



Integrated Risk Management Plan

Report of Engagement Forums
with members of the public



April 2013



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Acknowledgements

Opinion Research Services (ORS) is pleased to have worked with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) on the five engagement forums reported here. The forum participants engaged with the issues under consideration and discussed their ideas readily, so we trust the report will contribute to service planning by MFRA at a time of very serious financial constraints.

We thank MFRA for commissioning the project as part of its on-going programme of public and stakeholder consultation. We particularly thank the senior officers and Fire Authority members who attended the sessions to listen to the public's views. Such meetings benefit considerably from the readiness of fire officers and other staff to answer participants' questions fully and frankly; and the public was pleased that elected members took such an interest.

We are grateful to all the members of the public who took part in the five interesting meetings and shared their views readily with us. They were patient in listening to background information before entering positively into the spirit of open discussions about challenging and complex topics.

At all stages of the project, ORS' status as an independent organisation consulting the public as objectively as possible was recognised and respected. We are grateful for the trust, and we hope this report will contribute usefully to thinking about MFRA's development in difficult times. We hope also that ORS has been instrumental in continuing to strengthen MFRA's public engagement through the forum participants.

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Project Overview

The Commission

1. On the basis of our long-standing experience with the UK fire and rescue service, and our status as the sole approved provider of research and consultation services under the terms of the Fire Services Consultation Association's National Framework Contract, ORS was commissioned by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) to convene and facilitate five Community Forums across the local authority districts of Merseyside as part of the Authority's on-going public engagement programme. ORS' role was to design, recruit, facilitate and report the five forums during March 2013. We worked in collaboration with MFRA to prepare informative stimulus material for the meetings before facilitating the discussions and preparing this independent report of findings.

Deliberative Research: Public Forums

2. The forums were designed to inform and 'engage' the participants both with the issues and with MFRA – by using 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 service delivery issues in detail. The meetings lasted for about 2.45 hours. In total, there were 107 diverse participants at the forums. The dates of the meetings and attendance level by members of the public at each forum were as follows:

AREA	TIME AND DATE	NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
Wirral	6.00pm – 8.45pm Thursday March 14 2013	23
St Helens	6:00pm – 8:45pm Monday March 18 2013	21
Liverpool	6:00pm – 8:45pm Tuesday March 19 2013	26
Knowsley	6:00pm – 8:45pm Wednesday March 20 2013	16
Sefton	6:00pm – 8:45pm Thursday March 21 2013	21

3. The attendance target for each meeting was between 20 and 25 people, so the recruitment programme was successful, except for a smaller than average attendance this time from Knowsley.

4. In each forum, about half the participants had attended a previous similar meeting within the last couple of years, while half were new recruits to the process. The new recruits were recruited by random-digit telephone dialling from the ORS Social Research Call Centre (in the same way as existing panellists had originally been). Having been initially contacted by phone, they 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 the most effective way of ensuring that all the participants are independently recruited.
5. In recruitment, care was taken to ensure that no potential participants were disqualified or disadvantaged by disabilities or any other factors, and the venues at which the forums met were readily accessible. People's special needs were all taken into account in the recruitment and at the venues. The random telephone recruitment process was monitored to ensure social diversity in terms of a wide range of criteria – including, for example: local authority area of residence; gender; age; ethnicity; social grade; and disability/long-term limiting illness (LLTI).
6. In all five forums (as shown in the table below), participants were a broad cross-section of residents from the local areas and, as standard good practice, were recompensed for their time and efforts in travelling and taking part.

	WIRRAL	ST HELENS	LIVERPOOL	KNOWSLEY	SEFTON
Gender	Male: 12 Female: 11	Male: 10 Female: 11	Male: 13 Female: 12	Male: 10 Female: 6	Male: 13 Female: 9
Age	18-34: 5 35-54: 7 55+: 11	18-34: 3 35-54: 9 55+: 9	18-34: 7 35-54: 10 55+: 8	18-34: 3 35-54: 7 55+: 6	18-34: 4 35-54: 8 55+: 10
Social Grade	AB: 6 C1: 8 C2: 4 DE: 5	AB: 4 C1: 7 C2: 3 DE: 7	AB: 6 C1: 9 C2: 4 DE: 6	AB: 2 C1: 3 C2: 6 DE: 5	AB: 6 C1: 5 C2: 3 DE: 8
BME	0	0	2	1	0
Disability	6	6	6	3	0

7. Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the five meetings reported here gave diverse groups of people from Merseyside the opportunity to comment in detail on MFRA' current and future direction of travel. Because the recruitment was inclusive and participants were diverse, we are satisfied that the outcomes of the meeting (as reported below) are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions. In summary, the outcomes

reported here are reliable as examples of the reflections and opinions of diverse informed people reacting to the proposals included within MFRA's *Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)*.

Discussion Agenda

8. ORS worked in collaboration with MFRA to agree a suitable agenda and informative stimulus material for the meeting, which fell into two unequal parts. The first part of each meeting began, for the sake of continuity and context, with a fairly detailed review of the outcomes of the five forums held nearly a year ago (May 2012). This retrospective review covered all of the following topics:

The importance of prevention in the context of protection and response services

The changing profile of MFRA – including resources, strategic roles, and incident profiles

The impact of the Phase 1 public spending reductions on MFRA – and in particular how the £9.2M annual budget savings had been achieved through reductions in staff and the transfer of five fire engines to a 'reserve' function

The previous forums' support for the:

The principle of a single overall Merseyside-wide response time standard instead the graduated or banded version with target times varying by areas' risk classifications

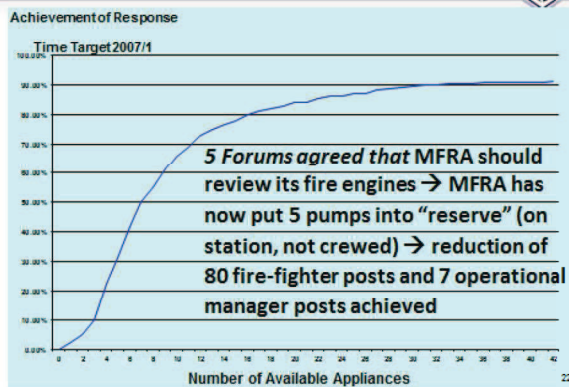
Flexible crewing to match resources more closely to varying levels of risk at different times of the day

Targeting prevention and educational activities towards areas of highest risk and achieving some cost-recovery for the fitting of smoke detectors in low risk homes

The previous forums' opposition to a substantial increase in the MFRA council tax precept.

9. The outcomes were illustrated with the following graphics in order to remind the participants of what issues had been reviewed the year before. It was evident that most of them had very good recall of the issues and the views of the previous forums.

FORUM OUTCOMES: FIRE ENGINES



VIEWS ON “ONE OVERALL TARGET”

To attend 90% of life incidents for example in x minutes with at least one fire engine – but no specific standard for 2nd engine’s attendance time

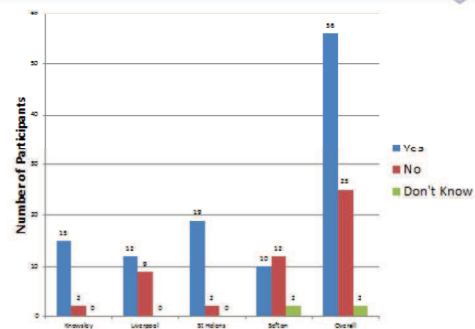
	Reasonable	Unreasonable	Don’t Know
Wirral	19	0	1
Knowsley	13	3	0
Liverpool	11	10	1
St Helens	18	2	1
Sefton	23	0	1
OVERALL	84	15	4

VIEWS ON CREWING SYSTEMS

Should MFRA consider more flexible crewing systems to match variations in ‘demand’?

	Yes	No	Don’t Know
Wirral	18	1	1
Knowsley	16	0	1
Liverpool	17	4	0
St Helens	16	2	3
Sefton	21	3	0
OVERALL	88	10	5

VIEWS ON TARGETING PREVENTION WORK



VIEWS ON COUNCIL TAX INCREASE

Should MFRA increase council tax to compensate for all/some of the grant reductions?

	Yes	No	Don’t Know
Wirral	7	12	1
Knowsley	4	12	1
Liverpool	16	3	2
St Helens	5	14	2
Sefton	3	11	10
OVERALL	35	52	16

10. Following the review of the previous forums, the second and much longer part of each forum considered an important and radical agenda, covering proposals that MFRA said it would not have brought forward except for the significant budget reductions it is facing. In summary the main proposals discussed were to:

The £10M scale of the Phase 2 budget reduction

Consequential reduction of 90 fire-fighter positions (presented as unavoidable)

MFRA proposals to:

(Having recently reduced from 37 to 33 fire engines (include seven low level activity and risk appliances)) to now reduce further to 28 fire engines (including four low level activity and risk engines)

Maintain 26 fire stations (rather than reducing to, say, 16) – albeit that two stations might subsequently be ‘merged’ to create 25

Introduce a single, all-Merseyside response time standard for all life-risk incidents – namely, for the “first fire engine to attend at least 90% of all life-risk incidents within 10 minutes”

Increase fire-fighter productivity by reducing the overall proportion of down-time through changes to the duty and shift system.

11. Each section of the discussion began with a short presentation devised by ORS and MFRA to inform and stimulate discussion of the issues, following which the above matters were reviewed in sequence. The budgetary issues were explained clearly as the context – in order to demonstrate the constraints and the context within which MFRA felt it had to bring the proposals forward; the finances were not themselves treated as a primary issue for discussion; whereas the proposals above and the choices facing MFRA were examined carefully and at length. Participants were given extensive time for questions prior to being invited to make up their minds on each discussion topic.

The Report

12. This report concisely reviews the sentiments and judgements of participants about MFRA and the proposals listed above.
13. Verbatim quotations are used, in indented italics, not because we agree or disagree with them – but for their vividness in capturing recurrent points of views. ORS does not endorse the opinions in question, but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly. While quotations are used, the report is obviously not a verbatim transcript of the sessions, but an interpretative summary of the issues raised by participants in free-ranging discussions.

Consultation Findings with Commentary

Introduction

14. This report has been structured to address each of the areas of discussion in some detail. The views of the five meetings have been merged to give an overall report of findings, rather than five separate and rather repetitive mini-reports – but significant differences in the sub-area views have been drawn out where appropriate. Following the introductory material, each forum addressed a series of issues connected with MFRA' current and future direction. Overall, the forums considered a wide range of important and indeed radical issues that are reported fully below.

Reduction from 37 to 33 to 28 Fire Engines

15. The need to save about £3M per annum by reducing by 90 fire-fighter positions was explained as the underlying reason for why it is necessary to reduce the number of crewed fire engines even further (following a previous reduction from 37 to 33) from the current 33 (including seven low level activity and risk appliances) to 28 (including four low level activity and risk appliances). In this context, participants asked many probing questions – which provided an informed context for further debates later in the meeting.
16. The key comments and questions made are shown below, grouped for clarity under some main headings:

Impact on response times

When you make the reduction to 28, are you confident you can meet the response times? (Wirral)

What is the response time with 28? (St Helens)

Will the response standards be affected? (Liverpool)

Will there be differences in response times? (Knowsley)

How to choose which engines to lose?

How do you decide which fire engines to lose – that is, which stations to remove them from? (St Helens)

The issue with the LLARs is how many of them are in the same area? Where are they? You might have two stations that are LLARs but close to each other (Liverpool)

How can you ensure that the vulnerable groups are covered – how will you prioritise which engines to lose? (Knowsley)

Potential for flexibility re crew numbers

Are fire engines fully crewed – or can the numbers be reduced? [important point – could be more flexible on crewing levels and run more engines] (St Helens)

Could you vary the number of fire fighters on each engine in order to run more appliances? (Liverpool)

I am concerned about crewing levels rather than the number of fire stations. How big a danger is anti-social behaviour for fire-fighters when they attend incidents? (St Helens)

You need to review how many fire-fighters ride each engine – to use them more effectively without over-crewing (Knowsley)

What is the crew for a fire engine – could you use fewer people and crew more engines? (Sefton)

Potential to use different types of vehicles

We once discussed the use motorcycles to respond to small incidents or to assess them – or landrover-type vehicles – is this possible? (Liverpool)

Could you vary your response for minor incidents? Will you use fire bikes or smaller vehicles? (Sefton)

Potential not to send two pumps to every call

Do you really need to send two pumps to every call? (St Helens)

There must be some incidents where you need only one engine – so why do you typically send two fire engines? Some incidents are small and should only have one engine (Liverpool)

Will the response to false alarms be different to real emergencies? You should aim to reduce the false alarms very actively rather than sending a fire engine every time (Knowsley)

Potential for being more selective about attending minor incidents

Will you be more selective about minor incidents, by not attending to them so urgently or at all? (Knowsley)

Will you do a lot more to reduce false alarms? (Sefton)

Possible use of RDS crews?

Why do you want to avoid RDS fire-fighters? Is that because they are not as good? You could use some RDS crews (Wirral)

Are RDS fire-fighters trained to deal only with the simpler incidents or can they deal with all incidents? (Wirral)

Do the RDS crews have a definite standard of performance? (Liverpool)

Why not use RDS in rural areas? (Sefton)

Impact of previous reductions?

It's gone from 37 to 33 to 28 so what number of incidents haven't been attended to? How many times have you been able to get to in time? (Wirral)

Why not make more reductions previously?

There's not much difference in performance with 28 and 33 fire engines, so why did you choose 33 last time rather than 28? (Wirral)

Stress on firefighters?

Is the reduction to 28 going to put stress/pressure on the fire-fighters? (Knowsley)

Risk from further migration/development in Liverpool

If you have 28 fire-engines, it will be hard to manage the increased risks in Liverpool due to international migration – there will be about 30K more people coming in (Sefton)

What about the expansion of Liverpool docks – is that higher risk?

Potential for more/less than 28?

Is the 28 fire engines a definite number now – is it fixed at that? (St Helens)

Changes necessary given budget reductions

It is a matter of redistributing resources in the light of risk – it's an inevitable challenge to be managed (St Helens)

We take it as a 'fact of life' in current times... (Knowsley)

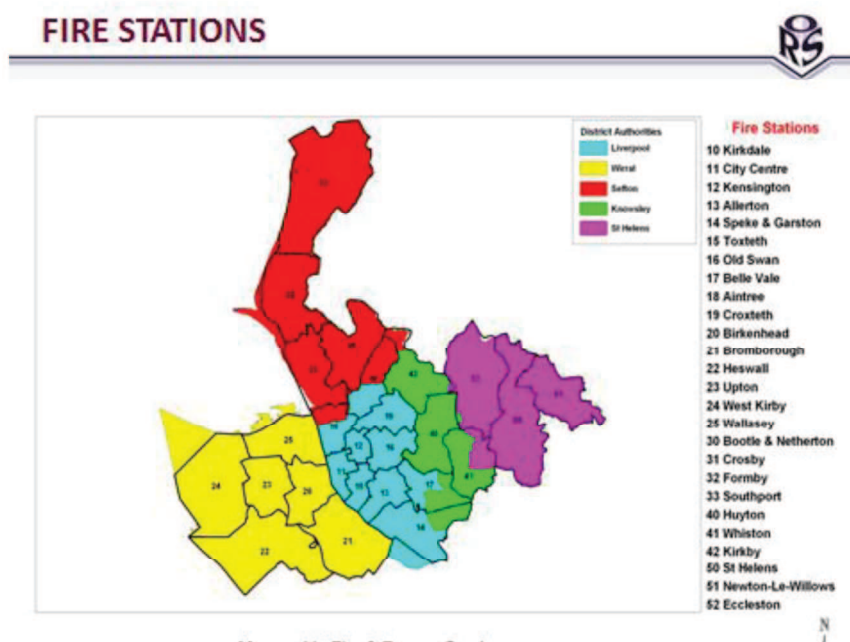
Not necessarily such a big change

The 33 included seven LLARs and now there are only four of them – so it is not such an acute change (Wirral).

17. Overall, the participants were able to accept the reduction of fire engines in the context of the financial constraints, though no formal 'vote' was taken on this issue. Some alternative courses of action were mentioned as worthy of serious consideration by the Fire Authority – such as reducing marginally the number of fire-fighters on each fire engine or using RDS crews on quieter stations – but these did not command general support. There was also a suggestion that the change was less radical than it appears initially, due to the reduction in the number of low activity and risk stations (LLARs).

Maintaining 26 Fire Stations

18. The distribution of fire stations was reviewed based on the following map:



19. Participants were asked whether MFRA should maintain its current 26 fire stations (which would be mainly one-pump) or opt for, say, 16 (mainly two-pump) stations. It was explained that the 16-station model is more financially efficient – due to the possible sale of sites, the reduced maintenance costs and some crewing economies; whereas the 26-pump model allows for greater community involvement and somewhat better response times for the first fire engine. It was also mentioned (but not discussed) that there is the possibility for two of the 26 stations to be ‘merged’ thus yielding a total of 25.

16 stations is too few – but is there an intermediate number?

The fire service is an emergency service for a reason – it is ludicrous to reduce to 16 – it’s unbelievable and we feel passionately about retaining these services so we need to speak out (Liverpool)

To go from 26 to 16 is a big reduction indeed – with massive implications! (St Helens)

Why did you choose a possible reduction of 10 rather than say 5? (Wirral)

Closing 10 stations is an awful lot – but you could consider maybe closing say 5 of the most expensive stations (St Helens)

Where did the 16 idea come from – it seems a very big jump – what about a reduction of say 5? (Liverpool)

Did you do an analysis for reductions by one or two stations that would have less impact? (Liverpool)

Is there an intermediate figure that is acceptable – like, say, 20 fire stations? How has the figure of 16 been derived? (Knowsley)

Retaining 26 will help maintain response times/attendances

We need the first crew as quick as possible and 26 helps to do that – I found that when we had a house fire! (Wirral)

What would the response time be with 16 stations – how much longer? [2.30 seconds] – And what is the difference in fatalities or casualties (St Helens)

If you send 3 pumps to some calls, you will have to use more stations in order to provide the resources – and if that was from 16 stations it would be significantly longer (St Helens)

Response time is god! That's what matters if you're waiting for the fire engine (Liverpool)

Safety has to come first! Maintain the current response times (Knowsley)

What would response times be with 16 fire stations? (Knowsley)

I agree because reducing the stations will erode public confidence and people will be concerned (Knowsley)

Cutting the stations is not desirable when we need several fire engines to attend incidents quickly (Sefton)

Less controversial to maintain 26

The public would prefer to keep 26 (Wirral)

How would you decide which stations might close? It would cause a lot of protest! (St Helens)

How would 10 stations be chosen? (Knowsley)

Future flexibility and funding

There would be no going back if we cut to 16 – we should keep them if we can (Wirral)

If you reduced to 16 stations, then it might even reduce our grant again – on the grounds that we need less funding! (Knowsley)

Potential to sell stations

Would you be able to sell 10 stations if you ran with 16? (Wirral)

Are we stuck with the PFI stations? How many will there be in total? (Liverpool)

Changing perspectives in consultation

We do seem to have moved from the personal side to the money and numbers approach – there has been a change of emphasis with less nostalgia for the fire service to considering the harsh reality (Wirral)

Some other suggestions

Have fire engines got to be based at fire stations – could they not be based, fully crewed, at more strategic locations, like the ambulance service? (Sefton)

Would it save money if we had more systematic cross-border agreements? (Sefton)

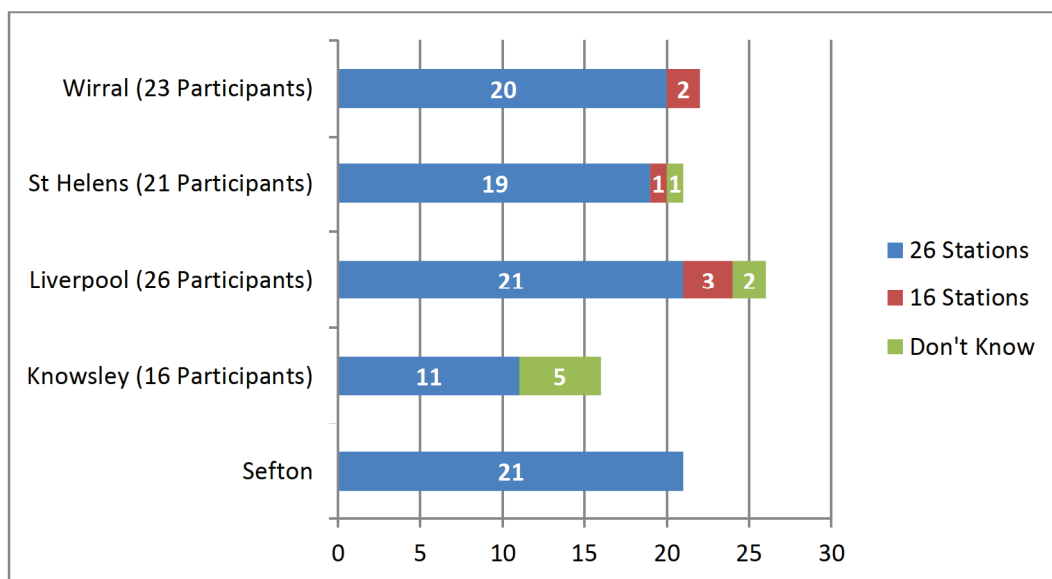
Reasonable to make reductions

Why do you want to keep more stations than are necessary? You should have only what you want! We don't really need 26 community stations (Wirral)

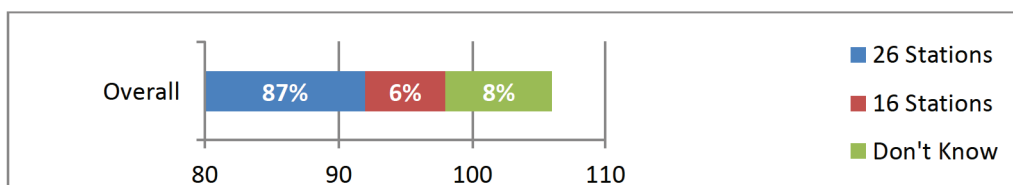
The new stations, like Kirkdale, can be quite close to some other older stations, like Crosby (Sefton).

20. Overall, there was overwhelming support for maintaining 26 fire stations currently. The balance of opinion in each forum was as follows:

Is it reasonable to maintain 26 fire stations? (by Forum)









Is it reasonable to maintain 26 fire stations? (overall by percentage of participants)

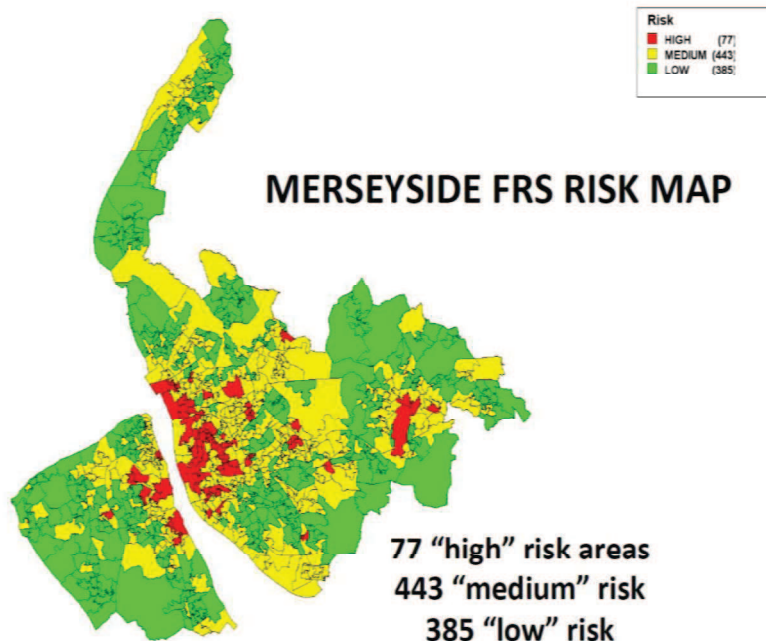


21. Overall, for those who expressed an opinion, the ratio of those in favour of maintaining 26 rather than reducing to 16 was about fourteen to one.

Response Time Standards

22. A considerable time was devoted to the discussion of response time standards in the context of the pre-2004 national statutory standards, MFRA’s graduated response standards (based on risk levels) and the last forums’ clear preference for a single, undifferentiated all-Merseyside standard.
23. The graphic used to explain the pre-2004 national standards is shown below. It was explained that the statutory standards related only to fire incidents and derived from World War Two experiences of incendiary bombing in British cities – so the standards gave considerable emphasis to industrial and commercial property concentrations rather than to residential dwelling.
24. The risk map was also used to explain the MFRA’s response standard: “to attend at least 90% of life-risk incidents with the first fire engine within 5 minutes 59 seconds in high risk areas; within 6. Minutes 59 seconds in medium risk areas; and within 7 minutes 59 seconds in low risk areas”.

HOME OFFICE STANDARDS OF FIRE COVER	
RISK CATEGORY	FIRE BRIGADE ATTENDANCE
CATEGORY 'A' Built up areas in large cities containing large commercial and industrial premises or high rise property where there is a strong chance of fire spread.	  TWO PUMPS WITHIN 5 MIN THIRD PUMP WITHIN 8 MIN
CATEGORY 'B' Areas in towns and cities such as smaller industrial areas, extensive shopping centres and factory estates	  FIRST PUMP WITHIN 5 MIN SECOND PUMP WITHIN 8 MIN
CATEGORY 'C' Extensive areas of residential dwellings such as terraced property, blocks of flats or light industry/commercial	 ONE PUMP WITHIN 8 TO 10 MIN
CATEGORY 'D' Consisting of rural property, villages and farms	 ONE PUMP WITHIN 20 MIN

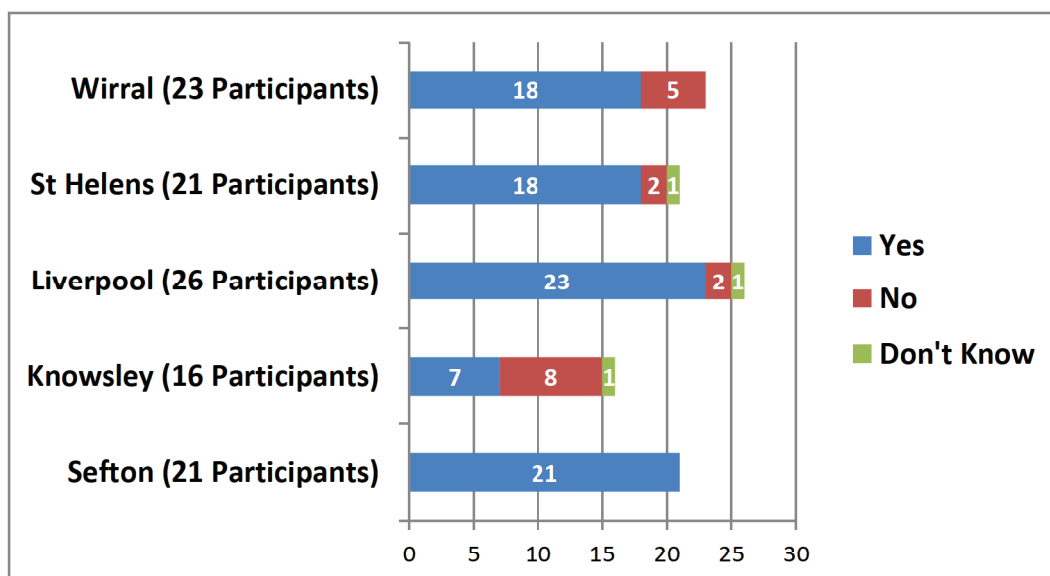


25. In order to provide further context, participants were reminded that the previous five forums had very much supported the principle of specifying a revised MFRA response time standard in terms of “attending at least 90% of life-risk incidents within a given time period” (though at that stage no particular time period was determined). The balance of opinion on this matter in the **2012 Forums** is shown on the next page.

VIEWS OF 2012 FORUMS RESPONSE TIME STANDARD FOR LIFE RISK INCIDENTS “To attend 90% of life incidents within given time (eg 8 minutes) with at least one fire engine – but with no specific standard for the second engine’s attendance time”			
	Reasonable	Unreasonable	Don’t Know
Wirral	19	0	1
Knowsley	13	3	0
Liverpool	11	10	1
St Helens	18	2	1
Sefton	23	0	1
OVERALL	84	15	4

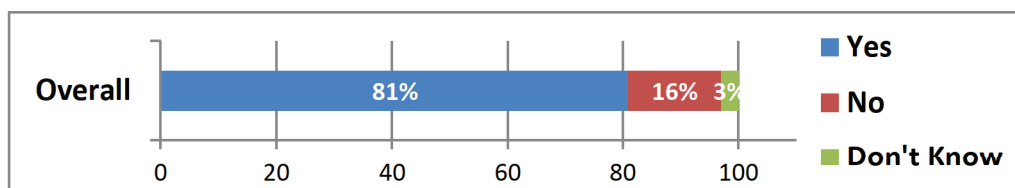
26. Within this context, the March 2013 forums were asked to discuss the proposal that MFRA should adopt a new standard to cover all life-risk incidents expressed as “For the first fire engine to attend at least 90% of all life-risk incidents within 10 minutes”.

2013 Forums on Proposed Standard – “For the first fire engine to attend at least 90% of all life-risk incidents within 10 minutes” by Forum



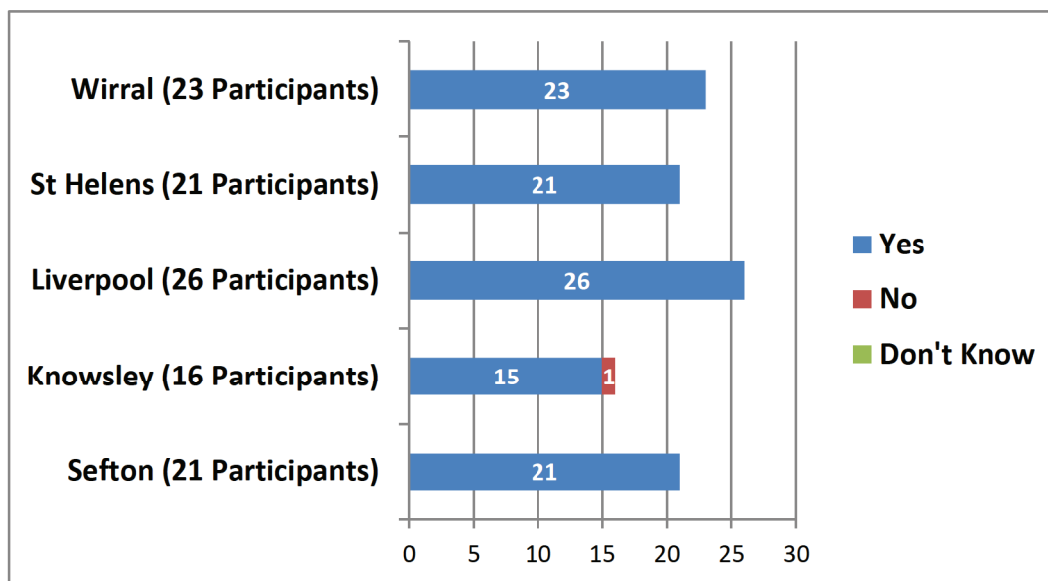
27.

2013 Forums by percentage of Forum respondents



28. Interestingly, in the May 2012 Forums the overall ratio in favour of an overall single response target for Merseyside to those against was about six to one, while in the March 2013 Forums (for the proposed target of attending 90% of life risk incidents with the first fire engine within 10 minutes) the overall ratio of those in favour to those against was about five to one – consistent and big majorities in both cases.
29. These comparable majorities are significant because the “example target time” mentioned by the facilitator in 2012 was “attending 90% of life risk incidents within 8 minutes” whereas the actual target proposed by MFRA in 2013 was “attending 90% of life-risk incidents within 10 minutes”. In other words, in the context of the full discussion and examination of the issues, the lengthening of the proposed time by two minutes made little difference to people’s views.
30. A more detailed comparison of the 2012 and 2013 opinions on response standards shows that opinion was divided only in Liverpool in 2012 (whereas the other areas were in favour of an overall standard), whereas in 2013 opinion was divided only in Knowsley and there were big majorities elsewhere, including Liverpool. These ‘variations’ reflect the fact that this was a qualitative exercise and the Forums do not (and cannot) achieve a statistically representative quantitative sample.
31. As well as confirming the target response times, the Forums also reviewed MFRA’s *average* response times – which, with 28 fire engines and 26 stations, are projected to be 5 minutes 22 seconds for the first fire engine to attend and 9 minutes 15 seconds for the second fire engine to attend life-risk incidents (compared respectively with 5 minutes and 15 seconds for the first fire engine and 6 minutes 47 seconds for the second fire engine (assuming 33 fire engines)).
32. People were understandably concerned about the slower second pump attendance, but they were able to accept the overall situation as not unreasonable. The balance of opinion is shown on the next table.
33. The chart clearly shows that there was considerable satisfaction with the projected average response times in all the five Forums – with unanimous support in all except one.

2013 Forums satisfaction with the projected average response times based on 28 fire engines at 26 stations



34. The various comments made and questions raised in the 2013 Forums are important in providing a deliberative context for the findings summarised above – so we have reproduced them below, once more under some section headings for clarity.

Practical or operational questions

*What does the first fire engine do while the second one is still getting there?
(Wirral)*

What can the first fire engine do? (St Helens)

*What determines low and high risk areas? Is it mainly social- or incident-related?
(Wirral)*

What causes the delay for the second fire engine? (Wirral)

How long does it take for the fire to become unmanageable? (Wirral)

Have you modelled the future incident levels over the next five years? (Wirral)

Will this standard apply for all incidents or only for life risk cases? (St Helens)

Who records the response times and how are they kept as records? (St Helens)

*How does the proposed response time compare with others around the country?
(Liverpool)*

Do you monitor the response times constantly and accurately? (Liverpool)

Who sets the standard? Can the authority over-rule the officers? (Liverpool)

*When you had 12 fire engines at one incident, what happened to all the other fire stations – were they alerted and when do you need to go outside the county?
(Liverpool)*

Response standards

Are the response standards based on the proposed 26 stations? (Wirral)

*Has the 10 minute response time been influenced by the reduction in engines?
(Liverpool)*

I don't know what difference five minutes will make on the standard? (Wirral)

*What is the evidence for the effect of marginally different response times?
(Knowsley)*

*What is the ratio of lives lost in 10 minutes compared with 15 minute response
times? (Sefton)*

*Does the 2.5 minute longer response time of the second fire engine make a real
difference? (Sefton)*

How realistic is it to achieve this standard – can you achieve it? (St Helens)

*It has to be a time limit that is good enough and a percentage that is high enough
to give confidence (Knowsley)*

*The target needs to be made simpler – and people can be misled by targets that
seem too short – so they then get stressed if they're waiting (Knowsley)*

Publishing response standards

*If you publish 10 minutes as your standard many members of the public won't
understand the averages – so they will be concerned – so is there a danger in
publishing your standard? The public doesn't know what a standard incident is
(Knowsley)*

*It is good to have an average time recorded, but it is dangerous to publish them
(Knowsley)*

*This has been well explained and seems to make sense because we now
understand it (St Helens)*

The explanation of the radius has helped – and the averages are good (Sefton)

Is a standard really necessary?

*Is the target really important when we know they will get there as fast as they
can? (Knowsley)*

Average times

*Average times can be misleading – because there can be a very wide range of
times and some could be much more (Wirral)*

How wide is the variation in response times? (St Helens)

*I see a danger in having such a difference between our times in Liverpool and the
outlying areas... where will have times over 10 minutes? (Liverpool)*

Prevention may not be effective in some areas

The FRS has taught some areas very well, but other areas might be less interested in prevention and education (Wirral)

Possible changes at Huyton/Whiston

Who pays for the new station at Prescott? (Wirral)

Will you dispose of the Huyton site? How will the money be spent? (Wirral)

If you were redesigning the overall locations, does it not make sense for more of the Wirral stations to be merged? Surely that would be more cost effective? Is it not feasible to merge some Wirral stations? (Wirral)

Reasons for finding proposals unacceptable

If you have to save £10M, do you mean it is reasonable to sacrifice 12 people nationally with the longer response times? (Wirral)

How long does it take a person to die with smoke? 10 minutes can seem like 10 hours (St Helens)

Is it actually good enough to get to fires within 10 minutes? (Knowsley)

Could a standard like this legitimise a reduction in resources in future? (Liverpool)

Reasons for finding the proposals acceptable

The target seems reasonable (St Helens)

You are constrained by the budget – so I am happy it is the best it could be...I have seen it in this light! (St Helens)

They are big reductions [in resources], so I thought the effect would be much bigger in practice – but all this seems reasonable (St Helens)

You seem to have excellent management and co-ordination of the response services and I can see why the 10-minute target can be used as a trigger for bringing in support services through dynamic cover (Sefton)

Deployment of fire engines - suggestion

Could you have the fire engines out 'patrolling' and kitted-up at the busier times of day – so they were even quicker? This is what they do in America in some places (Knowsley)

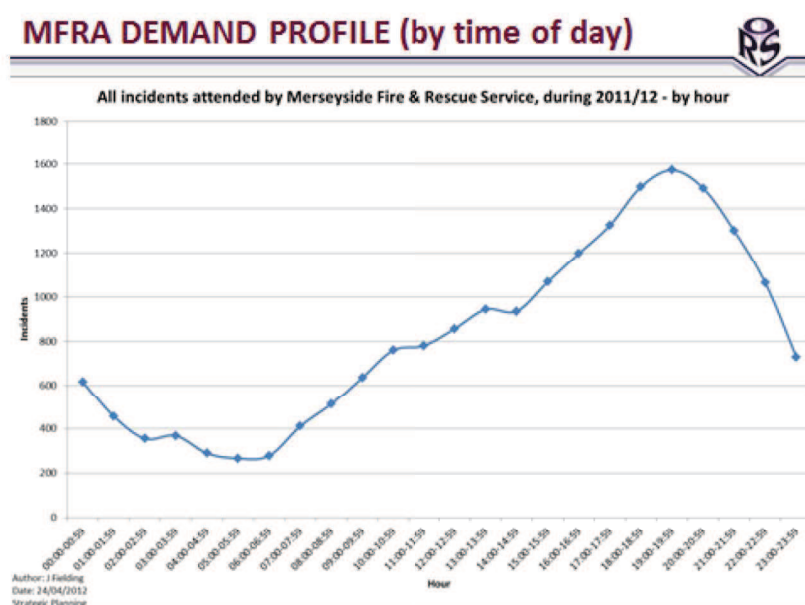
Shift System, Work Routines and Fire-fighter Productivity

35. It was explained to the Forums that the current “2/2/4” shift system is subject to two main inefficiencies:

It allows considerable ‘down time’ – for example, about 8.5 hours in total for each 15-hour night shift

The current 6pm shift change time is inefficient since it disrupts late afternoon and early evening prevention and protection work and requires overtime payments for fire-fighters who go to incidents shortly before the end of their day shift and consequently over-run their shift ending time.

36. The following graph was used to show that the current 6pm shift change time ‘clashes’ with the about the busiest time in each 24 hour period.



37. In this context, it was explained that the shift change time could be revised to achieve a better match with demand on the service and that the amount of down-time could be reduced significantly if MFRA adopted a shift system based either two 24-hour or four 12-hour shifts in each 8-day period. The issues around these ideas were discussed in detail.
38. There certainly some who felt that these issues were not really appropriate for public discussion – since they should be agreed between the management and the fire-fighters or their unions – whereas others took considerable interest in the issues and wanted to comment.
39. Overall, there was very general agreement that it was desirable to review the shift system with a view to making changes, but people were less happy with two 24-hour shifts than with four 12-hour periods – mainly on the ground that the former seems too long to be safe or family-friendly. There was emphatic support for changing the 6pm shift change time.

40. Some typical comments, shown under some main headings for clarity, were as follows.

Issues not suitable for public discussion

It should be the fire-fighters' decision – what would they think about it? (St Helens and a recurrent sentiment)

Firefighters don't necessarily have the information to judge what is the best overall shift system. (Knowsley)

24 hour shifts

What is the rest period within each 24 hour shift? (Wirral)

My only concern is that people might be tired on a 24-hour shift system (St Helens)

Shifts can change everywhere and you are trying to be flexible and family-friendly (Wirral)

I've done shift work and I found it tiring because the shifts get changed you cannot catch up properly (St Helens)

24-hour shifts are anti-social (St Helens)

It's well known that people can make mistakes while working long hours (St Helens)

Would these shifts be tiring for the fire fighters? (Liverpool)

The 24-hour shift is ridiculous in that the attention span is shorter (Liverpool)

We should use objective evidence from psychologists for this (Liverpool)

I'd be concerned about 24-hour shifts – it's tiring if they have a big incident (Knowsley)

Is the 24-hour shift family-friendly? Why have such long shifts here? (Sefton)

Does effectiveness reduce in 24 hour shifts? (Sefton)

Are they on the go for a full 24 hours? Are they on call during their break? (Sefton)

It's not what you can pack in the time...it's really about effectiveness at major incidents when you have been fatigued at previous incidents meanwhile (Sefton)

Longer incidents

What happens if you have a long incident – would you change crews? (St Helens)

If a firefighter goes to an incident for 4 hours, how soon could s/he come back on full duty? (Liverpool)

Consistent day or night shifts

It's better to work a block of days OR nights but not mix them two by two (St Helens)

People have worked shifts for many years – you need a steady fixed pattern – not to keep changing from days to night (Liverpool)

Some regularisation is better – we need to avoid switching from days to nights in the same week – that is less effective definitely (Sefton)

Further options and ideas

It would be harder to do a 12-hour shift by day – so the night should be shorter – I work shifts and know this. The driver has to be fresh for incidents and it would be good not to be asleep at night (Liverpool)

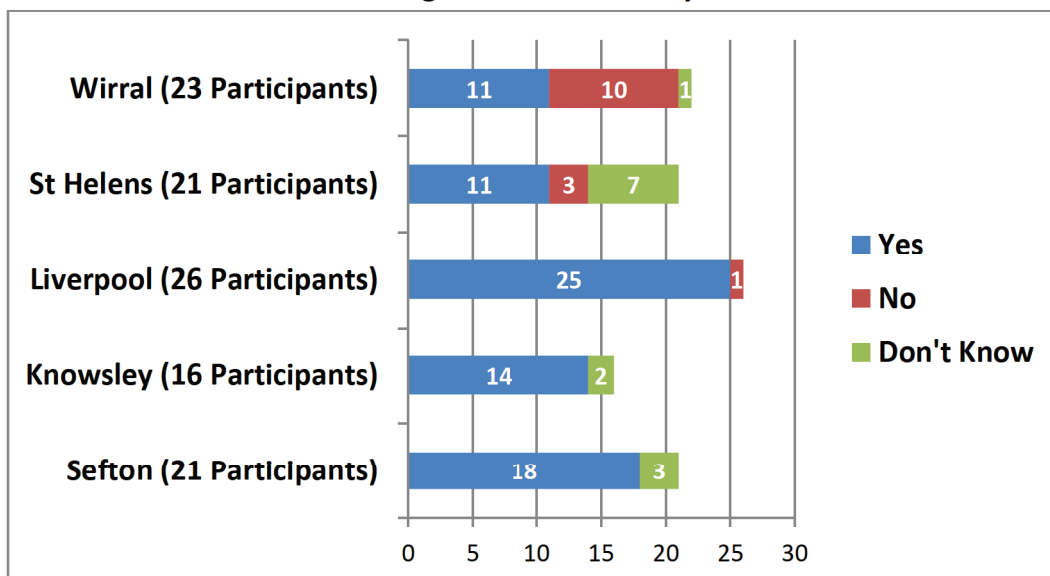
Could you have a three-shift system? (Liverpool)

Do they all have to be on the same shift pattern? Could you have different shifts by option for fire fighters? (Sefton)

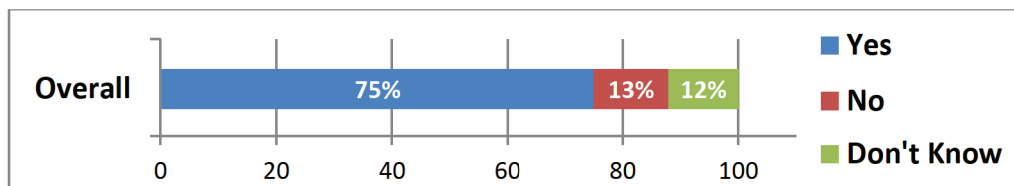
Why not have 8-hour shifts – that’s how companies are typically run, like the police? (Sefton)

41. Following detailed questions and discussion in each Forum, the participants in most of the meetings were almost unanimous that it was desirable in principle to change the current shift system and to consider both the 12-hour and 24-hour options outlined. Wirral was the only Forum in which opinion was divided on the principle of changing the shifts: the other four Forums supported the idea. The following charts illustrate the balance of opinions.

2013 Forums on: “Should MFRS change its current shift system?”



2013 Forums on: “Should MFRS change its current shift system?” by percentages of respondents



42. However, as many of the quotations above show, there was a clear preference for 12-hour rather than 24-hour shifts. In Liverpool, for example, the almost unanimous support for 12-hour shifts swung to the same level of opposition to the prospect of 24-hour shifts. In Sefton and Knowsley, opinion was broadly divided on the merits of 24-hour shifts, but there was overwhelming support for change based on 12-hour shifts.

Conclusions

43. It would be foolish to expect unanimity on the very big issues discussed in these Forums – partly because of their complexity and partly because different people will make different assessments of how compelling are the financial circumstances that MFRA faces. Moreover, in order to encourage free discussion, rather than just the passive acceptance of unchangeable proposals, the financial position was explained clearly but it was not used as a repeated justification of every proposal: participants were invited to assess proposals on their general merits, albeit within a very constrained position.
44. Nonetheless, there was considerable agreement that MFRA’s proposals are a reasonable and responsible reaction to the budget reductions it is facing. The main consultation outcomes were agreement that:
- In current circumstances it is reasonable to reduce to 28 crewed fire engines
 - 26 fire stations should be maintained – (87% of participants agreed)
 - The proposed all Merseyside response time target (of attending 90% of life risk incidents within 10 minutes with the first fire engine) is reasonable – 81% of participants agreed and only in Knowsley was opinion divided
 - Almost everyone approved the average response times
 - Four out of five Forums thought the current shift system should be changed to improve efficiency – but opinion was divided in Wirral.