

Knowsley Consultation

Public meetings and Stakeholders meeting

Promotion:

Three evening public meetings and a breakfast stakeholders meeting were held as part of the Knowsley consultation process.

The public meetings were held Tuesday 10th June at Rainhill High School, Prescot; Thursday 12th June at the Lord Derby Academy, Huyton; Tuesday, 17th June at St Edmund Arrowsmith School, Whiston.

The stakeholders breakfast took place at Huyton Civic Suites, Huyton, on the 16th June.

These meetings were widely promoted through the local media, internet, social media, Knowsley Council community messaging service, our own staff meetings and leaflet distribution to public buildings and local supermarkets.

The Liverpool Echo and Knowsley Challenge carried news features and Radio Merseyside ran an interview with the Chief Fire Officer on the morning of one of the public meetings. MFRS Facebook page carried information from the beginning of the process as did the MFRS website and information about the meetings was tweeted in advance of all the events.

Knowsley Council distributed information regarding the consultation process through its community messaging service which is sent to 9,000 people and through their business newsletter which goes to 3,000 people.

The MFRS Consultation newsletter was given out at 14 locations, including Whiston Hospital, health and leisure centres and the Asda and Tesco supermarkets.

Meetings took place with all our Knowsley staff who had the proposed mergers explained and were also made aware of the public meetings.

The Knowsley Chamber of Commerce promoted the events in their newsletter and encouraged their members to attend the stakeholders breakfast meeting.

Signers were engaged for all the public meetings and a hearing loop was available to ensure any attendees with hearing impairments could participate. Neither were required.

Feedback

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 MFRS operational activities.

This was followed by an invitation for people to ask questions of the MFRS senior management who attended.

The stakeholders meeting was attended by 14 people and generated a significant number of questions (See appendix A).

The public meetings were less well attended – five people at Prescot, none at Huyton and one at Whiston. The question and answers sessions are captured in appendix B.

It is difficult to be sure why so few people attended the public meetings which were held in the heart of the communities. Leafleting was done through key locations and the only other option in the future would be to leaflet individual homes in the areas affected. This would have cost in the region of £10,000(to be checked).

Appendix A

Stakeholders Breakfast Meeting (16th June)

Q: When you talk about sharing facilities with partners, how do you link in with them?

A: There are two examples. One is at Croxteth with the Ambulance Service's Hazardous Area Response Team (HART). They share the same station, messing facilities and they train together. We are not interchangeable services because we do different jobs but they train together because they turn out to very specific incidents. We act as landlords and they pay to be there.

The other example is at Heswall, the Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) work out of the station because it is an appropriate base for them to have a small office and carry out their administration work. There is not a large amount of operational interaction but it gives them a base.

Q: The decision to go down the PFI (Private Finance Initiative) route, taking into account the long term issues I'm assuming you will take into account the lessons learned.

A: We wouldn't be using the PFI route for this station and that programme is concluded. The stations we are talking about building would be funded through grant, capital receipt and reserves. We are looking to be debt free.

Q: How long will the consultations last? What timescale will a decision be made by?

A: The consultation process started in May and lasts for 12 weeks. At the most recent public meeting in the Lord Derby Academy nobody came along. We had a public consultation last week and five people attended. We are trying to encourage people to come along to consultations. We seem to be in the grip of austerity fatigue. We will persist and we have held forums, where a market research company has recruited people to attend and paid them expenses on our behalf, that is much more successful. We will collate all of that together, what people have said and information from the online survey and the Authority will take a view of whether there is anything substantive that says the plans are unreasonable.

Q: Has there been anything done specifically with the Council?

A: On three occasions we have met with the full Council.

Q: The public may have an opinion but may prefer to go through their local councillors.

A: The first thing we did was contact local councillors and on three occasions we have addressed the full Council on it.

Q: When it comes to consultation there are two aspects; one is what we are able to do and the other is options if you don't do this. However there are no other options here are there?

A: I'm not going to say there aren't any other options because there are, however, this is the option that I would take.

Q: You can ask people but you're still going to make the cuts.

Another guest added: Yes but it's how you make them and it's to give people the opportunity to be consulted. It is your business and you know the safe way to run it and it's about being able to support the service. There will be thousands of people who say they didn't know about it despite significant attempts to consult people.

Q: You said there weren't people attending, it could be that the word consultation puts people off.

A: We called it engagement initially and we got slightly less people interested. We haven't finished yet so anything you suggest we are happy to pick up on that.

Q: Thank you for coming along and I'm disappointed that there isn't the turnout you hoped for. As a business owner I have complete faith in you guys and that comes from the relationship I have developed with yourselves over the years. I think you have convinced us that you have given it a huge amount of thought. I personally have huge faith in your decision. I like the idea of a state of the art station.

A: Sometimes it feels like the austerity measures have been going on forever. The perspective that I have is that at some point we will get through this and when we do I want us to have the best possible infrastructure and the best trained workforce we can have at that time.

If this plan looks reasonable to well informed people then I can report that back to the Authority which would give them a degree of reassurance.

Q: My view is it seems a sensible solution. You've got to save money and this is a merger instead of closing the stations and this will also be a state of the art facility. However is it future proof? In Liverpool the Council invested in a facility that was built and 17 months down the line it was cut.

A: Prescott would be one of the 10 key stations, it would always be there, with South Knowsley covered by Prescott and North Knowsley covered by Kirkby.

Also, with the PFI stations jobs were created locally in the construction industry and the Authority policy was that it would employ local firms. This merger would create eight Knowsley jobs if it goes ahead.

Appendix B

Whiston Public Meeting (17th June)

Q: When would building start?

A: The consultation process has to conclude and a report to go back to the Authority for a final decision. We then have to go through the whole planning process before the build work begins.

Q: Does the hospital have any issues with the proposals?

A: We used to have issues with automatic fire alarms (AFAs) going off at Whiston hospital but we have worked very closely with them over the last few years and they have put new processes in place. In 2013-14 there were no AFAs. Because it is a building that is always heavily occupied it is less likely that a fire would occur and that nobody would see it very quickly.

Q: Are the ambulance service coming in with us at Prescot?

A: Not at this stage.

Q: How much space do the police want?

A: We are not sure yet but it may be just office space.

Prescot Public Meeting (10th June)

Q: [Following a discussion about Council Tax] How much would a referendum cost?

A: £2 million for referenda in all five districts as we are pan-Merseyside. We may not win a referendum so that cost would need to be found on top of the £6.3 million of savings.

Q: What's the establishment (regarding number of firefighters)?

A: The current staffing levels are around 790 but would reduce further to 764.

Q: What's been the highest (number of firefighters there has been)?

A: In the past 1,500 firefighters.

Comment (during presentation) – Response times would be delaying by seconds (comment made during the Prescot Proposed Station slide mentioning current average response times for Huyton and Whiston to fires).

A: Yes it would be seconds. For some it could be longer than the average but we would get there as quickly as we can.

Q: If there was a big fire in Huyton would you send two appliances?

A: It depends on the circumstances. If it was a fire in a high rise building we would send four.

Q: It would be from across Merseyside (the appliances sent to the fire)?

A: Yes. It is the nearest appliance that responds. We have 10 key stations to help with our mobilisation system operation to meet the ten minute response time.

Q: Do you have any collaboration with Cheshire (in regards to responding to incidents)?

A: Yes we do. Arrangements are in place for Cheshire appliances to come into Merseyside and vice versa but the Cheshire deployments into Merseyside do not happen very often but may happen more often in the future. There are similar arrangements with Manchester and Lancashire.

Q: If there was a large chemical fire in Runcorn would Merseyside respond and help?

A: As with the above answer it was explained Merseyside would respond.

Q: The average response times are based on wholetime and wholetime retained. There's a good chance wholetime retained will not come to fruition so it may be community retained. Have you looked at response times in the light of that?

A: The wholetime retained appliance, the second pump would be at a Prescot station, but it would not be a "response" appliance but a "resilience" one with firefighters responding into the station and onto the pump within 30 minutes. It would then be available as support cover.

Q: Then the times are based on having two – the old figures are based on two machines – one at Huyton one at Whiston?

A: The current average response time figures for the current stations, Huyton and Whiston, are based on the first responding appliance – as soon as they book on scene that is when the clock stopped. It was the average time for first appliance attendance at the incident.

Q: I thought that was based on the average for two machines?

A: No, but it is an important point. There will be more of an impact on the time of the second appliance attending.

Q: It will be interesting to see the change in a few years. A few years ago it was first machine in 5 minutes, second in 8 minutes. It is worrying. I come here as a member of the public. You see the rise in firefighter fatalities since 2001 especially with high rise fires.

A: Firefighter safety is paramount for us as a Service. It was explained that wholetime and wholetime retained was considered to be the “gold standard” and is where senior officers would like to place the Service. The Service would like to go back to 42 appliances but not necessarily go back to 26 stations as it is the fire appliances and firefighters that save lives not stations.

Q: How many fire appliances do they have now (Whiston and Huyton)?

A: There are two between the stations.

Q: So we (will) have the same number of fire appliances?

A: There would be the same number of appliances but they would be staffed differently as mentioned before – wholetime and wholetime retained on the second appliance.

Q: Would they (the firefighters) get overtime for that (the wholetime retained element)?

A: They would get paid additionally for something like a 48 hour retained cover period covering day/night/weekend.

Q: For me living in Rainhill the response would be a couple of seconds – but what about for those on the other side of Huyton?

A: The average response time from the Prescot station would be 5 minutes and 9 seconds, but, due to the nature of an average it may take

a little longer for some people depending on the distance the fire appliances were travelling but it is within the 10-minute response which was better than a lot of the rest of the country. However, people living closer to the new Prescott station would get an even quicker response. It really depends where the incident is.

Q: What would be the difference (in response time between Rainhill response and other side of Huyton)?

A: It is a travel distance of around two miles or so which could be an additional minute or so but there may be a delayed response that could be 6 minutes instead of five minutes.

Q: The LLAR stations – are they being looked at to go wholetime in the future?

A: LLAR stands for Low Levels of Activity and Risk where they have retained firefighters on site/in accommodation near the fire station during the night and consideration is being given to certain LLAR stations returning to wholetime operations e.g. Newton le Willows, but no decision has yet been taken.

Q: Is it true you will not respond to Automatic Fire Alarms? In our golf club we've been told we need to call if there is a fire and we are getting something called a "double knock" alarm.

A: AFAs are not responded to unless a fire is confirmed or suspected but if a double knock system activates that would be considered as confirmation a fire was at the site and a response would be sent. In other cases a back-up call needs to be made.

Q: This is the thin end of a wedge – you just wonder where it is going to stop. Is there a time when all the Chiefs are going to get together and say "enough is enough" (when it comes to reducing funding for FRSs further)?

A: Lobbying had taken place since 2010 and that resulted in providing some funding protection for Merseyside FRS but it was clear that those who control the funding have the aspiration to reduce the deficit at least up to 2020, as pointed out on an earlier Powerpoint slide. The Authority and officers are rising to the challenge responding to providing the best possible service with funding resources that were available.

Q: Are you confident that the 840 average calls can be responded to by one station (the Prescott one responding to the fire calls across their area)?

A: Yes. There may be some delay and it may be quicker for some than the average and slower for others.

Q: If there are 840 incidents next year you can get there (in all those call-out cases)?

A: Yes, those calls would be got to and covered with a station built in the Manchester Road area of Prescott.