



Integrated Risk Management Planning 2017-2020

**Report of Forums with
Members of the Public**

January 2017

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Acknowledgements

Opinion Research Services (ORS) is pleased to have worked with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) on the three Merseyside consultation forums"reported here. The diverse participants engaged with the issues and discussed their ideas readily, so we trust that this report of findings will help to inform MFRA's planning for 2017-20 at a time of serious financial constraints.

We thank MFRA for commissioning the project as part of its on-going regular programme of public and stakeholder engagement and consultation about its risk management and budget 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 64 members of the public who took part in the three meetings to share their views with us: they were patient in listening to important and detailed background information before entering positively into open discussions about challenging topics, with some controversial aspects.

At all stages of the project, ORS's status as an independent organisation engaging with the public as fairly 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.

The ORS Project Team

Project Design and Management

Dale Hall

Kelly Lock

Fieldwork Management

Leanne Hurlow

Forum Facilitator

Dale Hall

Report Author

Dale Hall

Introduction

The Commission

1. ORS was commissioned by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) to conduct three consultation forums across Merseyside about wide-ranging draft proposals for integrated risk management over 2017-20. ORS's role was to recruit, facilitate and report the deliberative meetings.
2. MFRA has conducted both pre-consultation listening and engagement and formal consultation meetings with residents across Merseyside on a regular cycle; and in this context ORS has facilitated both district-based and all-Merseyside forums for the Authority. Within this framework, the proposals and forums reported here both built upon five local authority-based "listening and engagement" forums (in June 2016) that reviewed the general principles now embodied in MFRA's plans for 2017-20.
3. In the light of the continuing pressure on emergency service budgets, the seven general principles reviewed in forums last June were that the service should:

Focus on the community

Respond effectively to emergencies

Focus on safety

Be based in the community

Give value for money

Meet demand

Continuously improve and innovate.

4. Residents' responses to these principles and priorities have informed the development of the draft proposals considered in the consultation programme reported here. In summary terms, MFRA's proposals discussed in the three forums cover all the following:

Emergency response, including:

Number of fire engines

Firefighter contracts

Emergency medical response (co-responding)

Prevention, including

Safe and well visits

Community fire safety hubs

Volunteering programme

Protection

Preparedness

5. There were also two other areas of discussion, namely:

Collaboration with the police

Council tax levels.

Deliberative Research

6. The forum meetings reported here used a 'deliberative' approach to encourage members of the public to reflect in depth about MFRA's proposals while both receiving and questioning background information and discussing them. The meetings lasted for at least two-and-a-half hours and in total there were 64 diverse participants. The dates of the meetings and attendance levels by members of the public at each forum are as shown in the table immediately below.

Forum Meetings	Date	Number of Attendees
Bootle Community Fire Station	Monday November 21st 2016	17
Birkenhead Community Fire Station	Tuesday November 22 nd 2016	22
Belle Vale Community Fire Station	Wednesday November 23 rd 2016	25

7. The attendance target for each of the forums was 20 to 25 people – so the total of 64 participants was on-target. 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.
8. 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).

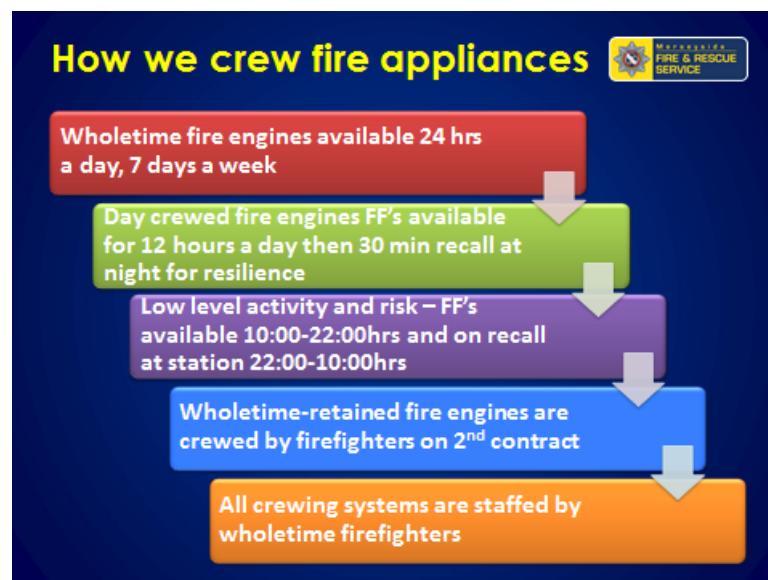
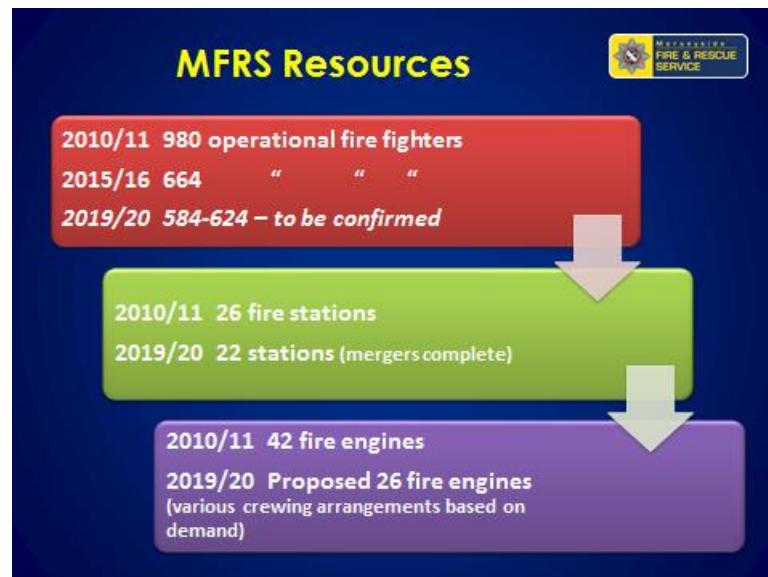
9. Consequently, as the table below shows, there was a diverse range of participants from the local areas and, as standard good practice, they were recompensed for their time and efforts in travelling and taking part.

<u>CRITERIA</u>	Bootle	Birkenhead	Belle Vale	Overall
Gender	Male: 12 Female: 5	Male: 11 Female: 11	Male: 17 Female: 10	Male: 40 Female: 26
Age	16-34: 1 35-54: 7 55+: 9	16-34: 4 35-54: 10 55+: 8	16-34: 8 35-54: 11 55+: 8	16-34: 13 35-54: 28 55+: 25
Social Grade	AB: 8 C1: 4 C2: 3 DE: 2	AB: 5 C1: 8 C2: 4 DE: 5	AB: 8 C1: 8 C2: 3 DE: 8	AB: 21 C1: 20 C2: 10 DE: 15
Ethnicity	0 Non-White British	0 Non-White British	2 Non-White British	2 Non-White British
Limiting Long-term Illness	0 LLTI	2 LLTI	1 LLTI	3 LLTI

10. Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the five meetings reported here gave diverse groups of Merseyside residents the opportunity to comment in detail on MFRA's draft planning principles. 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.

Profile of MFRA

11. Early in the meetings, the residents were briefed about changes in MFRA resources and policies since 2010. The initial presentation covered key changes in MFRA's resources since 2011 in the context of reductions in central government funding – which mean that, having had a 35% reduction in central funding since 2010 (requiring savings of £26.5 million), the Service now faces a further 50% reduction in central funding by 2020 (requiring savings of £11 million). The changes since 2010 were summarised in the two slides on the next page:



12. The following topics were reviewed in order to explain the changes (made and impending) and how they have been possible:

Reduction from 42 to 24 wholetime fire engines (because two of the 26 are 'reserve resilience vehicles' (not available immediately on a day-to-day basis)

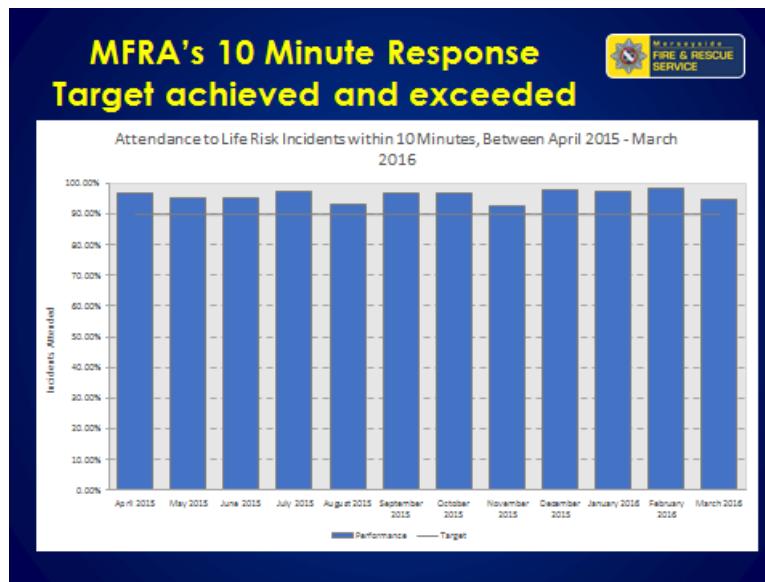
Reduction in firefighters and support staff

Station mergers currently underway

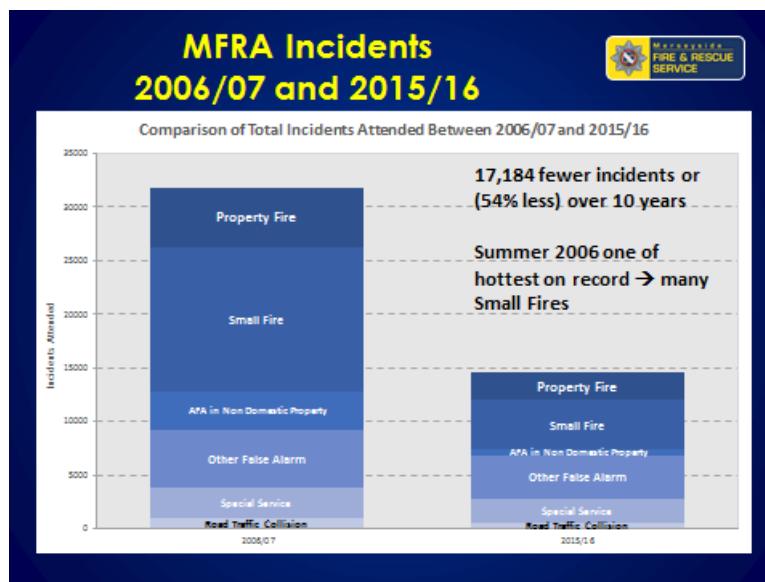
Financial savings already achieved and underway

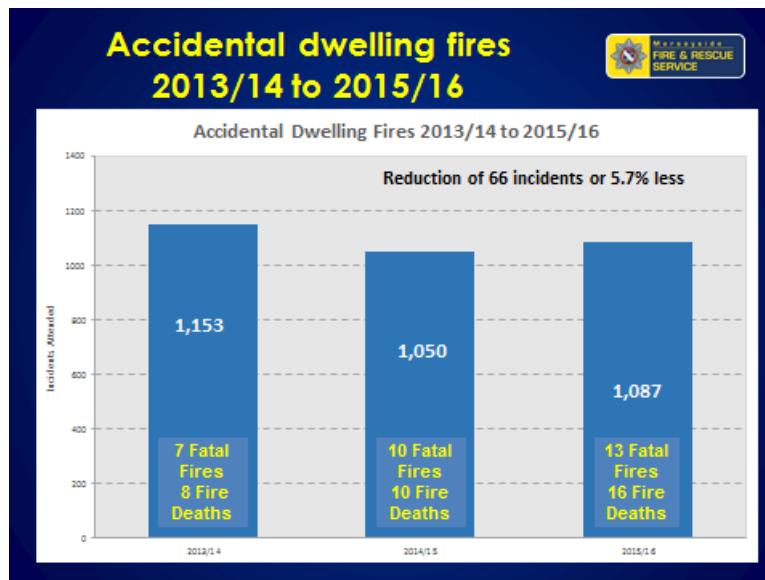
Such reductions have been possible because of reductions in risk (measured in terms of the number of incidents, including critical ones).

13. Following are some of the slides used to 'take stock' of MFRA's position. The first on the next page shows that, despite lesser resources, MFRA continues to do better than its exacting 10-minute response standard for life-threatening incidents.

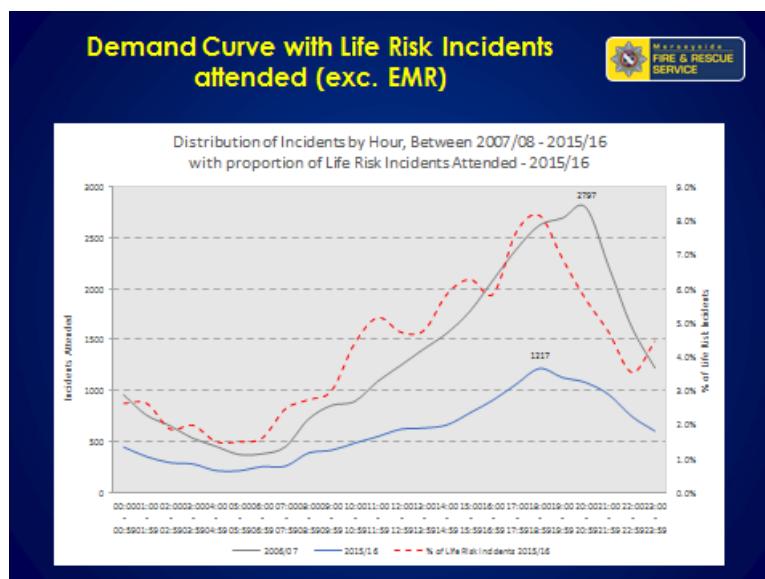


14. Part of the reason that response times have been maintained in the context of big front-line reductions is that risk (in terms of the number of incidents) has reduced considerably over the last ten years, even if the reductions over the last three years reductions in serious incidents have been levelling, with more fatal fires and related deaths – as the next two slides show.





15. The number of fatalities in accidental dwelling fires is low but fluctuates from year to year, reflecting the difficulties of identifying and accessing the most vulnerable people and improving their safety. It is noticeable that in 2015-16, the number of deaths increased sharply, though the increase in the number of fatal dwelling fires was less steep; over three years, deaths increased from eight to 16, whereas fatal dwelling fires increased from seven to 13. It is too soon to know, though, if an upward trend is emerging for increased fatalities.
16. The following slide also shows that incidents have considerably reduced since 2007/08 and that they are still distributed ‘unevenly’ throughout the day and night – so demand for fire and rescue service in Merseyside (as elsewhere) still varies very significantly over each 24-hour period.



17. The dotted red line in the above slide shows that the number of life-risk incidents is only a small proportion of the total – ranging from about 1.5% to about 8% of incidents at the quietest and busiest times of the day.

Forum Findings

Introduction

18. Forum participants were reminded that MFRA has an important duty to consider the impact of its policies, proposals and actions on equality and diversity in general, and on those with 'protected characteristics' in particular. The following slide was used to encourage participants to reflect on whether the draft proposals give due consideration to such groups.



19. This report concisely reviews the sentiments and judgements of participants about MFRA's draft proposals: it is not a verbatim transcript of the three sessions, but an interpretative summary of the issues raised by participants in free-ranging discussions.
20. The three forums did not differ materially in their reactions to the proposals, so this report combines the findings from all the meetings in a single account.

Initial questions and comments

21. The information reviewed in the previous chapter was of considerable interest to the participants and they made a number of comments before discussing the proposals. For instance, they asked all the following questions:

Have you been unable to deal with any incidents since your resources have been reduced?

How much does the reduction in resources impact on the number of fire and RTC deaths?

Are your fire engines bigger and better than they used to be?

How many fire engines would you send to a house fire? Can you continue to send three even with reduced resources?

Will the 26 planned fire engines be the big machines? Surely you should be using some smaller vehicles to deal with chip pan fires?

The data shows there are many less call-outs at night

What tolerance and flexibility is there in your performance at different times of the day and year? Can you meet the varying demands?

You have to make your budgets work, but could you deal with a 9/11-type disaster?

Have you built in resilience via agreements with other fire services?

Could you target your home safety inspections better? Vulnerable people need to be informed of the service they can get; and care in the community is poor for people with mental health problems nowadays – so they are more at risk in the community

Can you maintain your prevention work for the very vulnerable? Are all the deaths in the same socio-economic class?

The number of vulnerable people will be increasing in future due to the reductions in social care

Will more firefighters be on call rather at the station? Will this affect their terms of service? How much are they in the station? Is the retained/recall role compulsory or is it voluntary?

Retained crews are well known and have been used for many years in many fire and rescue services

Will these proposals involve compulsory redundancies?

Do you still find that firefighters are happy to stay in the service for their working lives or are they too stressed to do that? What is staff morale like?

Can you deal with big incidents at the same time?

Will it mean doing your day shift and then being on recall after hours?

Emergency response proposals

Overall summary

22. MFRA's response proposals include:

Reducing the total number of fire engines from 24 to 18 between the hours of 8:30pm and 8:30am

60% of wholetime firefighters also having secondary retained contracts

Adopting an emergency medical response role (co-responding).

23. After detailed discussions, all of these proposals were overwhelmingly embraced in all three forums. In particular, from a total of 64 participants:

54 endorsed the reduction in fire engines and only five were definitely opposed

63 endorsed the proposal for secondary retained contracts for wholetime firefighters and only one was definitely opposed

52 endorsed the proposal for an emergency medical response role and only four were definitely opposed.

Discussion

24. Before these very positive conclusions were reached there were many questions about the proposals, but ultimately so many were able to accept the first two because they understood and were impressed by the evidence about varying demand and low proportions of life risk incidents.
25. The main comments or questions raised in discussions are noted under indicative headings below:

GENERAL COMMENTS

*The FRS has become much more efficient with fewer resources since 2010!
There is scope to do more of this!*

The reduction in incidents is down to your prevention work – but that has to be maintained – so what impacts will the loss of 40-80 firefighters have on that?

You can't keep on making cuts indefinitely when the population is increasing and aging!

It's good that you're making changes now, but god help us by 2026 if these changes continue indefinitely!

REDUCTION IN FIRE ENGINES OVERNIGHT

The Liverpool population has reduced significantly over recent years!

Your firefighter numbers still compare well with elsewhere. And what about the number of fire engines available per head of population?

FIREFIGHTER SECONDARY RETAINED CONTRACTS

Firefighters used to have second jobs and did not like regular day-time work – so do the secondary contracts avoid those problems now?

The greater flexibility of the new working patterns is a good thing!

Are there any limits to the working hours for firefighters?

Will the people with secondary contracts be able to deal with peaks in incidents and still have a fair quality of life?

Will you be able to maintain the training for firefighters if they work differently and are fewer in number?

Are you expecting existing firefighters to sign these contracts voluntarily and have they lost the old terms and conditions for 2-2-4 – do they get enough time off?

How does the shift pattern work for the wholetime-retained crews? You could find that there is no back-up because everyone has used their working hours up

The “2-5 24-hour” shift pattern sounds very favourable even if they’re on call in the middle of the 5 days off!

MEDICAL (CARDIAC) RESPONSE SERVICE

Would this be the thin end of the wedge? Would there be a tendency for the fire service to replace part of the ambulance service role?

Could this be a counter-argument against budget and service reductions? Do you need more staff to do this important role?

Is it cost effective to send crews to resuscitations rather than drones?

I’m worried that your first aid service could divert an ambulance from an important incident! They could come to rely on you increasingly

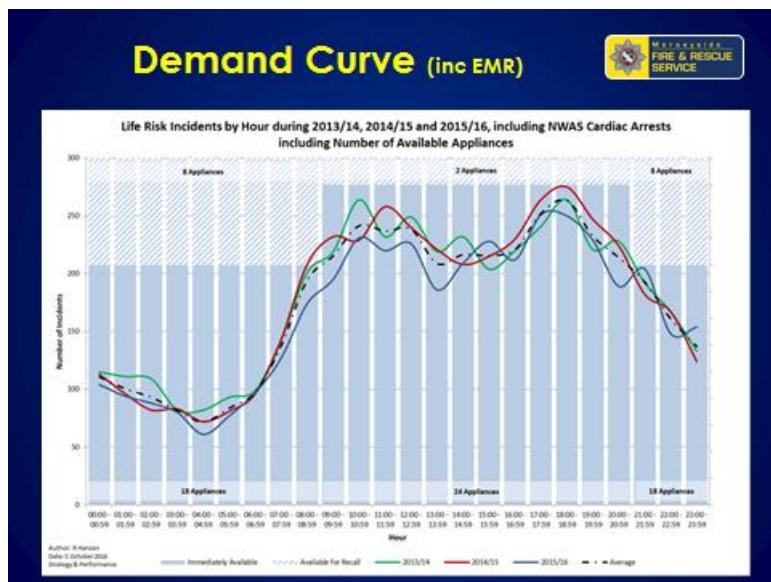
Who gives you the incidents to go to? Does the ambulance service despatch your fire engine?

How many cardiac calls could you have in a year – about 2,500? Won’t they divert you from your core fire and rescue role?

How long have you been testing this idea at the three stations?

There must be a lot of paperwork attached to this role?

26. As we have said, the data and evidence provided by MFRA was very influential with forums that took the trouble to study it. In particular, they recognised the significance of the following chart that indicates the potential for saving more lives through emergency cardiac response than just through traditional fire-fighting. The 24-hour demand curves in the next chart shows not only that there is significant demand overall, but that when cardiac arrest life-risk is taken into account the potential demand period (for fire and rescue interventions) lengthens or widens to around a 12-hour period, from about 8am to 8pm – matching MFRA's proposals for its maximum fire engine deployment. In other words, the forums responded positively to the data showing the potential for a wider role for the fire and rescue service.



27. It was this potential for life-saving interventions in cardiac arrest that was so persuasive in the forums.
28. However, the forums did not wish to see the fire and rescue service role widening to embrace all kinds of medical emergencies, or to generally supplementing or 'replacing' the ambulance service, for they thought that such a trend would weaken the service by taking it too far from its core role(s).

Prevention proposals

Overall summary

29. MFRA's response prevention proposals include introducing:

Safe and Well visits

Community Safety Hubs

Volunteering programme.

30. After detailed discussions, all of these proposals were overwhelmingly embraced in all three forums. In particular, from a total of 64 participants:

56 endorsed the *Safe and Well* visits initiative and only three were definitely opposed

58 endorsed the proposal for Community Safety Hubs and only two were definitely opposed

59 endorsed the volunteering programme and only one was definitely opposed.

Discussion

31. Before these very positive conclusions were reached there were many questions about the proposals, but ultimately so many were able to accept the first two because they understood and were impressed by the evidence about varying demand and low proportions of life risk incidents.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Who would fund all this – is funding available?

Would these roles reduce the prevention work that the MFRS does?

You're reducing your work in schools, but children can take important safety messages back to their homes – so you need to keep up prevention work

You need to work with the other services to do the wider role you are envisaging

SAFE AND WELL VISITS

My mother was given a lot of help due to MFRS getting the other agencies to act (when they met her through a home fire safety check) – and it reduced her risks and the risks of 43 other residents there

Will the Health and Well-being Board approve this initiative? This could be helpful in keeping people out of hospital

It all sounds very well, but what are the rules governing your duty of care and how you use the information – is there a clear protocol for your responsibilities and accountability? If you called on a vulnerable person and did not refer them and s/he died later on you would have no clear cut accountability or ways of measuring your effectiveness – there could be gaps between the different services

How would you know what should and should not be passed on?

It's really good to tell services that someone is in trouble and needs help – it's spot on

This could seem like interfering with people – and make them less trusting of the fire service – I don't want to think that all sorts of services are sharing my data!

You need to be able to measure your success and failure clearly to justify this kind of new initiative because it goes beyond what the public expect you to do and it needs justifying

Will firefighters have the skills to be 'care mentors' in this kind of way?

How do you find vulnerable people in the first place? Do you have a clear protocol to identify and help vulnerable people?

There could be a conflict of interest with the Social Services. There could be a conflict of interest and it seems unfair to expect firefighters to take this on

Aren't you trying to take over the responsibility of Social Services – which doesn't seem to be your job

Will the total number of visits reduce if these replace home fire safety checks?

A lot of old people won't appreciate this!

COMMUNITY SAFETY HUBS

In order to work and do some good, this has to mean more than just co-location!

Do community safety hubs make a real difference? It seems to make sense – but the fire and rescue service needs to get out to people generally

I think it's a great idea to co-ordinate information through this and through the community hubs – it could help a lot

VOLUNTEERING PROGRAMME

There was little explicit discussion of a volunteering programme, but the three forums were generally supportive of the idea.

MFRS-Police Collaboration

Overall summary

32. MFRA's proposal is to develop and enhance collaboration with the police wherever possible, particularly through community safety hubs. This proposal was readily endorsed, but the forums were also clear that there should be no kind of 'merger' with the police. In particular, from a total of 64 participants:

45 endorsed greater collaboration with the police, but 13 were definitely opposed (with those opposed being concentrated in Birkenhead (10 of the 13))

Only five endorsed any kind of 'merger' with the police whereas 45 were definitely opposed; the five in favour were all in Belle Vale.

Discussion

33. While supporting closer collaboration, the forums were opposed to any kind of 'merger' with the police; and there were some emphatic comments about the issue:

It would make sense to merge into one organisation to save money

The 'democracy' argument about the direct election of the P&CC compared with the indirect election of the Fire Authority is not very important

Local councillors are more representative of their own areas than the P&CC

The P&CC costs a lot of money! It is an expensive service to run

A merger would seem unlikely to save money because the P&CC office is very expensive to run!

I like closer collaboration, but not a single entity with the P&CC at the head

They should stay separate and autonomous

What would be the advantages of a merger?

It would be like the Navy merging with the Army!

It could dilute the P&CC role if they cover too many services

We don't want any kind of merger via the P&CC

It could divert funding from the fire and rescue service

We need more of the facts to judge this properly.

Council Tax

Overall summary

34. The consultation also included discussion of whether MFRA should seek to increase council tax by "more than 2%" and about a possible referendum for a bigger increase. The prospect of an increase larger than 2% was roundly rejected and so, too, the prospect of a referendum on a bigger rise. In particular, from a total of 64 participants:

Only 15 supported a council tax increase of more than 2%, but 44 opposed it; most of those supporting a bigger increase were in Belle Vale (14/15)

The forums were all unanimous that a referendum would be unwelcome in principle to Merseyside residents and unwinnable in practice.

Discussion

35. There were some emphatic comments about the issues:

Council tax payers are under great pressure already!

We pay enough money in taxes!

I'd pay more for my fire and rescue service! But I don't think the residents would vote for this in a referendum!

Would the cost of a referendum and re-billing have to be borne by the MFRA?

It would be surprising if the people approve the 10% increase!

It's high risk and expensive issue!

It would be a precedent for one authority to increase more than 2% for the others to do so!

You should charge for fitting smoke detectors

We need to have a rational allocation of resources nationally

The government should fund the service

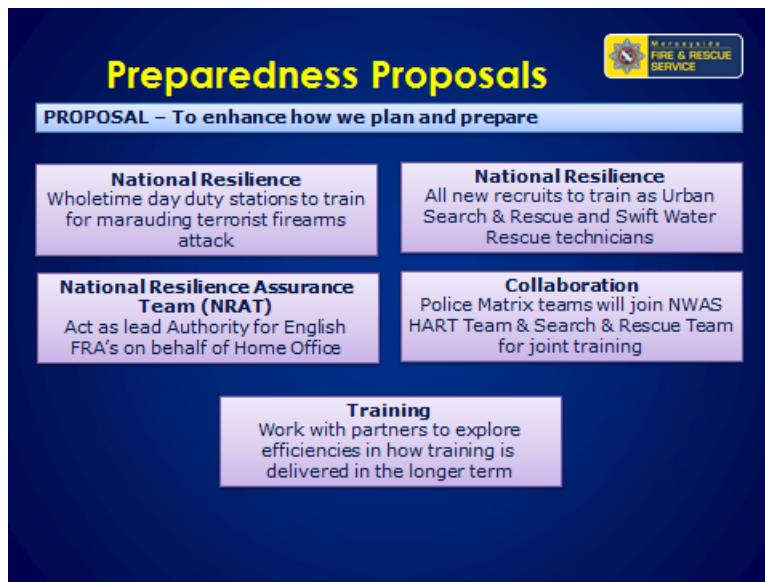
We have to rearrange what we're doing – even if it means paying more money per month for a good service.

Protection and Preparedness proposals

Overall summary

36. MFRA's proposed Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) includes a range of proposals about the Service's protection and preparedness proposals, but (while these were not discussed in detail) it was clear that the forums did not consider them to be controversial (or to have a direct discernible impact on the day-to-day services the public receive). Therefore, the initiatives outlined on the following two slides were all approved without significant discussion:





Protected characteristics

37. MFRA's response and other proposals were not thought to jeopardise in any way any of the groups with protected characteristics. Indeed, several said that the prevention initiatives in general, and the Safe and Well visits and Community Safety Hubs in particular, would positively benefit vulnerable people – providing that the commitment to broader prevention and education initiatives was also maintained (for example, in schools).

Summary Conclusions

38. This concise report does not need an elaborate conclusions section, but it is worth emphasising the main outcomes of the three forums:

Emergency response proposals

39. MFRA's response proposals were overwhelmingly endorsed in all three forums. In particular, from a total of 64 participants:

54 endorsed the reduction in fire engines and only five were definitely opposed
63 endorsed the proposal for secondary retained contracts for wholetime firefighters and only one was definitely opposed
52 endorsed the proposal for an emergency medical response role and only four were definitely opposed.

Prevention proposals

40. MFRA's prevention proposals were also overwhelmingly embraced in all three forums. In particular, from a total of 64 participants:

56 endorsed the Safe and Well visits initiative and only three were definitely opposed
58 endorsed the proposal for Community Safety Hubs and only two were definitely opposed
59 endorsed the volunteering programme and only one was definitely opposed.

MFRS-Police Collaboration

41. MFRA's proposal to develop and enhance collaboration with the police wherever possible were endorsed by 45 of the 64 participants (with 13 (mainly in Birkenhead) definitely opposed); but only five (all in Belle Vale) endorsed any kind of 'merger' with the police, whereas 45 were definitely opposed.

Council Tax

42. Only 15 (mainly in Belle Vale) of 64 participants supported a council tax increase of more than 2%, but 44 opposed it and the forums were all unanimous that a referendum would be unwelcome in principle to residents and unwinnable in practice.

Protection and Preparedness proposals

43. MFRA's proposals about protection and preparedness were not discussed in detail, but it was clear that the forums did not consider them to be controversial and participants were unanimous in their support.

Protected characteristics

44. MFRA's response and other proposals were not thought to jeopardise in any way any of the groups with protected characteristics: it was suggested that Safe and Well visits and Community Safety Hubs would have positive benefits for vulnerable people.