby fire station, concluded with Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council withdrawing the offer of the land. The Fire and Rescue Authority then approved a further 12 week consultation on two options:

A)

- 1. The closure of West Kirby and Upton fire stations (each of which houses one wholetime appliance) and the building of a new station at Saughall Massie Road to cover both station areas.*
- 2. The re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime appliances as "wholetime retained" (with a 30-minute recall), whilst;*
- 3. Inviting suggestions for other suitable alternative options to deliver the savings required as a result of further cuts to the Authority budget.*

OR:

B)

- 1. The outright closure of West Kirby and the relocation of the West Kirby wholetime appliance to Upton as the alternative to merger.*
- 2. The re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime appliances as "wholetime retained" (with a 30-minute recall), whilst;*
- 3. Inviting suggestions for other suitable alternative options to deliver the savings required as a result of further cuts to the Authority budget.*

4. The Authority also approved a detailed consultation plan. The plan included an online questionnaire, three externally facilitated deliberative focus groups (Saughall Massie and the Upton and West Kirby station areas) and one forum (all-Wirral), three open public meetings (Saughall Massie and the Upton and West Kirby station areas), a stakeholder meeting and several staff consultation meetings. A summary of the outcomes of the consultation are set out at paragraphs 6 – 14 below.
5. The Authority also commissioned Opinion Research Services (ORS) to conduct a postal survey of 10,000 addresses in the areas covered by Upton and West Kirby fire stations. Outcomes are set out at paragraph 44 below.

Summary of outcomes

- 6. The majority of participants at the deliberative focus groups and forum agreed that the principle of merger was reasonable given the financial challenges facing the Authority. However, the Saughall Massie focus group opposed the specific location. The other focus groups and forum supported the Saughall Massie Road location although there were some concerns about the use of Green Belt land.**
- 7. The Stakeholder (public/private sector) meeting was supportive of the merger proposal.**

- 8. There was considerable opposition to the merger, particularly the proposed Saughall Massie Road site, at the public meeting in Saughall Massie and in responses to the online questionnaire, the majority again from the residents of Saughall Massie. The majority of those objecting wanted the Authority to close West Kirby fire station and maintain the station at Upton or select another non Green Belt site as an alternative to building a new station on Saughall Massie Road. Some respondents could see the benefits of a new station, but not at that location, citing volume of traffic and use of Green Belt land as objections.**
- 9. The majority of Saughall Massie residents attending meetings and those responding to the questionnaire focussed their comments principally on the proposed site for the new fire station and consequently few objective comments were received on the principle of merging two stations as a way of making necessary savings, whilst maintaining the best operational response provision in the circumstances.**
- 10. There was no significant opposition at the public meeting in Hoylake to the closure of West Kirby fire station. It should be noted that the majority of attendees were not from West Kirby or Hoylake.**
- 11. There was no significant opposition at the public meeting in Woodchurch/Upton to the closure of Upton fire station, which would be required in order to facilitate the proposed merger.**
- 12. There were 129 responses to the online questionnaire. The questionnaire showed 59% disagreed with the proposal to close West Kirby and Upton, building a new station at Saughall Massie. The majority of respondents were from the Saughall Massie area.**
- 13. There were 1351 responses to the postal survey. The respondents to the postal survey showed an absolute majority supported the proposal to close West Kirby and Upton, building a new station at Saughall Massie (51% of Upton station area residents and 70% of West Kirby). Overall 57%.**
- 14. Opinions at the public focus groups and forum varied sharply depending on their place of residence with strong opposition to the Saughall Massie site only in that area. Support for the Saughall Massie site was overwhelming in the other two focus groups and in the all-Wirral forum. Centralising emergency cover in Upton was unanimously opposed in West Kirby and a majority opposed this option in Upton and at the all-Wirral forum.**

Promoting and marketing the consultation

- 15. On 2nd March 2015 an initial consultation document and on-line survey were published on the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service website (Appendix 1). Facebook, Twitter and a press release were used to launch the consultation. The**

consultation launch was reported by the Wirral Globe and Liverpool Echo.

16. Consultation documentation was printed and distributed widely across West Wirral and at all consultation events, published on the Authority website and promoted via social media and the press. This included delivery, by hand, to over 900 households in the Saughall Massie area. Consultation documents were placed in public buildings, local shops and businesses across West Wirral, (approx. 125).
17. Social media was frequently used by the Authority during the consultation period to direct people to information and encourage participation in the consultation. The public meeting on April 20th saw the Wirral Globe sending numerous tweets to their 11,800 followers. The Liverpool Echo tweeted about the second public meeting to their 205,000 followers. MFRS Twitter and Facebook were extensively used.
18. Advertisements and articles (appendix 7&8) promoting the consultation process were published in local district newsletters and Wirral Older People's Parliament March newsletter. Leaflets and posters, created by the MFRS Corporate Communications team, highlighting the public meeting dates were printed and distributed across the station areas affected.
19. Opinion Research Services (ORS) carried out a postal survey of 10,000 homes in the affected areas. These addresses were randomly selected.
20. The Wirral District Manager and the Wirral District Management Team consulted with uniformed and non-uniformed staff in the Wirral District to explain the proposals within the Chief Fire Officer's consultation presentation and to seek their views. The consultation was highlighted in the staff magazine Hot News.
21. The Wirral District Manager and Wirral District Management Team also distributed information to their respective partnerships, including the Wirral Public Service Board, Local Public Service Boards, Health & Wellbeing Board, Community Safety Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce, encouraging attendance at the stakeholder meeting.

Media Interest

22. The consultation process attracted media interest with the Wirral Globe and Liverpool Echo reporting on developments and carrying readers' letters on the subject. The Chief Fire Officer was interviewed on Radio Merseyside to promote the consultation process and the public meetings in particular. Examples of press articles can be found at Appendix 8.

The consultation events

23. The consultation events that took place are detailed below. The focus groups and public meetings took place in the evening.
 - 13th April – Focus Group (Saughall Massie) – St Mary's Centre.
 - 15th April – Focus Group (West Kirby) – Westbourne Hall.
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- 16th April – Focus Group (Upton) – Holy Cross Church Hall.
 - 20th April – Public Meeting (Saughall Massie) – St Mary’s Centre
 - 27th April – Stakeholders Meeting – Holiday Inn, Hoylake
 - 28th April – Public Meeting (Upton) – Holy Cross Church Hall
 - 5th May – Public Meeting (West Kirby) – The Parade, Hoylake
 - 13th May – Joint Forum (All West Wirral) – Birkenhead fire station
24. The focus groups and forum were deliberative meetings, facilitated by Opinion Research Services (ORS), the contractor for the Authority’s Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Forums. Participants were randomly selected from the relevant West Wirral area and invited to attend.
 25. The stakeholders’ breakfast meeting was promoted amongst public and private sector partners in Wirral.
 26. The public meetings were open meetings which anyone could attend. No one was recruited or specifically invited. They were however widely publicised as detailed above. The public meetings were listening events where people could offer their views. No vote was taken on whether or not people agreed with the proposals, because public meetings cannot be guaranteed as statistically representative of the population. Questionnaires were available for completion at the meetings.
 27. The breakfast meeting and open public meetings were organised, promoted and delivered by Authority staff. Authority staff were also heavily involved in the organisation of the ORS facilitated focus groups and several uniformed and non-uniformed staff attended each meeting to provide advice and organisational support.
 28. In addition, the Chief Fire Officer and other officers met with the local MPs and councillors during the consultation period.
 29. The Chief Fire Officer also met with the Wirral Older People’s Parliament and the Saughall Massie Village Conservation Area Society.

Outcomes from the consultation

On line questionnaire

30. Full analysis of the online questionnaire results can be found at Appendix 6. The following paragraphs provide an overview:
 31. There were 129 responses to the online survey.
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32. Most respondents 59.1% (75 from 129) strongly disagreed with closing West Kirby and Upton fire stations and building a new station at Saughall Massie Road. However if those respondents who strongly agreed and tended to agree with the proposal are combined 40.2% (51) are broadly in favour of the development.
33. When asked if the outright closure of West Kirby fire station, as an alternative to the merger at Saughall Massie Road, was preferable the majority 52% (64), of respondents disagreed with this proposal. 38.5% (47) agreed this was their preferred option.
34. Post code analysis shows that the vast majority of respondents (75 of 127) live in the CH46 and CH49 post code area (which includes Saughall Massie and Greasby). Of those responses 54 (76.1%) strongly disagreed with the proposal to close West Kirby and Upton and build a new station at Saughall Massie.

Focus groups and forum

35. Full information about the focus groups and forums can be found at Appendix 7. The following paragraphs provide an overview:
36. As Members will recall, the three public consultation meetings reported here followed an earlier all-Merseyside 'listening and engagement' process held in January 2014 that considered a wide range of options for the Authority in the context of significant cuts to its budget over the course of the last Parliament. This was followed by a full 12 week consultation from January to March 2015 on the site in Greasby (which resulted in Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council withdrawing the site). Having taken account of those earlier meetings and all the other available evidence, the Authority formulated the current draft proposals for Wirral.
37. The four meetings (three focus groups and one forum) used a 'deliberative' approach to encourage members of the public to reflect in depth about the Fire and Rescue Service, while receiving and questioning background information and discussing the proposals in detail. Each of the meetings lasted for at least two-and-a-half hours and in total there were 49 diverse participants.
38. 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.
39. There was a diverse range of participants from the local areas.

Location (station area)	Type of meeting and number attending
Upton	Focus Group - 8
Saughall Massie	Focus Group - 10
West Kirby	Focus Group - 9
All Wirral	Forum - 22

40. Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the four meetings that took place gave diverse groups of people from Wirral, the opportunity to comment in detail on the Authority's proposals for the District's fire stations. As a result, ORS are satisfied that the outcomes of the meeting (as summarised below) are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.
41. A significant part of the meetings explored any proposals that the participants might have for alternative ways of making the savings.
42. 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 close West Kirby fire station outright as an alternative to the merger at Saughall Massie were as follows:

In Saughall Massie

Seven out of nine people in the group opposed a new station in Saughall Massie: only one person found it acceptable and there was one 'don't know'.

Above all, most of the group wanted to protect the Green Belt area from development of all kinds.

They were unanimously opposed to the inclusion of a large tower on any fire station in Saughall Massie (on the grounds that it would be visually very intrusive).

Seven out of nine did not want the fire station (if developed) to include an ambulance base (on the grounds that this would increase the scale of the development).

The group was broadly divided on the question of whether some community facilities should be included.

By a ratio of two-to-one the participants also rejected the proposed changes to the crewing of the second fire engine. The group raised no specific equality and diversity issues.

If a station were to be built there, the Saughall Massie residents wanted it to be as small and unobtrusive as possible.

In Upton

Slightly more than half of the eight participants accepted that, in principle, the closure of two fire stations and their replacement with a new station would be reasonable, but the others were 'don't know'.

Five of the eight thought it reasonable to site the proposed new station in Saughall Massie, but two were opposed and there was one 'don't know'.

Most of the group opposed the use of a Green Belt site: no one specifically

supported it, but there were three 'don't knows'.

The group was equally divided on whether a fire station in Saughall Massie should include a tower; but all agreed that alternative training facilities would be reasonable.

The group also unanimously supported the inclusion of an ambulance base and community facilities, if the station were built there.

Everyone agreed that the proposed changes to the crewing of the second fire engine would be reasonable.

The group raised no specific equality and diversity issues.

In West Kirby

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

They were also unanimous that the Saughall Massie site was a suitable location for the new station.

Nine of the ten participants felt it was reasonable to site a fire station in the Green Belt (in this case).

The option of providing cover from Upton fire station only was opposed by everyone.

The group was concerned that centralising cover at Upton would disproportionately jeopardise the elderly and socially deprived in West Kirby.

Everyone agreed that the proposed changes to the crewing of the second fire engine would be reasonable.

Four out of ten participants thought that the introduction of some community retained firefighters is an option that should at least be explored by the Authority, as an alternative way of saving money; but six were opposed to this idea.

In the all-Wirral Forum

All except one of the 22 participants readily accepted that the proposed merger of two fire stations was reasonable in principle.

The same majority supported using the Saughall Massie site rather than centralising services at Upton.

The forum was unanimous that in this case it was reasonable to develop a Green Belt site.

The option of providing emergency cover from Upton fire station only was supported by only one person.

However, by a ratio of ten-to-one the forum felt that, if the Saughall Massie site became unavailable for any reason, it would be acceptable then to base local emergency services at Upton.

One member of the forum was concerned that basing cover at Upton would jeopardise young people in a special needs school in West Kirby.

With only one opposed, the participants thought it was reasonable to include a tower on the Saughall Massie site in order to facilitate training – but they thought its visual impact should be minimised.

All the participants thought that the inclusion of some community facilities was reasonable.

There was a broad division of opinion in respect of whether ambulance facilities should be co-located at the site – and those against were concerned that ambulance mobilisations would cause more disturbance than the less frequent fire engine movements.

A large absolute majority of participants (19) accepted that it was reasonable to change the status of the second fire engine: there were only three ‘don’t knows’.

Overall assessment

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

The majority at West Kirby and the all Wirral forum agreed that it was reasonable to site a fire station on Green Belt but most participants at Saughall Massie and Upton opposed the use of Green Belt with a number of ‘don’t knows’ at both meetings.

The groups were divided on the inclusion of a training tower at the new station. Saughall Massie unanimously opposed this proposal while the other groups were divided but agreed some sort of training facility would be reasonable.

The majority of participants agreed it was reasonable to change the status of the second fire engine apart from the Saughall Massie group with a ratio of two-to-one opposing the proposal.

A limited number of equality and diversity issues were raised, relating to centralising at Upton and the impact on the elderly, socially deprived and a special needs school all in West Kirby.

Postal Survey

43. For the first time during a public consultation ORS were engaged to carry out a postal survey of 10,000 homes, 5000 in Upton fire station areas (including Saughall Massie) and 5000 in West Kirby station area. The survey was sent out in week commencing 13th April with the cut-off date for return by 15th May. The addresses were selected at random.

A total of 1351 completed questionnaires were returned (577 from Upton station areas and 774 from West Kirby) yielding an overall response rate of 14% (11% Upton, 16% West Kirby). Saughall Massie residents accounted for 11% of the initial contact sample, but accounted for 17% of the survey respondents.

The survey questionnaire covered the same two options as the deliberative meetings including the additional draft proposal for a second appliance.

An absolute majority of residents in both fire station areas preferred Option 1 (the proposal to close West Kirby and Upton, building a new station at Saughall Massie) (51% in Upton and 70% in West Kirby). In Upton 41% preferred Option 2 (outright closure of West Kirby and moving fire cover to Upton fire station) but in West Kirby just 21% preferred closing West Kirby and using Upton fire station.

Overall the responses from both areas yielded a majority of 57% in favour of Option , merging Upton and West Kirby fire stations at Saughall Massie.

The full report can be found at Appendix 7.

Stakeholder meeting and open public meetings

44. The format for the public meetings and stakeholder meetings was a formal presentation by the Chief Fire Officer giving the reasons for the changes being proposed and details of the actual merger process and its likely impact on Authority operational activities.
 45. A Wirral Council Officer attended each of the public meetings but they were limited in their responses to questions due the purdah period prior to a general election. They did however explain planning policy and process when relevant.
 46. This was followed by an invitation for people to ask questions of the Authority managers who attended the event. Appendix 4 details the questions raised at the meetings and the responses given.
 47. The stakeholders meeting was attended by 3 people and generated a significant number of questions (see Appendix 4 for details).
 48. The public meetings were well attended and in the case of Saughall Massie, oversubscribed. 17 people attended the West Kirby meeting, 21 attended Upton and in the region of 120 attended the Saughall Massie meeting with around the same number unable to get into the venue (those unable to attend the meeting were redirected to the Upton and Hoylake public meetings . The questions and answers are captured in Appendix 4.
 49. There was significant opposition expressed at the Saughall Massie meeting to the proposal to build on the Saughall Massie Road site. At each public meeting, the Chief Fire Officer explained the financial challenges, the operational basis for the proposed fire station (including possible alternatives) and that the proposed site was being considered as it was the only site offered by Wirral Council in the area. The Chief Fire Officer also made it clear that a number of other sites had been considered but only Saughall Massie Road met the required conditions for mobilising to both West Kirby and Upton in under 10 minutes, aside from one site (also Green Belt) which was in private ownership, and despite approaches with regards to purchasing land, no response had been received. The Chief Fire Officer emphasised his priority is public safety and that the issues around Green Belt were a planning matter to be addressed if the proposal reached the planning stage with Wirral MBC.
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50. At the meetings the Chief Fire Officer established that the audience understood the importance of attendance times, but when the proposed location was discussed, several of those opposing the site made it clear that they had little concern for attendance times to West Kirby, preferring to retain the station at Upton to ensure that a new station wasn't built in Saughall Massie. It is very clear that, as in the Greasby consultation, some people were unable to distinguish between the Authority's duty to provide emergency response cover and Wirral Council's duties in relation to planning and land use. However, the presence of a senior Council officer was useful in helping to explain the difference. Other attendees understood the logic of building a new station in a central location to equalise attendance times between Upton and West Kirby, but objected to the use of the Saughall Massie Road site.
51. There were several requests at the Saughall Massie meeting for a second meeting to be held to accommodate the people who were unable to get into the meeting due to the size of the venue (which was recommended by a local councillor as being the most suitable). Following consideration by the Chief Fire Officer and Chair of the Authority it was decided not to hold a second meeting in Saughall Massie for the following reasons:
- There was clearly very strong opposition to the proposal to merge at Saughall Massie and it was expected that those people unable to attend the meeting would hold a similar view at any second meeting. As a result, no value would be added by holding a second meeting.
 - Officers from the Service, including the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, stayed outside the meeting with those people who could not get in and provided information and answered questions. It can therefore be assumed with some confidence that upwards of 200 people opposed the merger at the Saughall Massie meeting
 - There were still two other public meetings scheduled, at Hoylake and Upton (the latter was a short distance from Saughall Massie and both are in the same station area). Neither meeting was well attended.
52. In West Kirby, there was some concern about the possible closure of the fire station but also concern about the Saughall Massie site which was expressed by Saughall Massie residents that had attended the meeting, accounting for approximately half of the attendees.
53. As in West Kirby, the Upton meeting had a large proportion of Saughall Massie residents present who were concerned about the site, increased traffic and loss of Green Belt. There were also a number of questions about the construction of a 40ft training tower to which the Chief Fire Officer assured people this was not the only option, a training house could be built, but that crews must have somewhere to train.
54. One suggestion advanced within the consultation questionnaire responses and at the public consultation meetings has been the use of Rapid Response Vehicles (RRV) or Brigade Response Vehicles (BRV) as used by other Fire and Rescue
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Services. A full response to this suggestion is included in CFO/058/15, which is elsewhere on this agenda.

55. Another concern among attendees at forum/public meetings and in correspondence was the potential danger of fire appliances on the roads in the area of Saughall Massie. A full response to this suggestion is included in CFO/058/15, which is elsewhere on this agenda.

Other meetings with interested groups and individuals

56. The Chief Fire Officer and other officers held a significant number of meetings with the local MP's and councillors before and during the consultation period to ensure they were fully sighted on the proposals and the financial reasons as to why they were necessary. Meetings were also held with the Wirral Older People's Parliament and the Saughall Massie Village Conservation Area Society. Other stakeholders understood the need for change, although not welcoming it and specifically in the latter case, objecting to the location.

Correspondence and requests for information

57. The Service received far fewer individual requests for information and/or objections and complaints during this consultation than during the previous consultation relating to the Greasby site. These requests were each responded to personally in detail by the Chief Fire Officer or other senior officers, or were handled as Freedom of Information (Fol) requests. The correspondence dealt with such matters as response times, why the Saughall Massie location had been proposed, why use Green Belt land, concerns about wildlife, traffic concerns, etc. Each request was different, even when the subject areas were similar and responses were thoroughly researched and considered. The vast majority of correspondence was from people who expressed that they were opposed to the Saughall Massie site.

58. There were:

- 20 enquiries from members of the public (some included a number of emails)
- 4 extended email enquiries from local Councillors

Emails and correspondence can be found at Appendix 2 and 3.

59. There were 8 Freedom of Information requests (6 from the same person) dealing with:

- Correspondence between private landowners and MFRA
 - Copies of correspondence between MFRA and Wirral MBC.
 - Location and response times to emergency calls in both station areas during 2013/14 and 2014/15.
 - Estimated costs of merging Upton and West Kirby fire stations at Saughall Massie.
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- Correspondence from WBC confirming the Greasby site 'would not be made available'.
- Topographical survey of Saughall Massie
- Typical sound levels in decibels of all emergency alarms including combined engine noise generated during a call out, measured from the front of a facility of this type.
- Approximate dimensions of a typical fire station perimeter wall and tower height, which must be fairly standard for facilities of this type, so a proper and informed assessment can be made of its impact.
- The FOI responses are available on request.

Staff consultation

60. The Wirral District Management Team consulted with staff in the District during the consultation period. This was in addition to earlier consultation regarding the proposal during the first public consultation and included setting up a section of the Intranet Portal where relevant documents and information was posted for staff to access. Meetings took place between managers on the District and each watch where the Chief Fire Officer's public meeting presentation was utilised.
61. This resulted in crews building on their previous knowledge of the operational response options for West Wirral and having a full understanding of the proposals when they engaged with the public during the period (they also distributed consultation documentation). In general the staff, although not supportive of station closures themselves, understood the reasons behind the merger proposals. Some staff also attended the public meetings.

Petition

62. A petition with 129 signatures was received at the end of the consultation period. This is a separate item on this agenda.

Equality and Diversity Implications

63. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached at Appendix 9.
 64. The EIA has found that the attendees at the focus groups and forums were broadly representative of the residents of the areas affected, as were the respondents to the postal survey and questionnaire.
 65. Some concerns were expressed in the focus groups and forums regarding the potential for negative impact on older and disabled people in West Kirby's station area. The merger proposal is designed to mitigate this impact, but the Service would endeavour to ensure that targeted prevention work takes place to reduce
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risk, regardless of which option is approved by the Authority.

Staff Implications

66. Wirral and Headquarters staff have been engaged in the process, as they were during the previous consultation. They contributed to the planning and delivery of the consultation process and were instrumental in engaging with the public, distributing information, attending public meetings and answering questions.

Legal Implications

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

Financial Implications & Value for Money

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

Room hire and refreshments - £548.00

British Sign Language interpreters - £375.00

Focus group and forum facilitation – £10,870.00

Architectural feasibility study for two different options & producing plans for the public meetings - £15,000

Contribution to publication of Wirral Older Persons Parliament newsletter - £100.00

Print of newsletters & postage for postal survey, preparation of survey and reporting - £19,195.00

Article in Messenger magazine - £255.00

Total - £46,343.00

69. All costs were met from existing budgets and there was no additional (direct) cost arising from staff attendance at evening meetings.
70. As detailed above, it is considered that the deliberative forums and survey offer value for money as it is considered that relying solely on open public meetings would not have provided Members with sufficient information about the views of the public of Wirral to enable them to make an informed decision about how to proceed.
71. For the first time, the Authority invested in a postal survey in order to gauge the views of a broad range and larger number of local residents on its operational response proposals. Public meetings are very useful for gathering feedback from local people, but by their very nature attract people who already hold strong views for or against a proposal. Following the consultation in Greasby, the Authority felt it was essential to establish whether or not local people generally supported its proposal to mitigate the impact of budget cuts on operational response in addition to the views expressed by a relatively small but vocal group of people who objected to the proposals for reasons related to planning, not operational response.
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Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

72. 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 merger proposals. There are no health and safety or environmental implications arising from this report.

Contribution to Our Mission: *Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Firefighters*

73. Entering into a period of twelve weeks meaningful consultation in Wirral has allowed the public and other stakeholders to carefully consider the implications of budget cuts on the Authority and contribute valuable opinions that will be considered by the Authority when it makes its final decision.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

CFO/111/11 If this report follows on from another, list the previous report(s)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

MFRA	Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority
MFRS	Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service
TRV	Targeted Response Vehicle
ORS	Opinion Research Services
LLAR	Low Level of Activity and Risk