



# Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

## IRMP Supplement 2019 – 21 Consultation

### Report of findings

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# Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

## IRMP Supplement 2019 – 21 Consultation

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# Acknowledgements

Opinion Research Services (ORS) is pleased to have worked with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) on the five 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 planning for the 2019-21 period.

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 99 members of the public who took part in the five 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.

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 future service delivery.

# 1. The Consultation Process

## Overview of the consultation

### Background to the review

- 1.1 'Integrated Risk Management' is the development of a balanced approach by the Fire and Rescue Service to reducing risk within the community. This is achieved by combining prevention, protection and emergency response, on a risk-assessed basis, in order to improve the safety of the community and create a safer working environment for firefighters.
- 1.2 In 2016, Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority (MFRA) developed and consulted on its most recent Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2017-20, which was subsequently approved. Since then, a number of significant national and international incidents have occurred and these, combined with changes to the City Region infrastructure and the initial findings of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) have given the Chief Fire Officer and Authority cause to review the sustainability of its plans to ensure that they are still fit for purpose.
- 1.3 In light of this, an IRMP supplement has been drafted that will extend the current plan to 2021, aligning it to MFRA's medium-term financial plans. The supplement includes a number of alternative proposals to those approved back in 2016/17 when the plan was first considered.

### The commission

- 1.4 A 12-week consultation on the IRMP supplement was launched on March 14<sup>th</sup> 2019. Opinion Research Services (ORS) - a spin-out company from Swansea University with a UK-wide reputation for social research - was appointed to convene, facilitate and report five forums with members of the public, one in each of the five areas of Merseyside (Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens and Wirral). Pre-consultation listening and engagement and formal consultation meetings have been undertaken 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 for many years.

### Deliberative engagement

#### Forums

- 1.5 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 two-and-a-half hours and in total there were 99 diverse participants. The dates of the meetings and attendance levels by members of the public at each forum are as shown in the table overleaf.

FORUM	DATE	NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
<b>Knowsley</b> (Belle Vale Fire Station)	<b>23<sup>rd</sup> April 2019</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Wirral</b> (Birkenhead Fire Station)	<b>24<sup>th</sup> April 2019</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Sefton</b> (Bootle & Netherton Fire Station)	<b>25<sup>th</sup> April 2019</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>St Helens</b> (Newton-le-Willows Fire Station)	<b>29<sup>th</sup> April 2019</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Liverpool</b> (Kirkdale Fire Station)	<b>1<sup>st</sup> May 2019</b>	<b>21</b>

- 1.6 The attendance target for each of the forums was 20 people – so the total of 99 participants was broadly 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, all participants were then written to - to confirm the invitation and the arrangements; and those who agreed to come then received telephone or written reminders shortly before each meeting. Such recruitment by telephone is an effective way of ensuring that the participants are independent and broadly representative of the wider community, though it should also be noted that around half of participants had participated in one or more previous ORS-run MFRA consultation forums.
- 1.7 In recruitment, care was taken to ensure that no potential participants were disqualified or disadvantaged by disabilities or any other factors, and the local fire stations at which the forums met were readily accessible - and people's special needs were taken into account in the recruitment and venues. The random telephone recruitment process was monitored to ensure social diversity in terms of a wide range of criteria – including, for example: gender; age; ethnicity; social grade; and disability/limiting long-term illness (LLTI).
- 1.8 Overall, participants represented a broad cross-section of residents - for example, there were 44 females and 55 males and the age profile was as follows: 21 x 16-34; 30 x 35-54; and 48 x 55+. As standard good practice, people were recompensed for their time and efforts in travelling and taking part.
- 1.9 Although, like all other forms of qualitative engagement, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the meetings reported here gave diverse members of the public the opportunity to participate actively. Because the meetings were inclusive, the outcomes are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.

#### Deliberative events: the agenda

- 1.10 The forums began with an ORS presentation to provide some contextual background information around:

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS)'s mission, aims and values;

The key role the Service plays in protecting people in its communities – and the guidance, scrutiny and legislation to which it is subject;

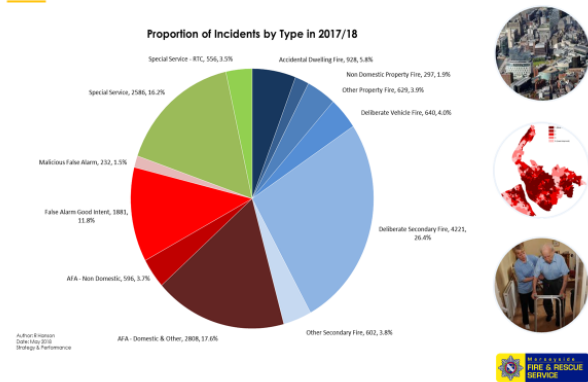
The incidents MFRS attends by type, time of day – and the areas in which these incidents occur;

The link between deprivation and demand for FRS services, but also the fact that vulnerability can be found anywhere; and

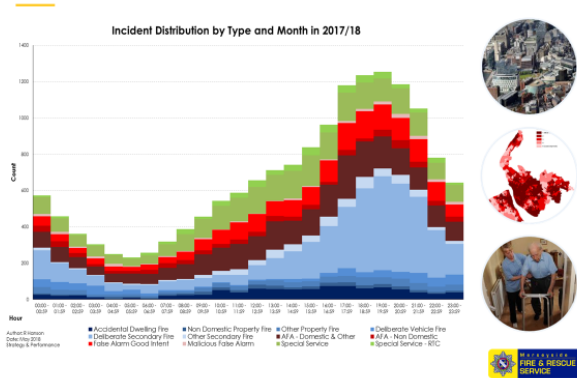
The way in which demand and risk has changed across Merseyside (and beyond) in recent years.

1.11 A selection of the slides used to outline this information can be seen below.

**A Service that needs to meet the risks and demands facing it**

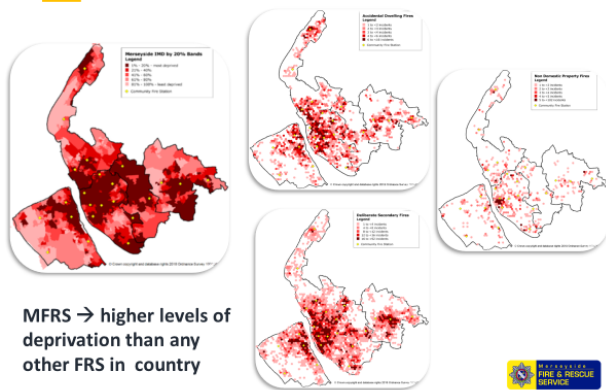


**One which understands that incidents occur at different times**





## And in different places



## A service that understands that risk and demand can change ...

### High Risk – Community Risk Register

- Thriving city
- World Heritage site
- Established and vibrant waterfront
- **Liverpool Waters Container terminal**
- Main & Underground railway network
- Three football stadiums
- Motorway network
- **200 High Rise Buildings**
- 43,288 workplaces and other buildings
- Airport
- **Cruise Liner terminal**
- **Arena Conference Centre**
- **City Region events (e.g. Giants)**
- 10 x COMAH sites

### High Demand – Community Insight

- High levels of deprivation
- Poor housing
- High health inequality
- **High levels of serious and organised crime**
- **Ageing population**
- **Increasing student population**
- **High levels of mental incapacity**
- **Demand on adult social care**
- **High number of troubled families**
- Poverty
- High smoking prevalence
- Socio-economic impact
- **1.4 Million people**



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

## The report

- 1.13 This report reviews the sentiments and judgements of respondents and participants on the MFRA IRMP Supplement 2019-2021. Verbatim quotations are used, in indented italics, not because we agree or disagree with them - but for their vividness in capturing recurrent points of view. ORS does not endorse any opinions, but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly. The report is an interpretative summary of the issues raised by participants.

## 2. Main Findings

### Introduction

- 2.1 This chapter reports the views from the five deliberative forums with members of the public across Merseyside, which were independently facilitated by ORS.
- 2.2 Each meeting began with a presentation that outlined some contextual and background information and participants were encouraged to ask questions throughout. The meetings were thorough and truly deliberative in listening to and responding openly to a wide range of evidence and issues.
- 2.3 This is not a verbatim transcript of the five sessions, but an interpretative summary of the issues raised by participants in free-ranging discussions - and as the forums did not differ materially in their reactions to the proposals, this report combines the findings from all the meetings in a single account.

### Main findings

- **MFRS's planning principles were supported**
- **There was unanimous support for the new 'Protection', 'Resilience' and 'Response' proposals**
- **MFRS's planning assumptions were supported**
- **The alternative plan was accepted by all – and all other new IRMP proposals were supported**
- **MFRA should consider extending its provision of free smoke alarms to the most deprived areas of Merseyside, but must also carefully consider the method by which it does so**
- **MFRA offers excellent value for money, but future council tax rises should be carefully considered**
- **There are no equality and diversity impacts, as the proposals are positive for all**

### MFRS's planning principles were supported

- 2.4 As a warm-up exercise, participants were shown the two slides overleaf outlining MFRS's Planning Principles - which had been agreed at the previous 2016/17 consultation forums - and a list of the most frequent comments made during those (and indeed other) sessions.

## Plans informed by communities

### Planning Principles – agreed at the 2016/17 consultation

#### Response to emergencies

- Maintaining fast response times
- Matching resources to varying risk
- Prioritising 10 key stations
- Flexible working practices/duty systems
- Excellent training

#### Safety focused

- Ensuring safety of staff/public
- Being properly equipped, with the right number of trained staff, to resolve emergencies effectively

#### Meeting demand

- Ensuring the right level of resources are in the right place at the right time to maximise productivity and flexibility

#### Focused on the Community

- Targeting most at risk, particularly the frail/elderly living alone, and those with precarious lifestyle or high risk factors

#### Continuous Improvement/ Innovation

- Collaborating with other FRs
- Widening scope of home fire safety checks
- Seeking more efficient firefighter shift patterns

#### Value for Money

- Recognising that cuts are a fact of life that have to be made, and ensuring policies are financially sustainable

#### Based in the Community

- Maintaining accessible local fire stations where possible, while assessing the need for stations in the context of local risk levels
- Opening stations for community use
- Promoting blue-light collaboration there



## And the things they felt were important

### — Stakeholder Consultation 2012 - 2018

- “prefer to **keep stations open** using different duty systems than close stations?”
- “like to maintain a standard **10 minute response** to all Life Risk Incidents across Merseyside rather than have some areas fall outside of that standard?”
- “prefer to use **wholetime (full time) firefighters** to protect its communities rather than retained firefighters”
- “like to secure a **long term solution** which protects staff moving forward”
- “would wish to **avoid compulsory redundancy**”
- “want **performance** against the response standard should be a determining factor when implementing change”
- “expect us to **resource to meet the demands** placed on the service”
- “would expect us to **maximise our productivity** to protect the public”
- “Keep **prevention at the forefront** of our work”
- “Supportive to our proposals to respond **‘along with’ NWAS to Cardiac Arrest** incidents
- “Wished to see blue light **collaboration not integration**”
- “understand the need to **deliver a balanced budget** in line with our medium term financial plan”



- 2.5 They were then given some time on their tables to discuss the question ‘do you think MFRS should still reflect these views when developing its plans?’ before feeding back their views to the wider group.
- 2.6 Generally speaking, all statements were endorsed – though there was minority disagreement with using wholetime firefighters to protect communities rather than retained firefighters for reasons of risk and cost-effectiveness, and with avoiding compulsory redundancies at all costs, as they can sometimes be necessary to achieve efficiencies.

*“We would prefer a mixture of both. In certain areas of low risk have retained firefighters, and in more high risk have wholetime firefighters” (St Helens)*

*“The retained firefighters seem to be a good and cost-effective idea so should be used more to help deliver a balanced budget” (Wirral)*

*“Avoid compulsory redundancies...any business needs to review their costs and efficiency and if redundancies have to be made then so be it” (Wirral)*

*“Yes and no...there’s a need to look at effectiveness and efficiency?” (Sefton)*

- 2.7 Moreover, preferring to keep stations open using different duty systems rather than closing stations was questioned by some who said:

*“The number of stations has reduced but standards are still sky high. So it obviously can be done and it should be left to the people in charge to decide whether it’s feasible without the public saying ‘keep stations open for the sake of it’” (Wirral)*

*“Must consider need; not keeping it open no matter what” (St Helens)*

*“Merge where possible” (Wirral)*

- 2.8 Clearly then, there were occasions when some attendees felt that keeping stations open may not always be feasible or desirable.
- 2.9 Other comments were made around the following:

#### **SECURE A LONG-TERM SOLUTION THAT PROTECTS STAFF MOVING FORWARD**

*“This helps with staff morale and costs” (Knowsley)*

*“But ensure reviews are carried out covering resources v demand” (Sefton)*

*“Helps the consistency of service delivery” (Liverpool)*

#### **RESPOND ‘ALONG WITH’ NWS TO CARDIAC ARREST INCIDENTS**

*“They can arrive before medics and save lives” (St Helens)*

*“Could they possibly divert the ambulance if they know the firefighters are on the way? Has that happened?” (Knowsley)*

*“Is there a conflict with other fire service responsibilities?” (Sefton)*

*“Should not be used to mask a failing ambulance service” (St Helens)*

*“Firefighters have to keep up to date with medical training” (Liverpool)*

#### **BLUE LIGHT COLLABORATION NOT INTEGRATION**

*“To work as a team” (St Helens)*

*“Ensures all priorities have focus” (Knowsley)*

*“We like the shared use of fire stations etc. as is already happening” (Wirral)*

#### **UNDERSTAND THE NEED TO DELIVER A BALANCED BUDGET**

*“Cost has to be considered” (St Helens)*

*“But there should be some flexibility when faced with a massive fire or other incident” (St Helens)*

*“I am a bit concerned that we just accept the cuts in the vein of being efficient...maybe we need to talk more about what we should do to stop them because they are obviously affecting resilience with the second, third, fourth, fifth engines being slower” (Wirral)*

*“Cuts have to be made and the ambulance service is overstretched so if the fire service can make savings that can be used somewhere else then it’s not necessarily negative” (Wirral)*

There was unanimous support for the new ‘Protection’, ‘Resilience’ and ‘Response’ proposals

- 2.10 While MFRA already has an existing Integrated Risk Management Plan in place for the period 2017-2020, it feels that the operational context within which MFRS is working has changed sufficiently to warrant amendments. Some of the risks that have recently become more apparent (both locally and nationally) can be seen in the slide below.

## Because we feel the operational context has changed...

### National risks

- Manchester Arena Bomb (Response)
- Borough Market Terror Attacks Westminster Bridge - heightened terrorist threat (Response)
- Grenfell Tower High Rise Fire (Protection) - challenges of the built environment
- Liverpool Arena Car Park Fire (Response)
- Saddleworth Moor and Winter Hill fires (Resilience)

### Local risks

- Heightened Terrorist Threat – Crowded places/city centre
- Environmental changes - wildfire/flood
- 200+ high rise buildings
- Housing developments – Local Plans
- Marine risk - Liverpool Waters /Cruise liner terminal/Twelve Quays/Cammell Laird

**Our speed of response is still good – but we want to improve Resilience and Protection**

- 2.11 In this context, a new plan has been developed to: increase resources in Protection to help keep people safer in public and commercial buildings; improve Resilience and help MFRS deal with the above changes in risk; and look for alternatives that still allow the Service to meet its Planning Principles whilst improving its Response.

- 2.12 MFRA’s **Protection** proposals are to:

Increase Protection staff by five Protection Officers;

Introduce a Fire Engineer role; and

Support the development of a new management information system to improve efficiency.

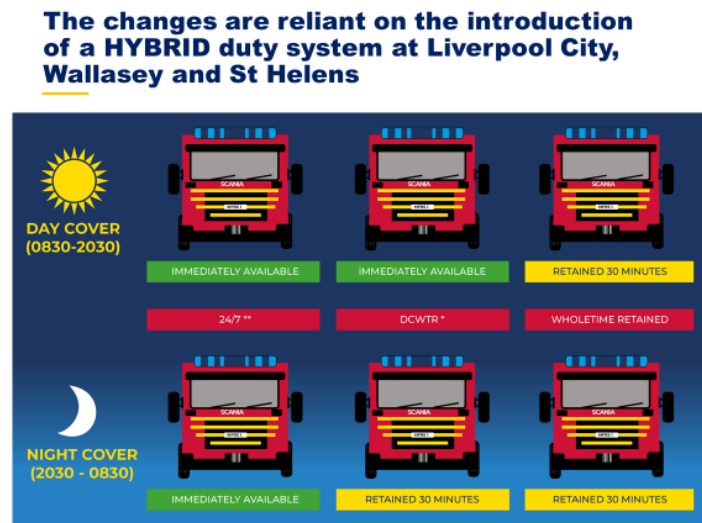
- 2.13 There was unanimous support across all five forums for these proposals, though one Liverpool participant questioned whether one Fire Engineer would be enough and there were a few comments about the potential cost of a new management information system. Some of the supportive comments made were as follows:

*“There needs to be enough protection staff to ensure contractors carry out adequate risk assessments?” (Sefton)*

*“I think it’s a very good idea to have people who can go out and give advice and to have more of them can only be a really good step” (St Helens)*

*“Five extra people would enable the Service to enforce the law to a greater degree” (St Helens)*

- 2.14 MFRA's **Resilience** proposals are to move from 26 to 30 fire engines, to be achieved by introducing a Hybrid Model at Liverpool City, Wallasey and St Helens. The slide overleaf was used at the forums to illustrate this model.



- 2.15 In terms of **Response**, the Authority is looking to:

Increase the number of firefighters from 620 to 642 (plus 20 in training);

Re-establish Crew Managers at key locations;

Maintain night-time cover at Liverpool City and Wallasey (via the Hybrid Model above);

Enhance its response to terrorist attacks and marine/flood incidents from Liverpool City and Wallasey respectively;

Re-distribute its specialist appliances; and

Use the appliances at Liverpool City and Wallasey to manage risk and demand across Merseyside dynamically.

- 2.16 There was unanimous support across the five forums for the move from 26 to 30 fire engines and the introduction of the Hybrid stations as a way of increasing resilience – and almost unanimous support for the introduction of this model at Liverpool City, Wallasey and St Helens Fire Stations (one Knowsley participant disagreed on the basis that “you’re going from two to three at St Helens but reducing to one at Prescott which doesn’t seem fair...to me, it all feels like it’s at the expense of Prescott”). Indeed, in relation to the latter point, several comments were made along the lines of:

*“It would seem that a lot of research has been done around the locations so I trust they’ve done their homework” (Knowsley)*

*“As to where they go, that’s for the experts to decide based on the data” (Sefton)*

*“If the evidence and analysis shows that’s where it should be then who am I to say it should be somewhere else?” (St Helens)*

- 2.17 There was also particular support at the Knowsley and Wirral forums for using the ‘roving’ appliances at Liverpool City and Wallasey to dynamically manage risk across Merseyside.

*“What I really liked is the idea of the roving appliance that can go to specific events” (Knowsley)*

*“The idea of the roaming engines seems like a really good capability” (Wirral)*

- 2.18 It was, though, somewhat difficult for those who had been to previous consultation sessions to ‘get their heads around’ the proposed resource increase having heard so much about austerity and the need for reductions and efficiencies over the years.

*“We’ve spent all these years being told we have to make all these cuts...” (Liverpool)*

*“Going back to all the previous consultations it’s all been around austerity and the need to make savings by getting rid of fire engines, closing stations etc. And now all of sudden it’s ‘we’re going to increase’...it was so drastic a few years ago so it’s all a bit confusing!” (Wirral)*

*“Three years ago it seemed like a completely different proposition...back then it was all about reductions and it now sounds like an investment proposal. Well done but I’m trying to get my head around it all” (Wirral)*

- 2.19 Furthermore, there was concern about what might happen if MFRA’s financial situation was to change in future, with some participants questioning whether this might result in redundancies.

*“If you get the extra fire engines and another raft of cuts come in, what happens then? Will you lose them? I’m just worried you might get punished for it because Government will look at you and say ‘they’ve seemed to have coped with the cuts, let’s hit them with some more’” (Wirral)*

*“Has the increase been considered in the context of what future funding is expected from central Government?” (St Helens)*

*“What happens if things change and there’s not as much money as they thought? Will we be back here in a few years talking about whether or not redundancies are needed?” (Liverpool)*

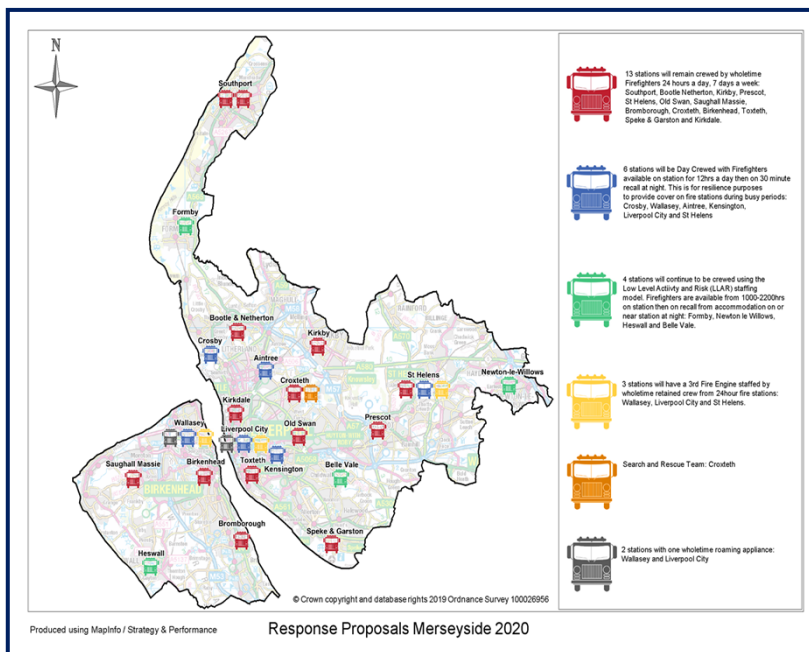
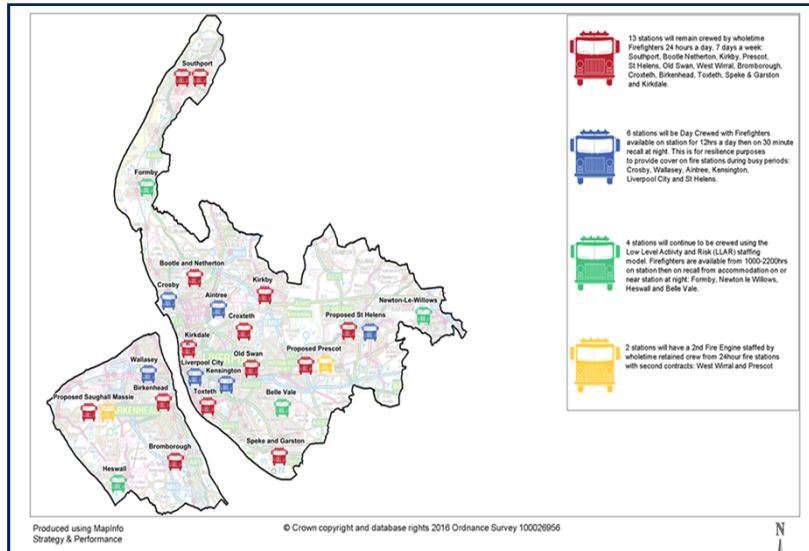
### MFRA’s planning assumptions were supported

- 2.20 Participants were informed that MFRA’s planning assumptions - and its desire to increase its number of appliances to 30 - are based on that ability to deal with one 20 pump fire/incident, two 10 pump fires/incidents or spate conditions based on the summer of 2018 - in addition to maintaining a fire engine in each one of its 10 key stations at such times to uphold its 10 minute response standard. This was considered eminently reasonable by all.

### MFRA’s alternative plan was accepted by all

- 2.21 Ultimately, participants were asked whether they preferred MFRA’s current or alternative plans, as shown in the slides overleaf.





2.22 Participants unanimously opted for the latter for they considered it: an effective and efficient use of resources; a prudent use of finances; and a positive step toward a properly resourced and more resilient fire and rescue service that is able to cope with heightened risk. Some of the many typical comments were:

*“It’s a measured response...well-planned and well thought out” (Sefton)*

*“It just seems to be a more efficient and effective use of resources” (Liverpool)*

*“The new plan seems to serve the wider area more efficiently” (Knowsley)*

*“It makes sense. You pay a lot more interest on debt than you get back on having it in reserve. So utilising some of that makes sense, as long as you don’t utilise it all. It’s minimal financial risk for a substantial gain...calculated and well-balanced” (Knowsley)*

*“The money that’ll be saved from paying off that debt will mean the Service is more prepared to cope with other risks and issues. I really like these plans” (Knowsley)*



*"It's more flexible; there are more engines in reserve within the system" (Knowsley)*

*"How can we argue against putting resources back into the Service?" (Liverpool)*

*"It's nice to see things going in the right direction rather than the wrong direction" (Knowsley)*

*"It's additional cover; it's always good to have extra fire engines for the resilience and to get the second engines there quicker" (Wirral)*

*"I think with the increased risk it makes sense to have more capability. We all agreed that there are more risks nowadays" (Sefton)*

*"To do nothing would be negligence...they have recognised and articulated the rising risk so to not amend their plans and put mitigation in place...you might as well take your uniforms off and close the doors now" (Sefton)*

### MFRA's other new IRMP proposals were supported

2.23 There was widespread support for all of MFRA's other IRMP proposals, namely to:

Continue to explore opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Service, including: whether fire stations and other buildings are in the right place; and whether there is any scope for further station mergers;

Explore the feasibility of introducing a drone capability to assist in getting a better view of incidents and share that information as required;

Explore the use of technology to support the mobilisation of resources (the 999Eye for example, which involves asking a person calling into the FRS to report a fire to take photo or video footage to assist Control in deciding what resources are needed);

Enhance the information held about risks in neighbouring FRSs to assist when responding to over the border incidents, and;

Examine how best to enhance cross-border training with neighbouring FRSs to assist when responding to over the border incidents.

2.24 The possibility of introducing a drone capability into the Service attracted the most comment, with participants typically agreeing that it would be a positive addition to MFRA's fire and rescue capability in terms of: cost-efficiency; effectiveness in responding to incidents in high-rise buildings; and firefighter safety.

*"Could the drone be used to investigate ahead of the fire engines getting there? So you would know whether you need one or two engines etc." (Knowsley)*

*"It'll be way more cost-effective than a helicopter. You can have a few of them, especially for incidents in high-rise buildings where you want to see the situation from up above and from different angles" (Sefton)*

*"It could also save firefighters' lives...as they'll have a better idea of what's in front of them" (Sefton)*

*“If it adds to the safety of the firefighters so they can see what the situation is, why not?” (St Helens)*

2.25 Indeed, using all kinds of appropriate technology to best effect was suggested at Knowsley, Sefton and St Helens.

*“The technology is there so why wouldn’t we use it to become more effective?” (Knowsley)*

*“If other services are using other technologies then we should be looking at them as well. Don’t limit it” (Sefton)*

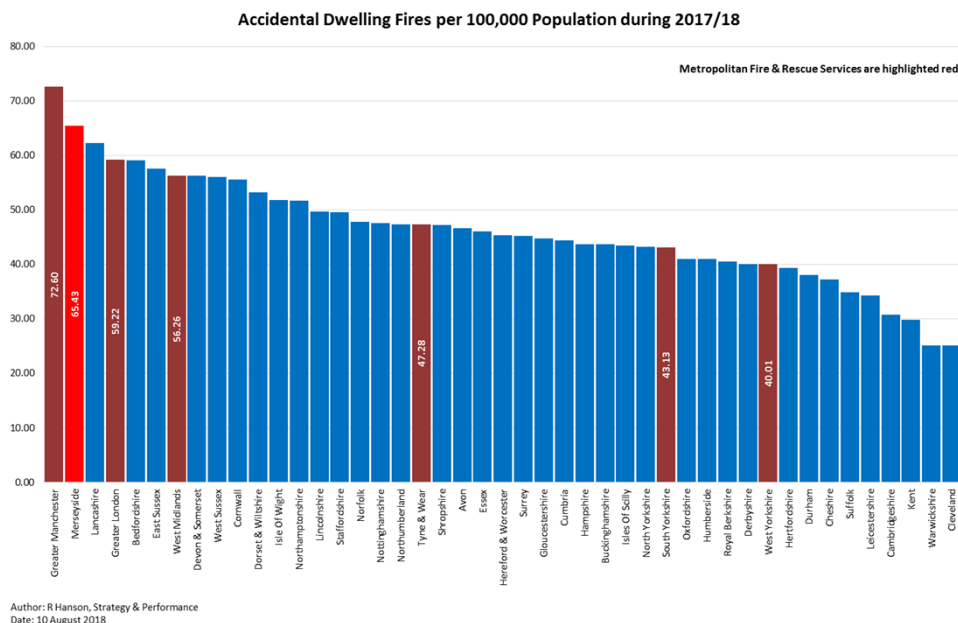
*“Use technology as much as you can to improve the situation” (St Helens)*

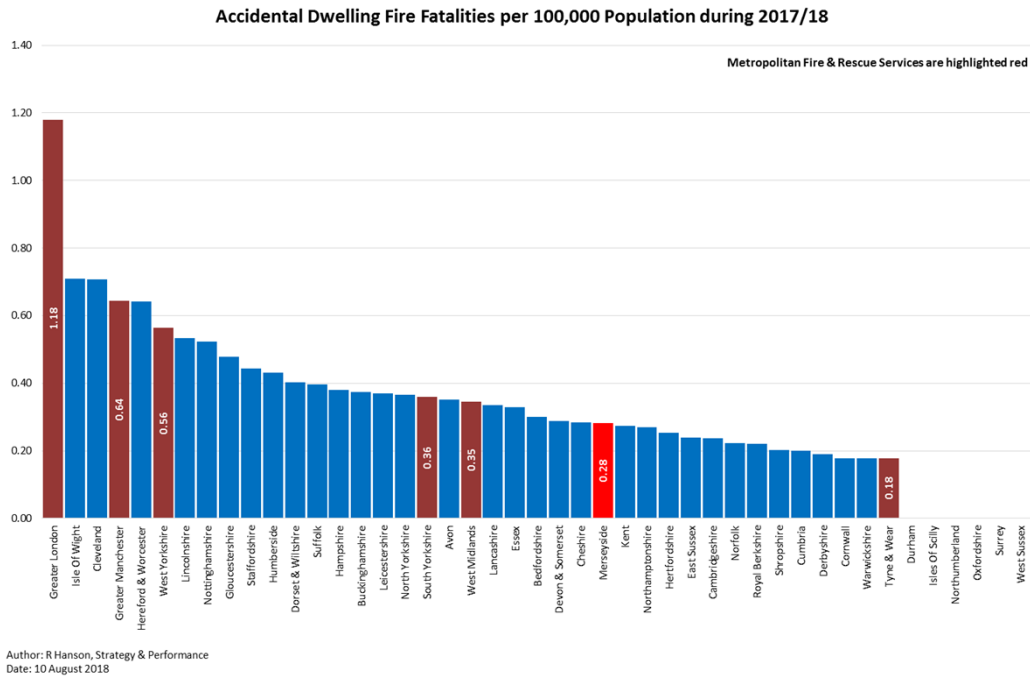
2.26 It was also suggested that MFRS could share a drone (and other technologies) with Merseyside Police, not only to assist with cost, but also as a mutually beneficial operational resource.

*“It would be good if you could share a drone with the police. That would help with the cost and it would be bound to benefit them as well” (Liverpool)*

MFRA should consider extending its provision of free smoke alarms to the most deprived areas of Merseyside, but must also carefully consider the method by which it does so

2.27 Participants were shown the following slides outlining that while MFRS attends a relatively high number of accidental dwelling fires (it was second only to Greater Manchester FRS in terms of accidental dwelling fires per 100,000 population in 2017/18), the number of fatalities experienced has reduced significantly (four in 2017/18 and in 2018/19).





- 2.28 MFRS's belief that this is due to a focus on over 65s, particularly through the provision of free smoke alarms, was noted - as was the trend toward declining smoke alarm ownership in Merseyside's most deprived areas (where, importantly, the concentration of accidental dwelling fires is highest).
- 2.29 In light of this, participants were asked whether MFRA should consider offering free smoke alarms in more deprived areas too - and the principle of doing so was strongly supported.

*"They called and put alarms up for me and if they hadn't done that I probably wouldn't have put one up being a single mum and living on my own" (Knowsley)*

*"It's all about prevention isn't it? It's got to be better and safer for firefighters to make sure people can get out if they have a fire" (Liverpool)*

*"Surely from a cost perspective and from the point of view of firefighters' lives it must be right to do this?" (St Helens)*

- 2.30 There were, though, some concerns about the potential cost of such an initiative - as well as how it might be implemented in practice.

*"How much would all of this cost?" (Liverpool)*

*"How much would the cost of this be?" (Sefton)*

*"It makes perfect sense in terms of the principle but it's the impact on budgets as it would be a big expenditure" (Wirral)*

*"How do you delineate the borders to say 'you're in a deprived area and you're not so you can get a free smoke alarm but you can't?" (Knowsley)*

*"It's a great idea, but how will it be targeted? How will the people be identified?" (St Helens)*

*"You should only offer them to people who want them and not force them on people" (St Helens)*

- 2.31 In relation to the latter quotation above, one St Helens participant stated that: *“going back a few years, they put leaflets through the doors where I live that said the firefighters were turning up that day and that if anyone needed anything they could go along. That gave people the choice”*.
- 2.32 In terms of the cost issue, it was considered somewhat unfair that MFRA should have to shoulder the entire financial burden of such an initiative given the issues it faces are symptomatic of wider issues. As such, working in partnership with other agencies to deliver it was urged.

*“It shouldn’t just be down to the Fire Service to do this; it should be done in conjunction with partners” (Wirral)*

- 2.33 It was also noted at Knowsley that: *“looking at the graphs, the issue is about the number of fires not fatalities. Smoke alarms aren’t going to stop fires...they’ll get you out but we were quite low on the list in terms of fatalities so it’s the actual number of incidents that’s the issue”*.

MFRA offers excellent value for money, but future council tax rises should be carefully considered

- 2.34 Participants generally felt that MFRA offers excellent value for money. As one Wirral participant stated:

*“A budget of £59 million to provide fire and rescue services for this region seems pretty reasonable to me” (Wirral)*

- 2.35 When asked whether MFRA should be able to go above the current cap on annual Council Tax increases (3%), participants were mixed in their views. Those who supported such a rise did so on the grounds that an important emergency service requires the additional funding, whereas others were more cautious in light of the financial struggles faced by many Merseyside residents currently and because they anticipated increased taxation yields anyway given the number of new housing developments across the area.

*“You have to take into account that all the others will ask for increases too. A lot of people are struggling in Liverpool” (Liverpool)*

*“As taxpayers we are paying more and more each year for all the different services” (Sefton)*

*“A lot of people really struggle as it is and have to make decisions about what they’re spending their money on. It’s a really emotive issue isn’t it?” (Sefton)*

*“I wouldn’t want to pay any more...I don’t begrudge the Fire Service more money but the overall bill I have is too high and I wouldn’t want to pay more on top of that” (St Helens)*

*“There are a lot of new houses going up and they’re all going to be paying more council tax so the tax take will go up” (Sefton)*

- 2.36 At the Wirral session, it was also said at that: *“you’ve got the balance right by saving all that money and now shuffling things around to spend a little bit. Why would you need an increase at this stage? I know you could always spend what we give you, but having known you’ve been able to save £13 million we*

would want some pretty strong assurances that the extra money would genuinely improve the service and the outcomes for everyone in the area”.

- 2.37 There was little support across the five forums for a referendum to enable a significantly larger council tax increase, not only because such a rise would be unaffordable for many residents but also because the referendum itself would be very costly and unlikely to be ratified by all five Merseyside Councils.

*“I’d support it; but it probably wouldn’t get through” (Liverpool)*

*“Not a single other place in the country has agreed with having a referendum like this” (Wirral)*

*“I think there would have to be a referendum in all five authorities and it would have to be an unanimous decision and the Fire Service would have to pay for that. I ran one some years back for a City Council and the printing of the documents cost £0.5million alone. So when you look at the cost and the risk of it not being accepted...it’s not worth the risk” (St Helens)*

*“I think you only need to go for referendum for increases over 10%, which would be a bit too much (Liverpool)*

- 2.38 It should be noted here that there was a great deal of concern and anger at all sessions about the fact MFRA is having to consider such large council tax increases to counter the absence of what was considered ‘proper’ funding from central Government.

*“What I don’t understand is why there’s no more money coming from central Government in the light of things like the terror attacks and Grenfell Tower” (Knowsley)*

*“The increased money should be coming from a national pot not from local people...why should it all fall on local people?” (Wirral)*

There are no equality and diversity impacts, as the proposals are positive for all

- 2.39 Finally, participants were asked to consider whether MFRA’s proposals have any particular positive or negative impacts on protected characteristic groups.

*“I wouldn’t say there are any impacts really; it’s all positive for everyone” (Liverpool)*

*“It’s all positive; everyone benefits from this regardless of any characteristic” (Knowsley)*

*“Better resilience is a positive for everyone” (Sefton)*

*“It’s positive for all!” (Wirral)*

*“It’ll have a positive effect on all people” (St Helens)*

## In conclusion

- 2.40 There is little to be said in conclusion other than that there was unanimous and enthusiastic support across the five forums for all the proposals contained in the draft Supplement to the Integrated Risk Management Plan 2017-2020. As such, based on the results of this consultation, there is nothing to prevent MFRA from pursuing them.

