

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY BUDGET MEETING		
DATE:	26 FEBRUARY 2015	REPORT NO:	CFO/008/15
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	PHIL GARRIGAN	REPORT AUTHOR:	DEB APPLETON
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT GROUP		
TITLE OF REPORT:	ALLERTON FIRE STATION CONSULTATION OUTCOMES		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX A:	CONSULTATION NEWSLETTER
	APPENDIX B:	2ND CONSULTATION DOCUMENT
	APPENDIX C:	CORRESPONDENCE
	APPENDIX D:	QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS REPORT
	APPENDIX E:	FOCUS GROUPS/FORUM REPORT
	APPENDIX F:	QUESTIONS FROM MEETINGS
	APPENDIX G:	EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of the outcomes of the twelve week public consultation process regarding the draft proposal to close Allerton fire station.

Recommendation

2. That Members:
 - a) Note the outcomes of the comprehensive and informative Allerton public consultation
 - b) take full and carefully considered account of those outcomes when considering report CFO/010/15 relating to the proposals for fire cover in Liverpool.

Introduction and Background

3. On 2nd October 2014 the Authority approved:

“..... a 12 week public consultation on the proposed closure of Allerton fire station and the relocation of the Allerton fire appliance to Old Swan to be crewed on a wholetime retained basis.”
4. The Authority also approved a detailed consultation plan. The plan included an online questionnaire, an externally facilitated deliberative focus group and a forum, two open public meetings, a stakeholder meeting and several staff

consultation meetings. The Integrated Risk Management Plan consultation event on 12th January 2015 also considered the methodology behind the proposed closure and the Authority's approach to the consultation, adding another level of public scrutiny to the Authority's proposals.

5. The consultation closed on 26th January 2015.

Summary of outcomes

6. Very low numbers of the public responded to this consultation compared to the Wirral merger consultation with 28 people attending the two public meetings, 4 partners attended the Business Breakfast and 65 responding to the questionnaire.
7. The deliberative focus group and forum (25 people) agreed that the proposed closure of Allerton fire station was reasonable given the financial challenges facing the Authority.
8. In addition, the IRMP Forum attendees (22) also thought that the methodology for the selection of Allerton and the consultation process was logical and reasonable under the circumstances.
9. The Stakeholder (public/private sector) meeting was broadly supportive of the closure proposal.
10. The number of the people that attended the public meetings was very low (20 attended the first meeting, 8 the second). Although there was some support for the Authority's situation (particularly at the second meeting), several attendees appeared to be generally opposed to the proposal. However, it is important to note that some of those opposed focused on the station as a perceived heritage site because of its connection with the Beatles' song 'Penny Lane'. Some said that they understood the financial imperative, reduced number of incidents and relative over provision in Liverpool, but were still opposed because of the Beatles connection or because they generally opposed cuts to public services.
11. The 65 people that responded to the questionnaire were in the main opposed to the proposal (61.5%), but again, there were very few responses in relation to the population of the Allerton station area. Survey respondents accounted for 0.1% of the population of the total station area.

Promoting and marketing the consultation

12. On 1st November 2014 an initial consultation newsletter (Appendix A) and on-line survey were published on the Merseyfire website. Facebook, Twitter and a press release were used to launch the consultation. The press release was used by the Liverpool Echo. Use of social media continued throughout the consultation period.

13. On 15th November Officers from the Service attended Allerton Farmers' Market to disseminate information regarding the consultation proposal.
14. Consultation documents were printed and distributed in the area.
15. Public meetings were held on 9th December 2014 and 15th January 2015. A focus group, forum and stakeholder meeting were also held.
16. A second consultation document was published on 2nd December 2014 specifically to address some of the frequently asked questions arising from the consultation and provide detailed information on the other options considered by the Authority. A copy of this consultation document is attached at Appendix B.
17. Some queries have been received from members of the public and have been responded to by the Chief Fire Officer and other MFRA Officers (these are attached at Appendix C).

Media Interest

18. The consultation process attracted media interest with Liverpool Echo reporting on developments and carrying readers' letters on the subject (examples available for Members to view at the meeting). The Chief Fire Officer was interviewed on Radio Merseyside to promote the consultation process and the public meetings in particular.

The consultation events

19. The consultation events that took place are detailed below. All the meetings took place at Bluecoat School on Church Road. The focus groups and public meetings took place in the evening.

2014

- 15th November – Allerton Farmers' Market
- 1st December – Focus Group
- 4th December – Forum Meeting
- 8th December – Stakeholder Breakfast Meeting
- 9th December – Public Meeting

2015

- 15th January – Public Meeting (all local councillors were emailed to inform them of this meeting)

20. The focus groups and forum were deliberative meetings (see paragraph 34 for more detail), facilitated by Opinion Research Services (ORS), the contractor for MFRA's IRMP Forums. Participants were randomly selected from the Allerton station area and invited to attend.
21. The stakeholders' breakfast meeting was promoted amongst public and private sector partners in the Allerton station area.

22. The public meetings were open meetings which anyone could attend. No one was recruited or specifically invited. They were however widely publicised as detailed above. The public meetings were listening events where people could offer their views. No vote was taken on whether or not people agreed with the proposals, because public meetings cannot be guaranteed as statistically representative of the population.
23. 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 employees attended each meeting to provide advice and organisational support.
24. In addition, the Chief Fire Officer and other Officers met with councillors and local MPs prior to the consultation period.
25. The Chief Fire Officer also met representatives of the Allerton Residents Association.

Outcomes from the consultation

On line survey

26. Full analysis of the online questionnaire results can be found at Appendix D. The following paragraphs provide an overview:
27. In total there were 65 responses to the survey
28. It is worth noting that over 51,384 people live in the Allerton station area, so the response rate to the questionnaire is a little over 0.1% of the overall population.
29. The majority of respondents (61.5%, 40 from 65) felt that the proposal to close Allerton station was unreasonable, 36.9% (24 from 65) felt proposals were reasonable.
30. When feedback from solely members of the public (rather than MFRS staff or partners) is taken into account the proportions change to 58.2% (32 from 55) of respondents stating the proposed closure was unreasonable and 40% (22 from 55) feeling the proposal was reasonable.
31. Based on the postcode submitted by only 45 respondents, the majority of respondents (20) lived within the L18 post code area which is where the station is sited. Following this with 7 responses each were the L25 and L19 postcodes. The L17 postcode area which makes up a large part of the western fringe of the Allerton station area received zero responses.

Focus groups and forum

32. Full information about the focus groups and forums can be found at Appendix E. The following paragraphs provide an overview:
33. As Members will recall, the consultation meetings reported here followed an earlier all-Merseyside ‘listening and engagement’ process held in January 2014 that considered a wide range of options for MFRA in the context of significant cuts to its budget over the course of this Parliament. Having taken account of those earlier meetings and all the other available evidence, MFRA formulated the current draft proposals for Liverpool.
34. The Liverpool consultation meetings used a ‘deliberative’ approach to encourage members of the public to reflect in depth about the Fire and Rescue Service, while receiving and questioning background information and discussing the proposals in detail. Each of the meetings lasted for at least two-and-a-half hours and in total there were 47 diverse participants (22 at the IRMP Forum).
35. The attendance at the focus group was not as high as that seen in Knowsley with fewer people attending than expected. Forum attendance compared well with attendance at other similar meetings.
36. Within the on-going programme of consultation by MFRA low attendance is unusual, since attendance expectations are normally exceeded and there seems no single or simple explanation of why focus group attendance was lower in this particular programme. As usual, the participants were recruited by random-digit telephone dialling from the ORS Social Research Call Centre. Having been initially contacted by phone, they were written to – to confirm the arrangements; and those who agreed to attend then received telephone or written reminders shortly before each meeting. Such recruitment by telephone is normally the most effective way of ensuring that all the participants are independently recruited.
37. Despite the lower than normal attendance for the focus group, there was a diverse range of participants from the local areas.

Meeting	Number of attendees
Allerton Focus Group	4
Liverpool Forum	21
Merseyside IRMP Forum	22

38. Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the meetings that took place gave diverse groups of people from Liverpool, the opportunity to comment in detail on MFRA’s proposals for the City’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.
39. A significant part of the meetings explored any proposals that the participants might have for alternative ways of making the savings. MFRS’s response to

these alternatives is captured in the second consultation document (Appendix B).

40. The key overall findings regarding the draft proposals (a) to close the fire station and (b) to reduce the number of fully-crewed wholetime engines by moving the Allerton fire engine to Old Swan while also making it a reserve or resilience vehicle available for recall (subject to a 30-minute delay) in exceptional conditions are shown below.

In the Liverpool forum

In each case by a ratio of two-to-one, the participants accepted the proposals, namely that:

It is reasonable and acceptable to close a fire station in principle Allerton is the most appropriate station to close. It is reasonable and acceptable to make Allerton's fire engine a reserve or resilience vehicle while moving it to Old Swan. No specific equality and diversity issues were raised.

In the Allerton focus group

The participants all accepted that it is reasonable and acceptable to close a fire station and that Allerton is the most appropriate. They were not quite unanimous about the fire engine, for there was one 'don't know'.

In the all-Merseyside forum

The participants unanimously accepted that:

It is reasonable and acceptable to close a fire station in principle Allerton is the most appropriate station to close It is reasonable and acceptable to make Allerton's fire engine a reserve or resilience vehicle while moving it to Old Swan MFRA's evidence base for its conclusions was appropriate and properly used The methodology used for considering the selection of possible stations for closure was appropriate and should continue to be used.

Overall assessment

While the Allerton focus group was small, it is significant that the members were almost totally unanimous about all the proposals, after being given every opportunity to understand and question the information on which the draft plans were based.

While a third of the 21 Liverpool forum members were opposed, two-thirds accepted all the proposals readily after discussing the evidence.

The all-Merseyside forum accepted the proposals for Allerton unanimously and endorsed the evidence-base and methodology used in selecting that particular station.

Stakeholder meeting and open public meetings

41. 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.

42. This was followed by an invitation for people to ask questions of the MFRA managers who attended the event. Appendix F details the questions raised at the meetings and the responses given.
43. The stakeholders meeting was attended by 4 people and generated a number of questions (see Appendix F for details)
44. The public meetings were not particularly well attended, 20 people attended the first meeting and 8 attended the second (with at least 2 people attending both).
45. Most of those people attending the meetings did express concern that the Authority should be in the position of having to propose a station closure in Liverpool and some also felt that Allerton station had cultural significance due to the Beatles' connection. A number of staff attended the first meeting in particular and were opposed to the proposal. However, some people (particularly at the second meeting) said that the case presented made it difficult to oppose the proposal, even though they did not want to see any stations close.

Other meetings with interested groups and individuals

46. The Chief Fire Officer and other Officers held a number of meetings with the local MP's and councillors before the consultation period to ensure they were fully sighted on the proposals and the financial reasons as to why they were necessary. This included the following:

19 th Sept.	Mayor Anderson
29 th Sept.	Telephone call Luciana Berger MP
29 th Sept.	Ward Councillors (Cllrs R O'Byrne, I Jobling, D Hughes)
30 th Sept./17 th Oct.	Cllr Kemp
3 rd Oct.	Telephone Call Maria Eagle MP

Correspondence and requests for information

47. Unlike the Wirral consultation, the Service received only six individual requests for information from the public and 2 from MPs. There were no Freedom of Information requests received. The questions and the responses provided are attached at Appendix C.

Staff consultation

48. The Liverpool District Management Team consulted with staff in the District during 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 took place between managers on the District and each watch where the Chief Fire Officer's public meeting presentation was used.

49. This resulted in crews having a full understanding of the proposals when they engaged with the public during the period (they also distributed consultation documentation). In general the staff, although not supportive of station closures themselves, understood the reasons behind the proposals. Some staff also attended the public meetings.

Equality and Diversity Implications

50. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached at Appendix G.

51. One respondent to the survey expressed concern about the potential for hate crime in relation to the area's Jewish community. This has been taken forward as an action in the EIA.

52. Demographic data regarding the questionnaire and ORS facilitated meeting attendance is detailed below:

Questionnaire:

53. Concerning **age** and **gender** 61 valid responses were analysed with 37 (60.7%) male respondents and 24 female (39.3%). Concerning age there was a wide distribution of ages to have responded to the survey with the 40-49 being the most common group with 16 responses, followed by the 50-59 and 60-69 groups. There were zero responses from the below 19 group.

54. Of the 60 valid responses to the question concerning **disability**, 7 of the 60 (11.7%) declared they were disabled.

55. Concerning ethnicity 95.2% (60 from 63) of respondents were from a White background with 4.8% (3 from 63) preferring not to say.

Focus Group and Forums:

	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Limiting long-term illness
Liverpool Forum	Male: 12 Female: 9	16-34: 3 35-54: 6 55+: 12	Non-White: British: 1	Yes: 7 No: 0
Allerton focus group	Male: 3 Female: 1	16-34: 1 35-54: 1 55+: 2	Non-White: British: 0	Yes: 1 No: 0

All-Merseyside Forum	Male: 14 Female: 8	16-34: 5 35-54: 10 55+: 7	Non-White British: 2	Yes: 2 No: 20
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Staff Implications

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

Legal Implications

57. The extensive twelve week consultation in the manner that it has been conducted ensures that MFRA has fully complied with legal requirements and best practice guidelines.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

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

Room hire and refreshments (four meetings)	£1550
British Sign Language interpreters	£100
Allerton Farmers' Markets stall	£35
Focus group and forum facilitation	£7258.75

Total – £8943.75

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

60. 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 Liverpool to enable them to make an informed decision about how to proceed.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

61. 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 proposals. There are no health and safety or environmental implications arising from this report.

Contribution to Our Mission: *Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Firefighters*

62. Entering into a period of twelve weeks meaningful consultation in Liverpool 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.

BACKGROUND PAPERS
