



# Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service

## Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) Engagement 2020 Report of findings



# Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) Engagement 2020

## Opinion Research Services

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# Acknowledgements

Opinion Research Services (ORS) is pleased to have worked with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) on the five engagement focus groups 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 service planning.

We thank MFRS 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 67 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 Engagement Process

## Overview of the engagement

### Background to the review

- 1.1 'Integrated Risk Management' is the development of a balanced approach by Fire and Rescue Services 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 findings of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), gave the Chief Fire Officer and Authority cause to review the sustainability of its plans to ensure that they were still fit for purpose. In light of this, an IRMP supplement was drafted to extend the Plan to 2021, aligning it to MFRA's medium-term financial plans. A number of alternative proposals were consulted on and approved in 2019.
- 1.3 The Service is now beginning to develop its IRMP for 2021 and beyond and is seeking input from a range of stakeholders on how it might provide fire and rescue services during this period.

### The commission

- 1.4 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 online focus groups 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 focus groups for the Service for many years.

### Deliberative engagement

#### Focus groups

- 1.5 The focus group meetings reported here used a 'deliberative' approach that encouraged members of the public to reflect in depth about MFRS's proposed direction of travel while both receiving and questioning extensive background information. The fact that the groups were part of an 'early stage engagement' rather than 'formal consultation' process was stressed: participants were told they would be 'testing' MFRS's ideas for how it might provide services over the lifetime of its next IRMP, rather than discussing any firm proposals.
- 1.6 The meetings (which were held on the online videoconferencing platform Zoom) lasted for around two hours and in total there were 67 diverse participants. The dates of the meetings and attendance levels by members of the public at each focus group are as shown in the table overleaf.

FOCUS GROUP	DATE	NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
<b>Knowsley</b>	<b>26<sup>th</sup> October 2020</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Wirral</b>	<b>27<sup>th</sup> October 2020</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Sefton</b>	<b>28<sup>th</sup> October 2020</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>St Helens</b>	<b>29<sup>th</sup> October 2020</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Liverpool</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> November 2020</b>	<b>16</b>

- 1.7 The attendance target for each of the focus groups was 12-15 people – so the total of 67 participants was on-target. Just over half of participants had participated in one or more previous ORS-run MFRA forums or focus groups; the others were ‘fresh’ recruits.
- 1.8 Previous participants were recruited through 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 email reminders shortly before each meeting. New participants were recruited by Acumen Field, a specialist recruitment agency, who initially sent out a screening questionnaire as an online survey to a database of contacts and, more widely, on social media platforms. They then collated the responses to establish a pool of potential recruits, which was ‘sifted’ to establish a contact list. People were then contacted by telephone, asked to complete a more detailed screening questionnaire and either recruited or not to match the required quotas. Those recruited were sent all the necessary details in a confirmation email and telephoned a day or two before the events to confirm their attendance.
- 1.9 In recruitment, care was taken to ensure that no potential participants were disqualified or disadvantaged by disabilities or any other factors. The recruitment process was monitored to ensure social diversity in terms of a wide range of criteria including, for example: gender; age; working status; and disability/limiting long-term illness (LLTI). Overall, as demonstrated in the table below, participants represented a broad cross-section of residents – and as standard good practice, people were recompensed for their time and efforts in and taking part.

GENDER	AGE	WORKING STATUS	LIMITING ILLNESS OR DISABILITY	ETHNIC GROUP
Male: 32 Female: 35	16-34: 18 35-54: 29 55+: 20	Working full- or part-time: 45 Not working/retired: 2	12	White British: 65 BAME: 2

- 1.10 Although, like all other forms of qualitative engagement, deliberative focus groups 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.

## The agenda

- 1.11 The focus groups began with an ORS presentation to provide some contextual background information around Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS)'s purpose and vision; and the reasons for the engagement. The slides used to outline this information can be seen below.

### Why the fire and rescue service exists – MFRS's Purpose



- The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
  - Respond
  - Prevent (home and community safety)
  - Protect (commercial and public building)
  - Educate and inform
- The Civil Contingencies Act 2004
  - Work with other agencies to deal with emergencies
- **The National Framework 2018**
  - Identify & Assess Risk
  - Prevent & Protect
  - Respond
  - Collaborate
  - Business Continuity (Intervention)
  - National Resilience
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS)
 

They consider:

  - Efficiency
  - Effectiveness
  - People



### ...and its Vision – to be the best



- Currently the best FRS in UK (HMICFRS)
- Operationally strong – assertive, professional, competent
- Outstanding at preventing fires and other incidents
- The only FRS to be re-investing in the front line
- National capabilities – extending beyond our borders
- Led the National Response to COVID-19
- Home Office Lead Authority for National Resilience – influencing at the highest level

*"We are in a good place – but we want to be better"*



### So what is today's consultation about?

**The National Framework requires each Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) to produce a publicly-available Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) covering at least a three-year time span which, amongst other things:**

- Is regularly reviewed and revised and reflects up to date risk information, consultation and evaluation of outcomes
- Demonstrates how prevention, protection and response activities will be best used to mitigate the impact of risk on communities in a cost-effective way
- Provides details of how FRAs deliver their objectives and meet the needs of communities through working with partners





## The National Framework

### Identify and Assess

2.1 Every fire and rescue authority **must assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect their communities, whether they are local, cross-border, multi-authority and/or national in nature from fires to terrorist attacks.**

2.2 Fire and rescue authorities **must put in place arrangements to prevent and mitigate these risks, either through adjusting existing provision, effective collaboration and partnership working, or building new capability.**



1.12 The subsequent discussion then covered the following areas:

Whether MFRS should factor risk, demand and vulnerability into the way it uses its resources – and whether MFRS’s previous actions in doing so seem reasonable;

The ways in which the world has ‘spun’ over recent years and affected the Service’s foreseeable risk;

Whether MFRS’s Planning Principles are still appropriate;

The relative importance of Prevention, Protection, Response and Firefighter Training; and

MFRS’s ideas for how it plans to provide services over the lifetime of its forthcoming IRMP.

1.13 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

1.14 This report reviews the sentiments and judgements of respondents and participants on how MFRS might deliver its services in future. 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. Key Findings

### Key engagement findings

#### There was support for MFRS factoring risk, demand and vulnerability into its resourcing

- 2.1 While there was strong support for MFRS factoring risk, demand and vulnerability into the way it uses its resources, concerns were expressed that:

This could leave lower risk/demand areas without adequate fire and rescue cover;

Relying too heavily on patterns of demand could prove dangerous given how changeable they are;

Vulnerability is not a particularly easy metric to define, quantify or mitigate against; and

The burden of identifying vulnerability should not fall solely on MFRS, but should be done in partnership with others.

- 2.2 There was, though, a great deal of trust generally that MFRS would: ensure proper levels of cover across all of its area; ensure it is properly monitoring demand patterns and resource accordingly; and work with its partner agencies to improve the safety and wellbeing of those with vulnerabilities.
- 2.3 Participants were asked to give their views on which of the three factors discussed - risk, demand and vulnerability - are most important for MFRS to consider. A majority felt they are all equally important.

#### MFRS's Planning Principles were largely considered appropriate, but there was support for a couple of 'tweaks'

- 2.4 The general consensus was that MFRS's 'Planning Principles' remain appropriate, but there was support for amending that which reads 'keep fire stations open using different duty systems rather than close stations' (no-one agreed that it is never acceptable to close and/or merge stations and there was strong support for doing so in the event that response times can be improved or maintained).
- 2.5 Participants also agreed to the inclusion of a principle around Protection given the forthcoming necessary increased focus on it as a result of the Grenfell Tower inquiry and recommendations – and for amending that which currently supports proposals for MFRS to respond along with NWS to Cardiac Arrest incidents with 'the public and Fire Authority would support MFRS assisting the ambulance service when it is facing a surge in demand, like that experienced through the pandemic (whilst maintaining response to fires/other emergencies)'.

#### Prevention, Protection, Response and Firefighter Training were all considered important – but Response most so

- 2.6 When asked to rank MFRS's four main areas of activity (Prevention, Protection, Response and Firefighter Training) from 1 to 4 (with 1 being most important and 4 least important), Response was rated highest, with Firefighter Training only slightly behind in second place. Prevention was ranked third, with Protection fourth. The fact that all four areas received an average ranking of under three demonstrates, however, that none were considered unimportant.

#### MFRS's 'proposals' were supported

- 2.7 There was widespread support for all of MFRS's suggested IRMP 'proposals'.

# 3. Focus Group Findings

## Detailed engagement findings

### Introduction

- 3.1 This chapter reports the views from five deliberative online focus groups<sup>1</sup> with members of the public across Merseyside, which were independently facilitated by ORS. Each session had two co-hosts: a main facilitator and a secondary host who was able to observe the session as well as address any technical issues arising from the online format.
- 3.2 The meeting format followed a pre-determined topic guide which allowed space for a general discussion of the key questions under consideration. A series of information slides were shared at set points during the sessions, which ensured that participants had sufficient background information to actively deliberate on the proposals. The meetings were thorough and truly deliberative in listening to and responding openly to a wide range of evidence and issues.
- 3.3 In order to quantify views on some key questions, a series of ‘quick polls’ were undertaken during the groups. Responses to these were captured and are reported in this chapter, but it is important to note that this was a qualitative research exercise and the numerical findings from the polls are not statistically valid.
- 3.4 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 focus groups 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

- There was support for MFRS factoring risk, demand and vulnerability into the way it uses its resources
- MFRS’s previous actions were considered reasonable
- MFRS’s Planning Principles were largely considered to be appropriate, but there was support for a couple of ‘tweaks’
- Prevention, Protection, Response and Firefighter Training were all thought to be important – but Response most so
- There was strong support for MFRS’s ‘proposals’

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<sup>1</sup> These meetings were undertaken on Zoom – as this has become a fairly familiar tool for the general public during 2020. Participant familiarity with the software varied and, depending on the platform, some participants struggled to take part in the online voting tasks.

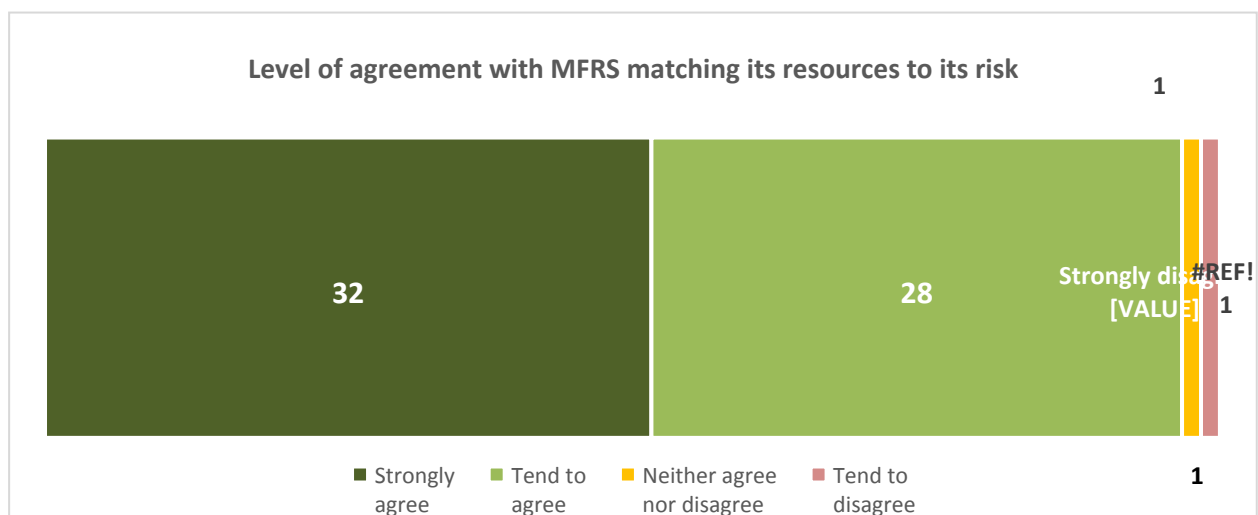
There was support for MFRS factoring risk, demand and vulnerability into the way it uses its resources

- 3.5 Participants were informed that MFRS resources to risk and were shown the slide below to illustrate the different types of risk it must take account of.



- 3.6 They were then asked the following question (via a Zoom poll): “To what extent do you agree or disagree that MFRS should match its resources to its risk?” The results, as shown in Figure 1 below, were very positive, with 60 of the 62 people who took part agreeing (32 strongly).

Figure 1: Extent of agreement with MFRS matching its resources to its risk



Based on responses from 62 people within the focus groups

- 3.7 The general feeling in discussion was that resourcing to risk is entirely sensible, and that this should apply not only to Response activity, but also to Prevention and education.

*“If your resources are all in one area, they’re not in another, but ... if those areas are having more problems than the other, then they probably should focus there. And I took the question to relate to not just fires, but the education around it” (Knowsley)*

*"If you're planning ahead then you will put the resource where you identify the risks. It's not saying that all the money and all the resources go that way, but that you are aware that there are risks and there will be priorities in that. So, it shows forward planning" (Knowsley)*

*"Limited resources have got to be managed, and we all know the Fire and Rescue Service has limited resources" (Sefton)*

*"We should also consider Prevention when considering risk" (Wirral)*

- 3.8 The main worry at this stage among those who felt they could not *strongly* agree was that resourcing to risk could leave certain areas without adequate fire and rescue cover. Others said they wanted more information about the probability of certain incidents occurring and how resourcing to risk works in practice prior to making a firm judgement. Some typical comments were as below.

*"It's having enough resources in reserve to cope with everything. If you target things in too many areas far apart, how much buffer is left just in case?" (Knowsley)*

*"I tend to agree because it's a public service, there are funding issues, you've got to streamline to the areas that need something the most. However, the nature of fire and rescue is the fact that there is an air of unpredictability. If all the resources are funnelled towards one area then you get something large that you wouldn't expect somewhere else, then that would increase the reaction time. Whilst I do agree, by completely streamlining everything towards one area, other areas could be completely minimised in terms of their possibilities" (Wirral)*

*"Where I live is probably low risk, but what worries me is that there might still be a risk. There might be a delay before resources get here if there is an incident" (St Helens)*

*"I would want a bit more information to back-up strongly agreeing ... I don't fully understand what I'm strongly agreeing to. So, I'd like a bit more clarification" (Sefton)*

*"I think I would have liked to have known the percentage expectation of certain events ... the probability and the budget costs" (Knowsley)*

*"I don't think we have enough information ... I'd like more facts and figures to digest the information. I'd like a breakdown, firstly, of the risk assessments, and what the risks are; and then, how they're mitigated; and then all the other information. I'd just like a bit more detail to digest..." (Liverpool)*

- 3.9 There was, though, a great deal of trust generally that MFRS would ensure proper levels of cover across all its area.

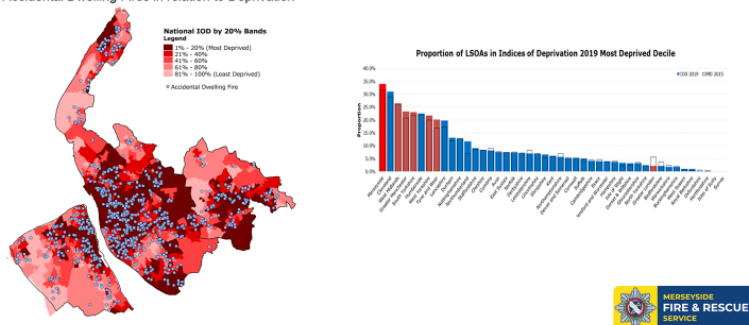
*"I didn't feel that eggs would be all in one basket as the Fire Brigade can be trusted to leave enough for unforeseen circumstances arising" (Knowsley)*

*"I took the view that the management and the team of the Fire Service itself should know where it needs those resources more than others" (Knowsley)*

- 3.10 The groups were then told that MFRS also resources to meet demand, which fluctuates both by area and time of day – as illustrated in the following slides.

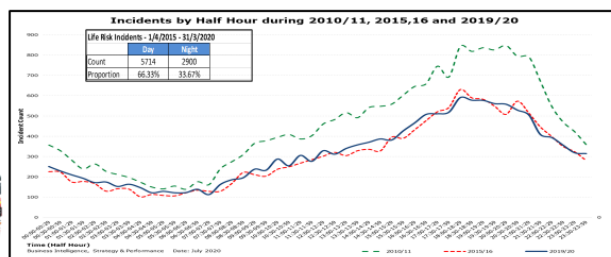
## So what about demand? MFRS has identified clear links to deprivation...

Accidental Dwelling Fires in relation to Deprivation



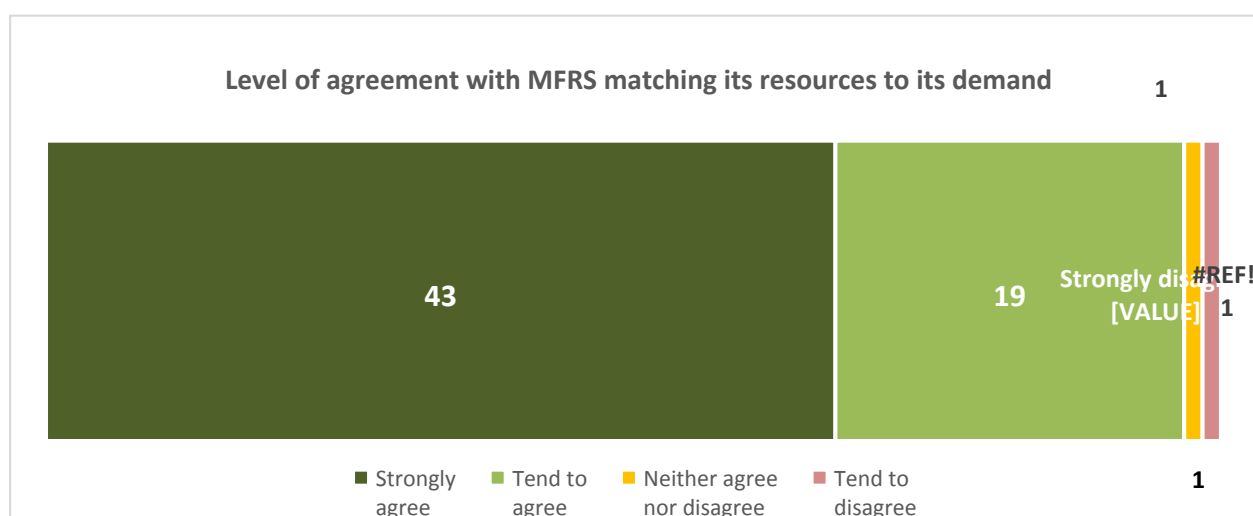
## And MFRS knows demand fluctuates (twice as busy during the day than the night)

All Incidents - 1/4/2015 - 31/3/2020		
	Day	Night
Count	48879	28409
Proportion	63.24%	36.76%



- 3.11 They were then asked the following question (via a Zoom poll): *“To what extent do you agree or disagree that MFRS should match its resources to its demand?”* The results, as shown in Figure 2 overleaf, were again overwhelmingly positive, with 62 of the 64 people who took part agreeing (43 strongly).

Figure 2: Extent of agreement with MFRS matching its resources to its demand



- 3.12 Few comments were made around this issue, although some participants expressed reservations about relying too heavily on patterns of demand given how changeable they can be. Moreover, one St Helens resident sought reassurance that resources can be ‘moved around’ to accommodate shifts in demand – and another at Wirral asked whether there are adequate resources overnight despite the lower incident rate.

*“I felt demand changes, and can change from day to day, minute to minute, hour to hour. If you try to pre-empt that demand, you could end up putting resources where demand might fall ... I take demand to be to be just reaction, whereas risk assessment is pre-emptive...” (Knowsley)*

*“You have to take into account things that might not have been foreseen” (St Helens)*

*“It’s just ensuring there is enough back-up if there are some areas with low demand. And that if all of a sudden there is a spike, you can move things around to meet that demand?” (St Helens)*

*“It’s fine to say we have more incidents during the day so we need more firefighters on, and less overnight because there is less demand - but there has to be a back-up plan in case of something unexpected happening” (Wirral)*

- 3.13 Again, though, participants typically demonstrated trust in MFRS to ensure it is properly monitoring demand patterns and resourcing accordingly.

*“The FRS over time, and looking at the peaks in the graphs, they were in the same place regardless of how many years have gone on, so they have an idea about what time they do need those resources. They know through the incidents that they have had to deal with” (Knowsley)*

*“I just think, obviously, the FRS knows where they’re needed most, because they’ve got the facts and stats” (Knowsley)*

*“I think we’re looking at a proven service, so it’s just more of the good practice that’s already been established and some of the lessons learnt” (Sefton)*



*“I have faith in what they’re doing and they’re going in the right direction ... the people who are in charge are clearly competent ... I tend to agree with what they’re doing, and I have faith in what they’re doing. I’m happy to go with the flow” (Liverpool)*

- 3.14 Finally, the following slides were shown to illustrate the fact that because vulnerability is seen across the whole MFRS area, the Service has a ten-minute response time to all life-risk incidents across Merseyside – which it achieves on 95% of occasions.

## But what about vulnerability?



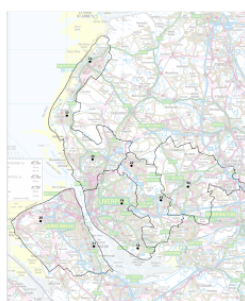
### Analysis of 10 years of data:

- Accidental dwelling fire fatalities can occur anywhere – but are higher in deprived areas
- The majority of victims are above the age of 75, male and sole occupants
- Smoking is still one of the primary causes of fire (49%)
- Importantly, MFRS knows where the most vulnerable live – it has the data for over 65s

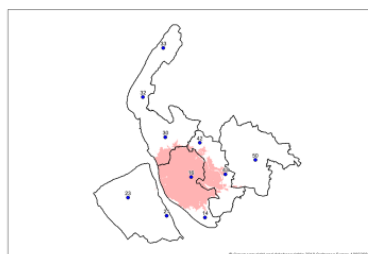


## If vulnerability is important, is it right that we spread our resources evenly?

MFRS is achieving its Response Standard on 95% of occasions

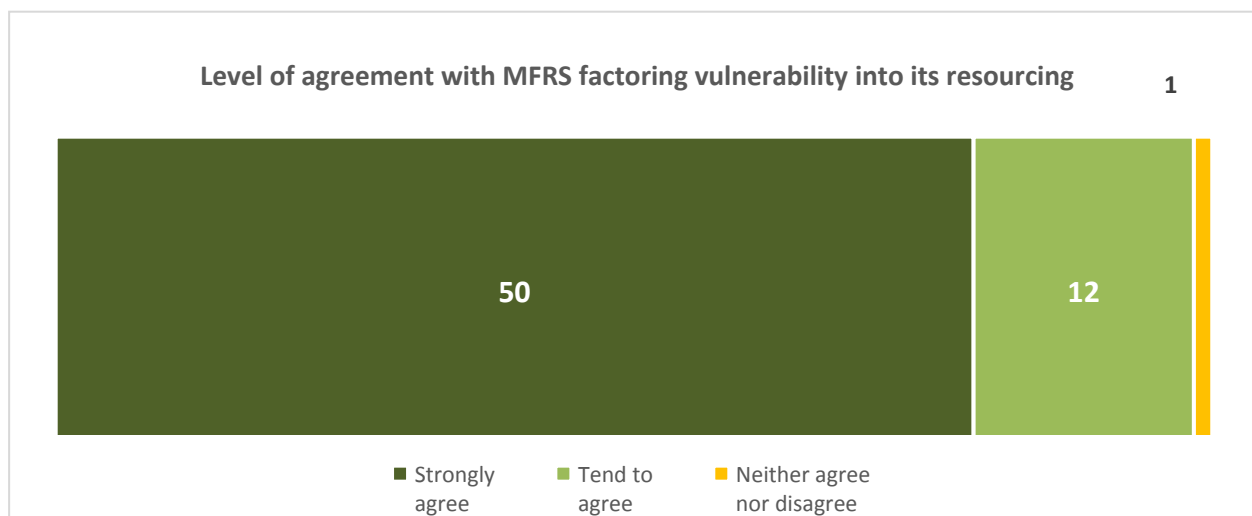


10 Key MFRS Community Fire Stations



- 3.15 The groups were then asked the following question (via a Zoom poll): *“To what extent do you agree or disagree that MFRS should factor vulnerability into the way it uses resources?”* 62 of the 63 people who took part agreed that it should, 50 of those strongly.



**Figure 3: Extent of agreement with MFRS factoring vulnerability into its resourcing**

Based on responses from 63 people within the focus groups

- 3.16 The person who neither agreed nor disagreed was asked to elaborate on their reasons why, and they said that while vulnerability is not unimportant, by resourcing to meet risk and demand, MFRS would to all intents and purposes also be covering it.

*"I feel that risk would consider vulnerability" (Knowsley)*

- 3.17 There were also some questions at this stage around how exactly MFRS determines vulnerability – and a few Knowsley participants were concerned that it is not a particularly easy metric to either define, quantify or mitigate against.

*"Is the vulnerability factor based on age details alone? Or does it include disability etc?" (Knowsley)*

*"I think it's difficult to assess vulnerability, and it's also difficult to know where that vulnerability is and to know how to respond. In an ideal world, yes, it would be good to take that factor into consideration, but I think it's hard to gain the knowledge of where the vulnerable people are ... you might have one vulnerable person who is miles and miles away from where the resources are. You can't allocate resources for that one person" (Knowsley)*

*"Ultimately, if you're looking at risk and demand, they can be quite easily quantified, and you can apply an analysis-based approach to it. Whereas, to understand what a vulnerable person is, it would be based on assumptions; it would be based on someone trying to understand what the demographic is and to build up a picture. It's not easily a quantifiable metric to deploy resources to. Also, if the FRS were to deploy resource in terms of back office support to ... do all this research around what the make-up and demographic was, and about what the population was, it could be investment not well spent. It could be a waste of taxpayers' money" (Knowsley)*

- 3.18 A couple of participants were keen to understand the mechanics of partnership working in this area, with one particularly seeking reassurance that the burden of identification is not falling solely on MFRS, but that it is working in partnership with others who may be more suited to this area of activity.

*“It was that previous reference to working with other agencies and the responsibilities of other agencies. I want vulnerability to be factored in, but there were lots of mention of other agencies who seem like the more natural lead” (Sefton)*

*“If someone who’s over 75 is having a lot of fires, what mechanisms are in place to make sure they’re passed on to the right agencies?” (Liverpool)*

- 3.19 One Liverpool participant was, in fact, able to offer personal experience of how a whole system approach can improve the safety and lives of vulnerable people.

*“I found out that my mother was classed as a vulnerable person thanks to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service ... it was through being identified as being a high-risk person via a home safety check. It turns out she had dementia and was then passed on to the right people. We just think of them going around putting fires out but there’s a lot more that goes on behind the scenes with the Prevention” (Liverpool)*

- 3.20 Despite the aforementioned reservations, the general feeling was that resourcing to achieve a 10-minute response time to all life risk incidents is important to accommodate vulnerability, and that the continuance of Prevention work with the at-risk demographic is vital.

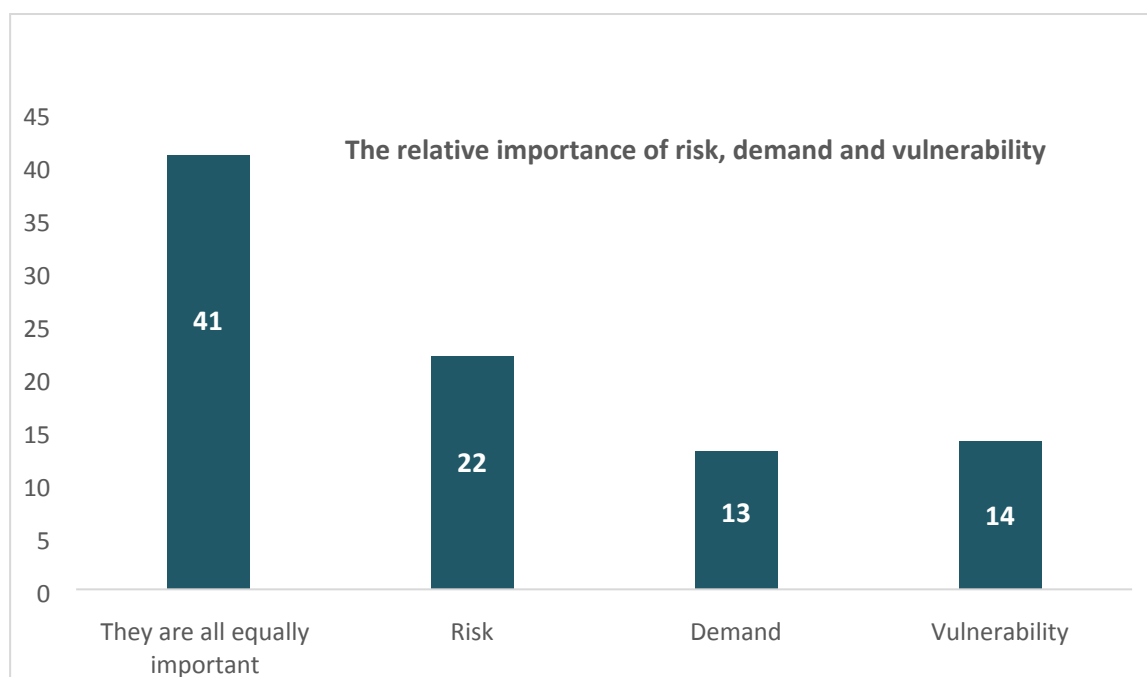
*“Make sure we’re not leaving anybody vulnerable and being able to cater for them if there was a fire in that area” (Wirral)*

*“It’s about educating the vulnerable people. Providing them with information, making sure they have everything they need to protect themselves within their own homes. Identifying issues and working with them” (St Helens)*

- 3.21 To conclude this section, participants were asked to give their views on which of the three factors discussed - risk, demand and vulnerability – are most important for MFRS to consider. The results from this Zoom poll are below<sup>2</sup> and they show that, for most people (41 of 64), they are all equally important. Among the others, risk was most frequently chosen (22 times), followed by vulnerability (14 times) and then demand (13 times).

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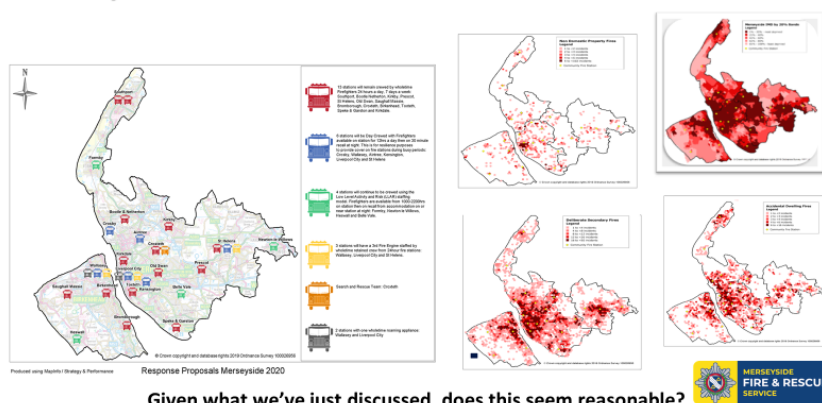
<sup>2</sup> Please note that this was a multiple-choice question, so participants were able to choose more than one response option.

**Figure 4: The relative importance of risk, demand and vulnerability**

Based on responses from 64 people within the focus groups

MFRS's previous actions were considered reasonable

### Ok; this is what MFRS has done...



- 3.22 The slide above was shown to outline the previous actions MFRS has taken to ensure it resources to risk, demand and vulnerability, most notably by:

Distributing its appliances in response to these three factors, now having more clustered around Liverpool, East Wirral and some other areas of high demand;

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

Introducing new duty systems where it has been shown to be beneficial;

Building brand new stations in St Helens and Saughall Massie where it was shown these were needed to improve response times;

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

Introducing a Hybrid Model (that uses a mix of different duty systems) at some stations to enable the introduction of more appliances there and ensure more resilience overall for major incidents and periods of high demand.

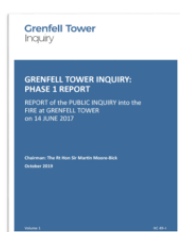
- 3.23 When asked whether these actions seemed reasonable, it was unanimously agreed that they did.

MFRS's planning principles were largely considered appropriate, but there was support for a couple of 'tweaks'

- 3.24 Participants were informed about the impact of three new or relatively new forms of risk and demand on the Fire and Rescue Service as follows:

Grenfell Tower and the increased focus on Protection that will be required as a result of the inquiry and its recommendations.

## But the world has spun again...



**MFRS will need to have an increased focus on Protection...**



The need to work with partners to respond to acts of terrorism.

## And again...



The need to work with partners, particularly NWS (North West Ambulance Service), to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic – and to potentially continue this support in future when the ambulance service is facing a similar surge in demand.

## And again...



- 3.25 In light of all that, the groups were shown the following MFRS 'Planning Principles' (as developed through consultation with members of the public and the Fire Authority over many years) and asked whether they remain appropriate.

## So, with that in mind, are these Planning Principles still appropriate?...

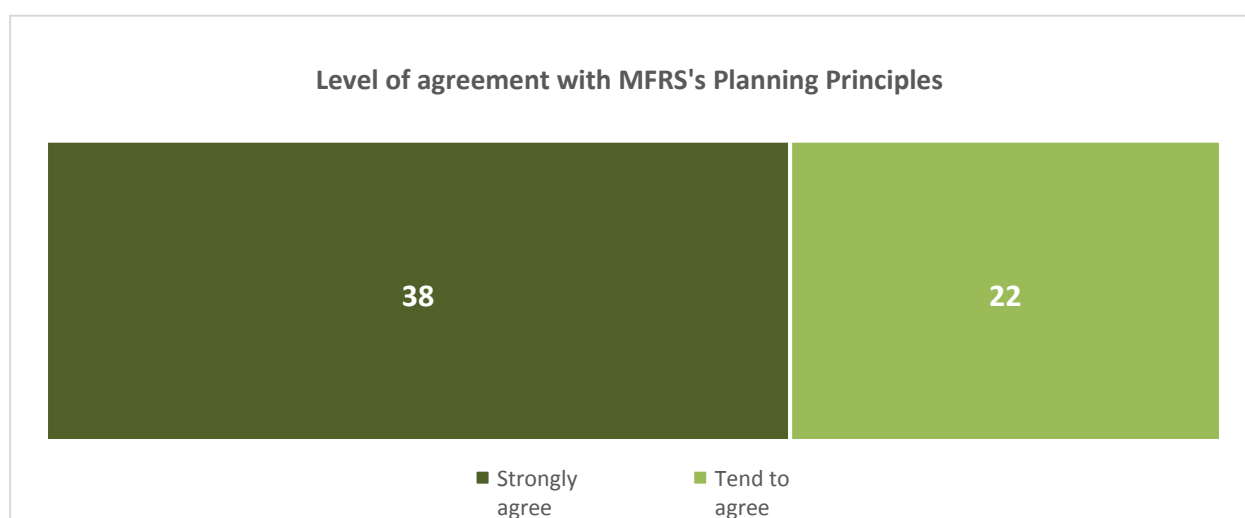
ORS Public Consultation 2012 - 2018

The public and Fire Authority would:

- like MFRS 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 MFRS to use wholetime (full-time) firefighters to protect its communities rather than retained firefighters"
- like MFRS to secure long-term solutions that protect staff moving forward
- wish to avoid compulsory redundancy
- prefer to keep stations open using different duty systems than close stations
- want performance against the response standard to be a determining factor when implementing change
- expect MFRS to resource to meet the demands placed on the service
- expect MFRS to maximise its productivity to protect the public
- like MFRS to keep prevention at the forefront of its work
- support proposals to respond 'along with' NWS to Cardiac Arrest incidents
- like to see blue light collaboration not integration
- understand the need to MFRS to deliver a balanced budget in line with its medium term financial plan



- 3.26 The general consensus was that they do – as shown in the results from a Zoom Poll that asked this question (Figure 5). Of the 60 people who answered the question, 38 strongly agreed that they are still appropriate, and the other 22 tended to agree.

**Figure 5: Extent of agreement with MFRS's Planning Principles**

Based on responses from 60 people within the focus groups

- 3.27 However, given the recent fire station mergers in Saughall Massie and St Helens, participants were also asked for their views on whether the fifth bullet point above ('prefer to keep stations open using different duty systems than close stations') could be amended. To gauge their views on this they were asked the following question<sup>3</sup>:

*When might it be acceptable to close/merge stations?*

*When the station has become unfit/inefficient*

*When it is a financial necessity*

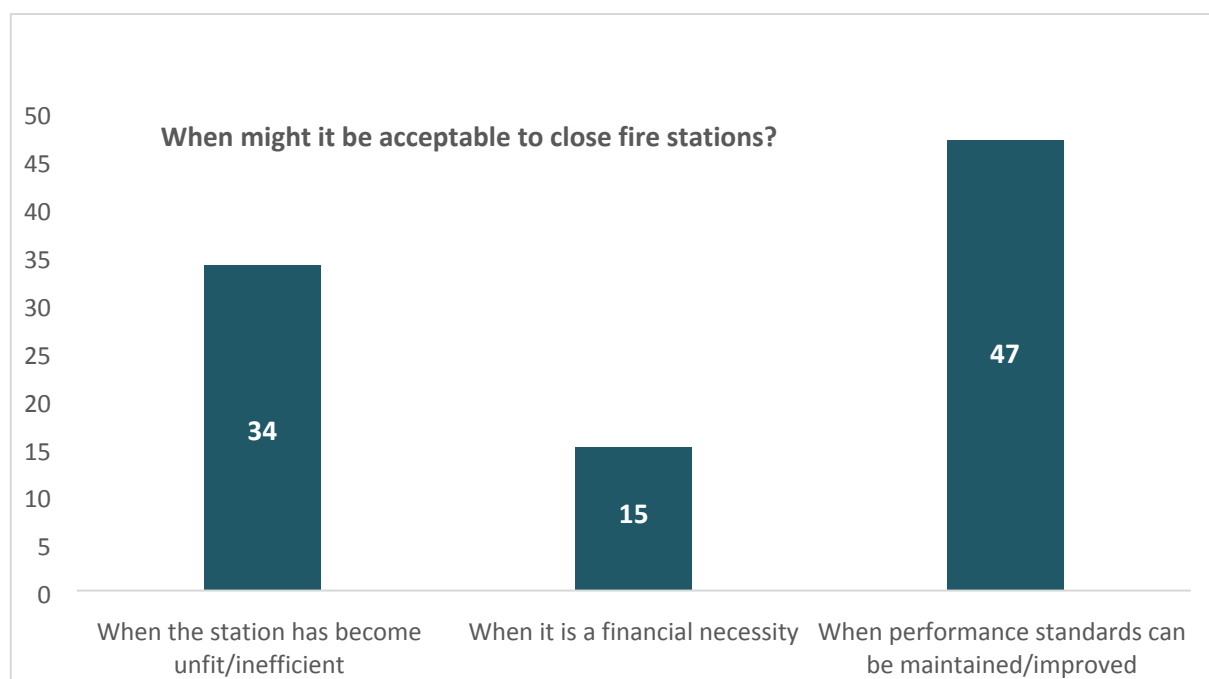
*When performance standards can be maintained/improved*

*It is never acceptable*

- 3.28 No-one chose the final response option – that it is 'never acceptable to close stations'. The level of support or otherwise for the others (seen in Figure 6 overleaf) was as follows: 'when performance standards can be improved/maintained' received the most 'votes' (47), followed by 'when the station has become unfit/inefficient' (34) and 'when it is a financial necessity' (15). Clearly then, in contemplating station closures and/or mergers for either of the latter two reasons, residents will need to be reassured that the former will, where possible, result.

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<sup>3</sup> Please note that this was a multiple-choice question, so participants were able to choose more than one response option.

**Figure 6: When might it be acceptable to close fire stations?**

Based on responses from 59 people within the focus groups

- 3.29 A couple of comments were made on this issue, as below – the last of which demonstrates the need for strong reassurance for people in any areas where closures/mergers occur that they will not see a detrimental impact on response times in particular.

*"Ideally I would prefer stations not to close but if the demand is not there then the resources should be moved to where the demand is or merge stations" (Knowsley)*

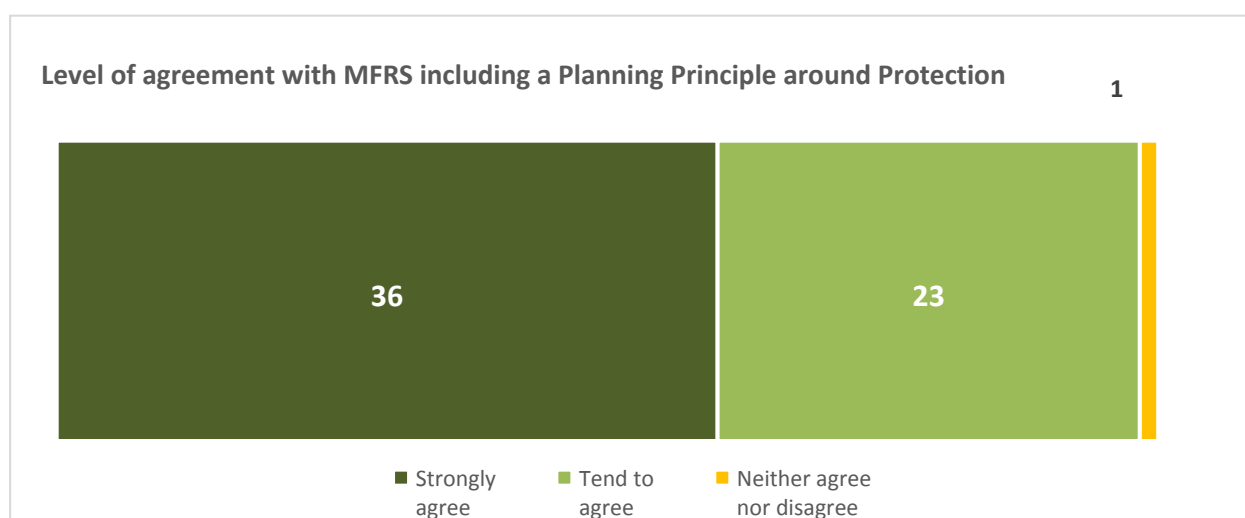
*"As long as the response time doesn't alter, it would be ok to merge" (Sefton)*

*"Not sure about closing stations. It needs strong statistical evidence that shows closing stations would not have a detrimental effect on the community, where the proposed stations will be closed" (Wirral)*

- 3.30 Moreover, a Wirral participant said that:

*"It would depend on whether those performance standards would include educating the local community or providing somewhere as a centre for the local community. It depends what your standards are before you can decide whether that is something you agree or disagree with" (Wirral)*

- 3.31 Given the forthcoming necessary increased focus on it as a result of the Grenfell Tower inquiry and recommendations, participants' appetite for including a principle around Protection was assessed via the following Zoom poll question: *"To what extent do you agree or disagree that MFRS should look to re-invest in Protection without impacting on the front-line (reducing fire engine (30) or firefighter numbers)?"* The results are shown in Figure 7 overleaf, with 59 of the 60 respondents agreeing - 36 strongly.

**Figure 7: Extent of agreement with MFRS including a Planning Principle around Protection**

Based on responses from 60 people within the focus groups

- 3.32 The person who neither agreed nor disagreed elaborated that, in their view, Protection is covered by the expectation for MFRS to resource according to the demands placed on it.

*"Would Protection not come under resourcing? Is there a need, if this is the case, for another standard to be considered?" (Knowsley)*

- 3.33 Finally in relation to the Planning Principles, MFRS was keen to understand people's views on whether the one that currently reads 'the public and Fire Authority would support proposals for MFRS to respond along with NWS to Cardiac Arrest incidents' should be replaced with the following:

'The public and Fire Authority would support MFRS assisting the ambulance service when it is facing a surge in demand, like that experienced through the pandemic (whilst maintaining response to fires/other emergencies)'.

- 3.34 The results of the poll reported in Figure 9 below show almost unanimous support for MFRS offering such assistance. This suggests that there would be little to no objection to also amending the Principle accordingly.

**Prevention, Protection, Response and Firefighter training were all considered important – but Response most so**

- 3.35 Prior to discussion around how MFRS might provide its services for the duration of its next IRMP, participants were reminded that the Service must assess all foreseeable risk, such as:

Incidents like that at Grenfell Tower;

The challenges posed by the built environment (there are 200+ high rise buildings in Merseyside for example, and MFRS also has to be mindful of councils' local housing development plans);

The continuing heightened terror threat;



A global pandemic such as Covid-19;

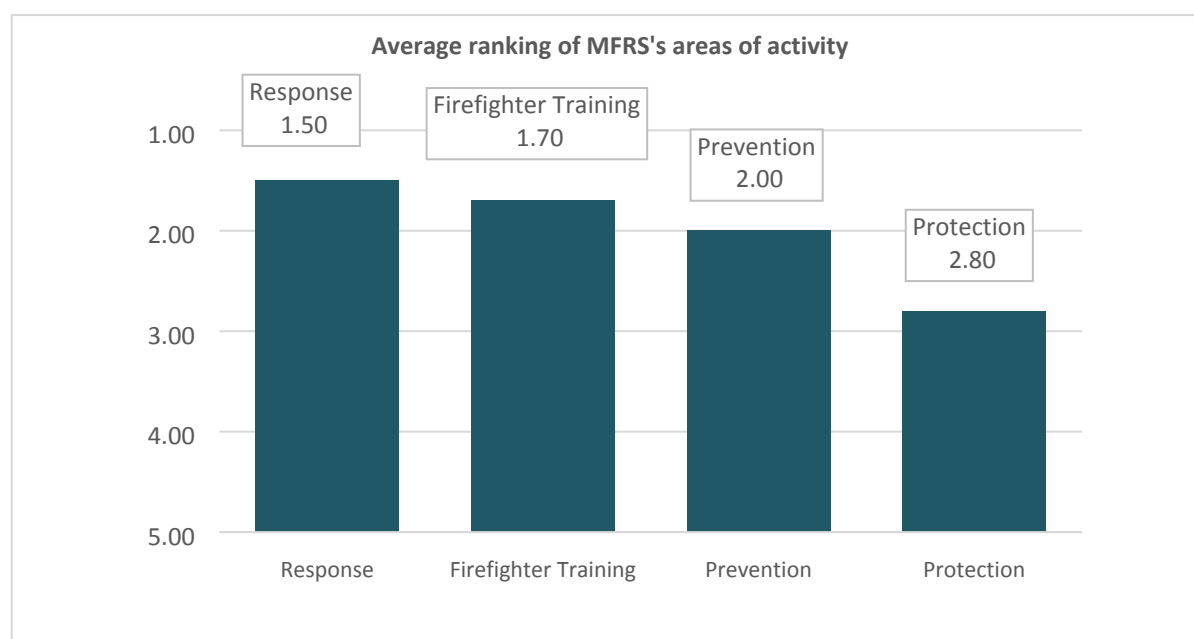
Environmental changes bringing more large wildfires and widespread flooding; and

Marine risk, especially around the Liverpool and Wirral Waters.

3.36 They were also reminded that the service must mitigate against risk to both the public and its firefighters through activity in four main areas: Prevention, Protection, Response and Firefighter Training. In order to determine the importance of these four areas of activity to members of the public, participants were asked to rank them from 1-4 (with 1 being most important and 4 least important) according to their relative importance to them. They were permitted to rank one or more area equally if they wished.

3.37 Figure 8 overleaf shows that Response was rated highest with an average ranking of 1.5, with Firefighter Training only slightly behind in second place (with an average ranking of 1.7). Prevention was ranked third (average ranking of 2), with Protection fourth at 2.8. The fact that all four areas received an average ranking of under three demonstrates, however, that none are considered unimportant.

**Figure 8: Average ranking of MFRS's areas of activity**



Based on responses from 63 people within focus groups

### MFRS's 'proposals' were supported

3.38 Participants were informed that if possible and financially viable, MFRS is considering:

Maintaining 642 firefighters as a minimum, while increasing its retained capabilities;

Increasing its diversity through continued 'positive action' recruitment, so its staff reflect the communities it serves;

Directing its Prevention activity toward the areas of highest deprivation and the most vulnerable;

Increasing the number of Protection officers in light of Grenfell Tower Inquiry and recommendations;

Aiming to increase its resilience (by increasing the number of fire engines if possible), for example by introducing innovative duty systems such as Hybrid Stations;

Enhancing its specialist and non-specialist capabilities for terrorist incidents and providing additional kit and equipment to firefighters;

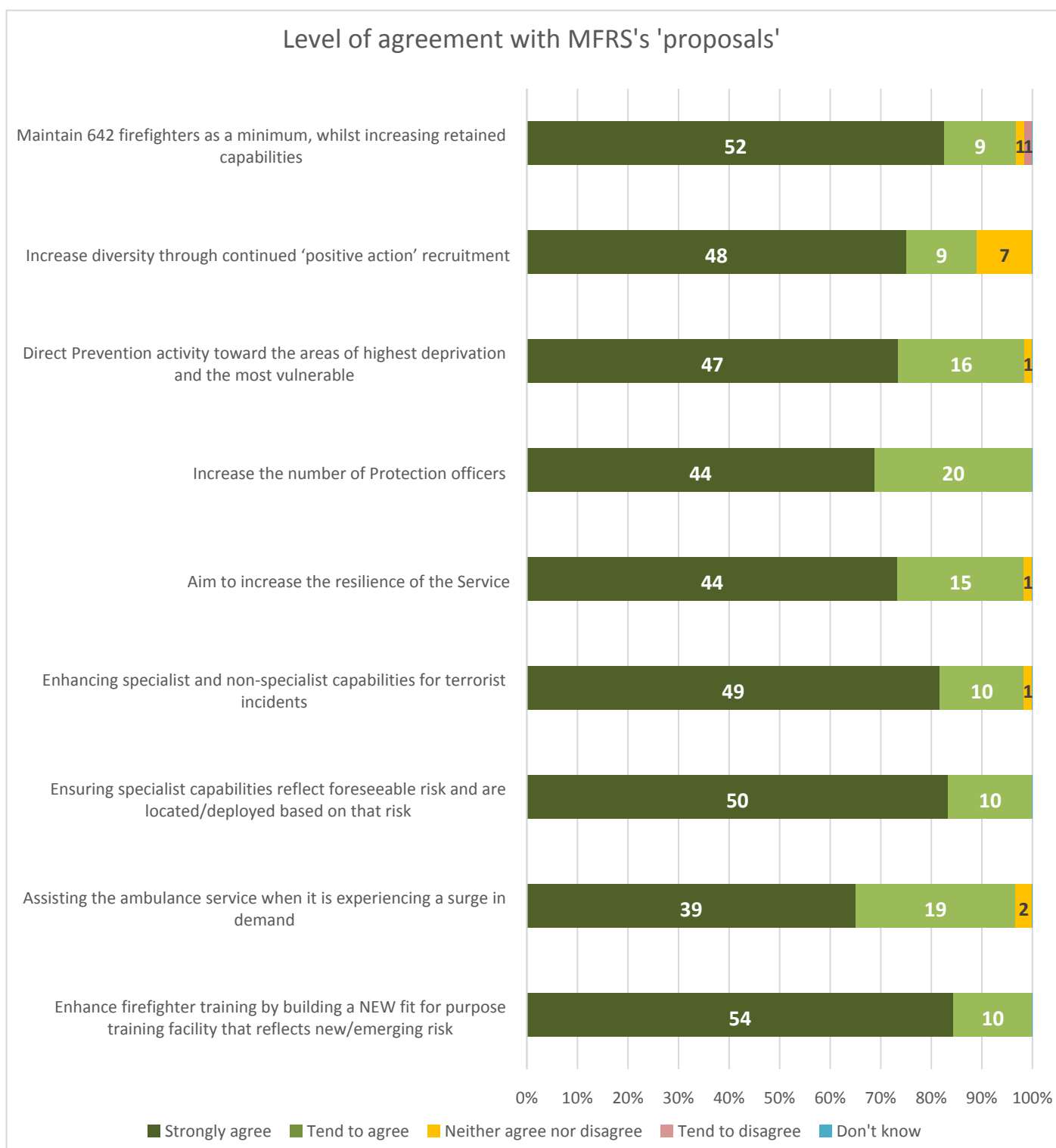
Ensuring its specialist capabilities reflect foreseeable risk and are located/deployed based on that risk;

Assisting the ambulance service when it is facing a surge in demand, like that experienced through the pandemic (whilst maintaining response to fires/other emergencies); and

Enhancing firefighter training (in relation to, for example, high rise incidents, terrorist attacks, marine response, Emergency Medical Response, flooding and wildfire etc.) by building a new training facility that is fit for purpose and reflects new/emerging foreseeable risk.

- 3.39 Zoom polls were used to determine levels of agreement or otherwise with MFRS's considerations. The results from these can be seen in Figure 9 overleaf – which shows very little disagreement with, or even concern around, any of them. Indeed, as one Liverpool participant stated:

*"I couldn't disagree with any of the proposals as they're all really good - fingers crossed for the required funding!" (Liverpool)*

**Figure 9: Extent of agreement with MFRS's 'proposals'**

Based on responses from between 60 – 64 people within the focus groups

- 3.40 A supplementary question was asked in relation to MFRS offering assistance to the ambulance service when it is facing a surge in demand: participants were asked for their views on which, if any of the following the service should respond to if it proceeds with this<sup>4</sup>:

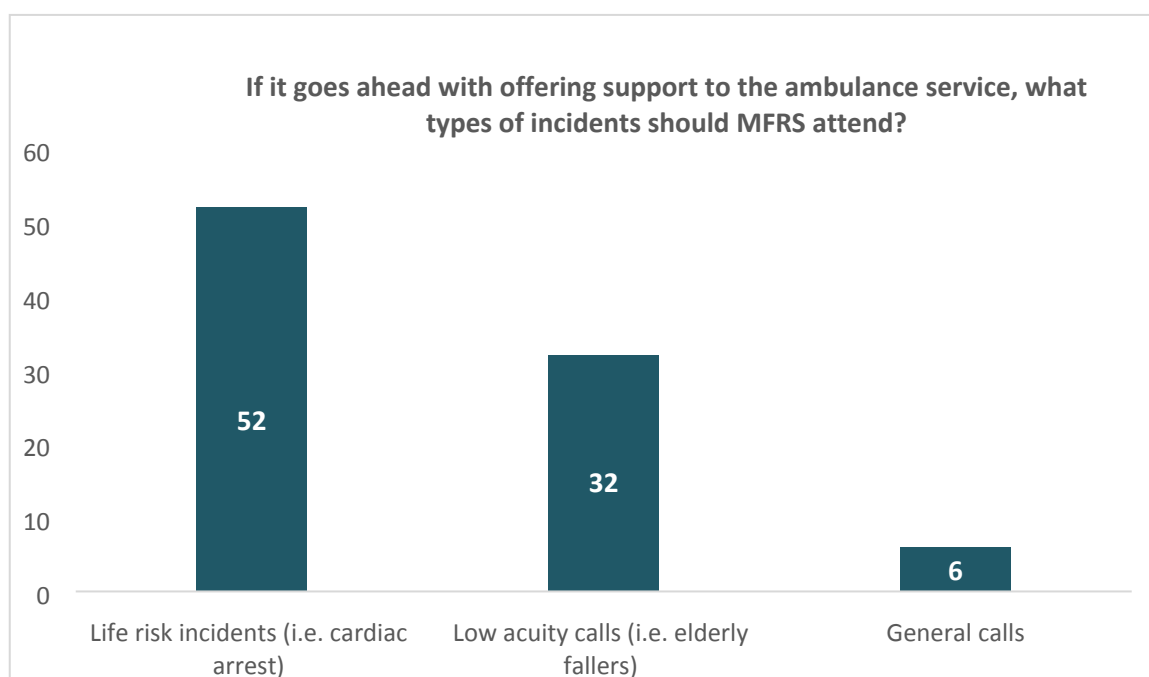
Life-risk incidents such as cardiac arrests;  
‘Low acuity’ calls such as elderly fallers; and  
General Calls.

- 3.41 They were also given the option of stating that MFRS should not offer any support to the ambulance service, though no-one chose it. The results for the other three options are seen in Figure 10 below, with seemingly a great deal of support for responding to life risk incidents in particular – but also for attending ‘low acuity’ incidents in order to free up paramedics for those of a more serious nature.

*"They should be able to respond to life or death situations and if they have the resources available to go to calls to help the elderly etc. then they should do" (Knowsley)*

*"The way I read it was, the Service is there almost in a support capacity to help the ambulance when they need it. My understanding was that if they were to go to calls that weren't necessarily emergencies that are increasing ... like elderly people, mental health issues. If the fire service can attend these it might free up the ambulance service to deal with the cardiac arrest side" (Wirral)*

Figure 10: Support for assisting the ambulance service with certain types of incident



Based on responses from 64 people within the focus groups

<sup>4</sup> Please note that this was a multiple-choice question, so participants were able to choose more than one response option.

- 3.42 One participant at Sefton was, though, concerned about the parameters of any support MFRS might provide to the ambulance service – and particularly that such support should not detract from its core functions of fire and rescue, including Prevention work.

*"I'm not hostile to the idea of the support side; I'm familiar with that. My reservations are about the other things that the Fire and Rescue Service should be doing around preventative work, and community work and everything like that. That's why I neither agree nor disagree, because it's about the framework around that: 'what is the surge in demand?' and 'what are the events, and the parameters around the role?'"*

- 3.43 In further discussion of the results of this exercise, the issue of positive action recruitment was raised: a couple of participants said they were particularly pleased to see this on the agenda given the need for young people within BAME and deprived communities to have positive role models within public services.

*"What is the Service doing to attract recruitment from the BAME community? I only ask because we struggle to recruit to the NHS from BAME backgrounds, especially to the higher levels. Schools need to see role models in all our services. Hopefully we will see the numbers increasing, especially from the more deprived areas/schools" (Liverpool)*

*"How do we attract young people from those deprived areas into thinking the fire service is something they could join? If they can see positive role models in their community, that can stop them behaving in ways that don't value their Fire Service and make them aspirational" (Wirral)*

- 3.44 However, even following explanations of the difference between positive action and positive discrimination, there remained some concern about 'political correctness' meaning the best candidates might be rejected in favour of those who fill particular 'quotas'. This suggests that careful messaging will be needed for clarity that this will not be the case.

*"About the increasing diversity, it's one of the things that concerns me. Yes, we want to increase diversity, but shouldn't it be the best person for the job? Would somebody be employed just so they increase the diversity over somebody who might actually be better for the job?" (Knowsley)*

*"In the back in my mind I've still got the thought of the target somewhere. My main area of concern is that you recruit the best people for the job, completely colour blind when you do it" (Wirral)*

- 3.45 While most people were pleased with the prospect of MFRS maintaining 642 firefighters as a minimum in order to increase its resilience, a few participants suggested that it should be more flexible in being prepared to make reductions if incident levels fall further as a result of ever-improving Prevention and Protection measures.

*"If the number of fires continues to drop as it has done in the last few years, there's a question of why you want 642 as a minimum?" (Wirral)*

*"If you can improve Protection and Prevention, then you might not need so many frontline firefighters; and technology is improving all the time. You can get better smoke alarms, better fire protection systems, better passive protection in buildings to stop the spread of fire" (Sefton)*

- 3.46 There was also a sense that frontline resources may need to be reorganised in light of the Grenfell inquiry recommendations, with firefighters potentially being redeployed into Protection activity (particularly in the event of shrinking budgets).

*"You've probably not got a lot of Protection officers who are trying to stop fires in big buildings and you might need to shift a few frontline firefighters; you may have to reduce, a little bit, the number of frontline firefighters to put resources into more Protection and maybe more Prevention" (Sefton)*

- 3.47 The prospect of a new training centre was welcomed, not only in ensuring firefighters are as safe and effective as possible – but also in allowing MFRS to share its experience and knowledge externally and help raise the standard of fire and rescue services both regionally and nationally.

*"I think this is a great initiative. And if we can be the leaders in providing training even better, as we can then be assured that MFRS are setting the standard and driving the standards up across the city region, and helping raise standards across the country" (Liverpool)*

- 3.48 Finally, while there was a great deal of support for MFRS's proposed direction of travel, there was concern that future budgetary restrictions (largely as a result of spend on the Covid-19 pandemic) may prove prohibitive. There was also a great deal of sympathy for the Service's difficulties in having to plan on a 'one year at a time' financial basis.

*"It's all about Covid-19. We all know mass unemployment is coming; less employment means less taxes, which means they're going to get less money ... it's obvious there are going to be cut-backs in the coming year" (Sefton)*

*"About the funding. Is it expected, after money spent on furlough scheme, that there will be cuts in budget?" (St Helens)*

*"It seems incredulous that they're expecting you to deliver on a one year at a time budget" (Sefton)*



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