

<b>MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY</b>			
<b>MEETING OF THE:</b>	<b>AUTHORITY</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>2 OCTOBER 2014</b>	<b>REPORT NO:</b>	<b>CFO/094/14</b>
<b>PRESENTING OFFICER</b>	<b>CHIEF FIRE OFFICER</b>		
<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:</b>	<b>DEB APPLETON</b>	<b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b>	<b>DEB APPLETON</b>
<b>OFFICERS CONSULTED:</b>	<b>COLIN SCHOFIELD, PETER RUSHTON, GARY OAKFORD, WENDY KENYON</b>		
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>KNOWSLEY STATION MERGERS CONSULTATION OUTCOMES</b>		

<b>APPENDICES:</b>	<b>APPENDIX A:</b>	<b>KNOWSLEY CONSULTATION NEWSLETTER</b>
	<b>APPENDIX B:</b>	<b>PUBLIC MEETINGS REPORT</b>
	<b>APPENDIX C:</b>	<b>KNOWSLEY SURVEY OUTCOMES REPORT</b>
	<b>APPENDIX D:</b>	<b>KNOWSLEY FOCUS GROUP AND FORUM REPORT</b>
	<b>APPENDIX E:</b>	<b>EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>

### **Purpose of Report**

1. To inform Members of the outcomes of the twelve week public consultation regarding the proposed station merger in Knowsley and the next steps.

### **Recommendation**

2. That Members note the outcomes from the Knowsley public consultation

### **Introduction and Background**

3. On 6<sup>th</sup> May 2014 the Authority approved (subject to consultation) a proposal to merge (close) Huyton and Whiston community fire stations and build a new station on Manchester Road in Prescot. As part of that report (CFO/044/14), the Authority approved the consultation plan. The Authority subsequently carried out a twelve week period of public consultation between 6<sup>th</sup> May and 28<sup>th</sup> July. The plan set out that the Authority would run an online survey, three externally facilitated deliberative focus groups and one forum, three open public meetings, a stakeholder meeting and several staff consultation meetings. The outcomes of the consultation are set out below.

## **Promoting and marketing the consultation**

4. Following the Authority's decision, a newsletter (Appendix A) that detailed the proposals for Knowsley was published on the Merseyfire website. This included details of the three public meetings to be held in Prescott, Huyton and Whiston. As well as being published on the website, paper copies were distributed widely by the Knowsley District team to shops and other businesses and agencies in the Knowsley area including major supermarkets, Health Centres, One-Stop Shops, Libraries and Local Authority Leisure Centres.
5. The Corporate Communications team used Facebook and Twitter regularly throughout the consultation period to introduce the proposals, direct readers to the online survey and to promote the meetings. The consultation was publicised in local newspapers, including the Liverpool Echo, St. Helens Star and Knowsley Challenge and the Chief Fire Officer also took part in a radio interview promoting the consultation events. When the consultation period closed, this was communicated on Twitter and the Merseyfire website.
6. Information about the proposed merger and the consultation meetings was distributed by Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council through their communication channels (including community messaging) to staff, partners and members of the public.
7. The District Manager for Knowsley consulted with staff in the Knowsley district to explain the proposals and seek feedback. He also distributed information to his partnership contacts including the Chamber of Commerce and encouraged them to attend the stakeholder meeting.
8. More information on the marketing and promotion of the consultation, the public meetings and stakeholder meeting can be found at Appendix B.

## **The consultation events**

9. The consultation events that took place are detailed below. The focus groups and public meetings took place in the evening.
  - Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June – Knowsley Park Centre for Learning – Focus Group
  - Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> June – Whiston Town Hall – Focus Group
  - Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> June – Lord Derby Academy – Focus Group
  - Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> June – Rainhill High School – Public Meeting
  - Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> June – Lord Derby Academy – Public Meeting
  - Monday 16<sup>th</sup> June – Huyton Civic Suite - Breakfast Meeting
  - Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> June – St Edmund Arrowsmith School – Public meeting
  - Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> June – Belle Vale Community Fire Station – Forum
10. The focus groups and forum were deliberative meetings, facilitated by Opinion Research Services (ORS), the provider of MFRA's IRMP Forums. Participants were randomly selected from the Knowsley area and invited to attend.

11. The stakeholders' breakfast meeting was promoted amongst public and private sector partners in Knowsley.
12. The public meetings were entirely open and anyone could attend. No one was recruited or specifically invited. They were however widely publicised as detailed above.
13. The breakfast meeting and open public meetings were organised, promoted and delivered by MFRA staff. MFRA staff were also heavily involved in the organisation of the ORS facilitated focus groups and several uniformed and non-uniformed staff attended each meeting to provide advice and organisational support.
14. In addition, the Chief Fire Officer met with the Leader and Chief Executive of Knowsley Council during this period and the District Manager met with Members of Cronton Parish Council.

## **Outcomes from the consultation**

### **On line survey**

15. Analysis of the online survey results can be found at Appendix C, the following is an overview.
16. The online survey was designed to be concise and easy to use. Members of the public accessing it through the website were first directed to read the newsletter referred to above and then answer one question:
  - *“Do you think the proposed merger of Huyton and Whiston fire stations at a new community fire and rescue station in Prescott is **reasonable** given the financial challenges faced by the Authority?”*
17. Respondents were then asked a supplementary question:
  - *“If you answered “No”, please use the box below to explain why you do not think the proposal is reasonable”*
18. Finally, respondents had an opportunity to add any further comments.
19. Below is a summary of the findings.
  - In total there were 93 responses to the survey
  - The majority of respondents (79.6%, 74 from 93) to the survey felt that proposals put forward by the Authority were reasonable, 17.2% (16 from 93) felt proposals were unreasonable and 3.2% (3 from 93) were undecided.
  - Concerning comments submitted, many local partners were broadly in favour of the merger proposals. Though there were some members of the public who were in favour, there were comments about the impact of

government cuts as well as concerns about the proposed location on Manchester Road given its proximity to the Cables Retail Park.

- Based on the postcode submitted by 50 respondents, the vast majority of people that responded to the consultation survey lived within the station grounds affected by the mergers; specifically the L34, L35 and L36 areas.
20. In the free text section, there were several comments looking favourably at the proposed site and concept of the mergers, especially by partners and some of the members of the public. There was some concern expressed regarding the proposed location identifying the nearby Cables Retail Park as an area of possible conflict. This was also picked up at the Prescott Focus Group and Knowsley Forum and is addressed in more detail within a separate report on this agenda. Other comments range from merging the Fire and Rescue and Ambulance Services to criticising the national government regarding the level of public sector cuts.
  21. One respondent commented on what they considered to be inconsistencies in the way the budget cuts were represented in a graph at the focus group and forum presentation. This is picked up in detail in paragraphs 47 and 48 of Appendix D. The point made was that the axis of the graph did not start at zero. As this was not incorrect, it was felt important to continue to show the same presentation to all the meetings. However, this will be considered in future presentations.

### **Focus groups and forum**

22. Full information about the focus groups and forums can be found at Appendix D, the following is an overview:
23. As Members will recall, the four consultation meetings reported here followed an earlier all-Merseyside 'listening and engagement' process that considered a wide range of options for MFRA in the context of its reduced budget due to public expenditure reductions. Having taken account of those earlier meetings and all the other available evidence, MFRA formulated the current proposals for Knowsley.
24. The four consultation meetings used a 'deliberative' approach to encourage members of the public to reflect in depth about the Fire and Rescue Service, while both receiving and questioning background information and discussing the proposals in detail. The meetings lasted for at least two-and-a-half hours and in total there were 48 diverse participants.
25. The attendance at the focus groups and forum was very good with at least the expected number of people attending and in some cases, more than were expected.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Type of meeting and number attending</b>
Prescot	Focus Group -11
Whiston	Focus Group - 11
Huyton	Focus Group - 8
All Knowsley	Forum - 18

26. Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the four meetings that took place gave diverse groups of people from Knowsley the opportunity to comment in detail on MFRA's proposals for the District's fire stations. As a result, ORS are satisfied that the outcomes of the meeting (as summarised below) are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.

27. The key overall findings were that:

- i. The three station-area-based focus groups and the all-Knowsley forum were all prepared to accept and even support the proposals as reasonable, feasible and safe in the circumstances.
- ii. Some people emphasised that their acceptance of the proposals was primarily or only due to the financial challenges MFRA faces: the implication was clearly that in other circumstances they would oppose the proposals
- iii. A very small number opposed the proposals in both principle and practice, and wanted MFRA to pursue other courses of action, including continuing to lobby the government
- iv. Overall, there was overwhelming majority support for the proposals across all four meetings. In fact, some people stressed that in their opinion the proposals are not at all undesirable, but the proper outcome of sensibly reviewing of resources against declining risk
- v. The discussions revealed some reservations about the choice of the Manchester Road site, but this was not a major issue and these concerns have been considered in the recommendations being made to Authority in the separate report on this Agenda.
- vi. Very few respondents rejected the "merger" proposals in their entirety or thought that MFRA should not even be considering such courses of action. There was general agreement that MFRA's proposals are a reasonable and responsible reaction to the budget reductions it is facing – and indeed could be introduced safely and sustainably.
- vii. None of the meetings felt that the proposals raised any specific concerns relating to vulnerable people or groups with protected characteristics, but some observed that it is important to ensure the elderly get appropriate prevention work in the form of home fire safety checks and other precautions.

### **Stakeholder meeting and open public meetings**

28. The format for the public meetings and stakeholder meetings was a formal presentation giving the reasons for the changes being proposed and details of the actual merger process and its likely impact on MFRA operational activities.
29. This was followed by an invitation for people to ask questions of the MFRA managers who attended the event.
30. The stakeholders meeting was attended by 14 people and generated a significant number of questions (see Appendix B for details)
31. The public meetings were less well attended – five people at Prescott, none at Huyton and one at Whiston. The question and answers sessions are also captured in Appendix B.
32. Despite the low numbers attending, there was general agreement that the merger proposals were reasonable in the circumstances, in the context of the cuts to Government funding for MFRA.
33. It is difficult to be sure why so few people attended the public meetings which were held in the heart of the communities. “Austerity fatigue” may be a factor. Leafleting was carried out in key locations, local newspapers were used to advertise the events; the Council assisted with promotion, the Chief Fire Officer took part in a radio interview and MFRA Tweeted and posted on Facebook regularly during this period. Another option in the future would be to leaflet individual homes in the areas affected. This could cost in the region of £4,000 for non-personalised leaflets to £35,000 for letters addressed to residents and business owners. Neither approach would guarantee an improved attendance.

### **Staff consultation**

34. The Knowsley District Management Team consulted extensively with staff in the District at the start and end of the consultation period. This included setting up a section of the Intranet Portal where relevant documents and information was posted for staff to access, meetings between managers on the district and each watch at Huyton and Whiston fire stations and a number of email messages reminding staff that the consultation was open and encouraging them to complete the on-line survey. The outcomes of this consultation were that there were no formal objections to the merger and it was recognised this merger forms part of the wider service changes as covered in the Principal Officer Briefings. The only questions raised were the staffing model at the proposed site and what criteria would be used to select staff.

## Conclusion

35. The overall outcome of the consultation was that a significant majority of those participating thought that the proposal to close Huyton and Whiston fire stations and build a new station at Prescott were reasonable in the circumstances. A few concerns were expressed about the Manchester Road site, which would be addressed as the project developed should the Authority decide to proceed.
36. It was definitely the case that inviting people to deliberative consultation events, such as the focus groups and forum, was much more effective than open public meetings and this has provided the Authority with important information to consider when making their decision. However, it is considered that open public meetings should still be carried out as part of any future similar consultation exercises to ensure that anyone who wants to can still have their say.

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## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

37. The only opportunity MFRA had to ensure a representative group of people were consulted with was in relation to the invited participants at the deliberative **focus groups and forum**. Efforts are always made to recruit a representative sample of Merseyside residents for each meeting, but as not everyone who is recruited actually attends the meeting, this can have an effect.
  - 60% (29) of the 48 focus group and forum attendees were male and 40% (19) were female.
  - 31% (15) were aged 16-34, 33.5% (16) were 35-54 and 35.5% (17) were over 54.
  - 16% (8) were of non-white British origin.

The **on-line survey** results showed the following in relation the diversity of those responding:

- 86 valid responses were analysed with 45 (52.3%) male respondents with 41 female (47.7%). Concerning age there was a wide distribution of ages with the 40-49 and 50-59 age groups being most represented, with 20 responses each.
- Of the 85 valid responses to the question concerning **disability**, 10 of the 85 (11.8%) declared they were disabled.
- In combination, 95.4% (82 from 86) of respondents were White with 2.4% being from a BME background

38. British Sign Language Interpreters were available at each open public meeting (they were not required for any of the deliberative forums) and a portable hearing loop system was also available for all meetings.
39. With regards to the outcomes of the consultation; Equality and Diversity considerations were raised at an early stage in each meeting and none of the focus groups or forum meetings felt that the proposals raised any specific concerns relating to vulnerable people or groups with protected characteristics, but some observed that it is important to ensure the elderly get appropriate prevention work in the form of home fire safety checks and other precautions.
40. The Equality Impact Assessment has been updated to reflect the consultation outcomes and this can be found at Appendix E.

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### **Staff Implications**

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41. There are no staff implications arising from this report.

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### **Legal Implications**

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

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### **Financial Implications & Value for Money**

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

Room hire and refreshments - £947  
British Sign Language interpreters - £270  
Hearing loop hire - £600  
Focus group and forum facilitation - £10,670

Total - £12,487

All costs were met from existing budgets and there was no additional cost arising from staff attendance at evening meetings.

44. As detailed above, it is considered that the deliberative forums offer value for money as it is considered that relying solely on open public meetings and the survey would not have provided Members with sufficient information about the views of the public of Knowsley to enable them to make an informed decision about how to proceed.

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### **Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications**

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45. It is considered that MFRA has reduced corporate risk by carrying out extensive consultation and considering the outcomes of that consultation before making any final decisions on the merger proposals. There are no health and safety or environmental implications.



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

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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**