



Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

Liverpool Fire Cover Consultation

Consultation Document 2

December 2014

Introduction

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) is consulting on a draft proposal to close Allerton fire station and relocate its fire appliance to Old Swan fire station. The consultation began on the 1st of November and will close on the 26th of January 2015. A newsletter was published on the 1st of November and this second document provides additional information to help people respond to the consultation.

Why the Fire and Rescue Service has to change

MFRA is responsible for providing fire and rescue services for Merseyside's 1.4 million people at 26 fire stations across the five districts. This currently includes delivering fire and rescue services in Liverpool from ten stations; Kirkdale, Liverpool City, Kensington, Allerton, Speke & Garston, Toxteth, Old Swan, Belle Vale, Aintree and Croxteth.

Over the last four years MFRA has had to make savings of £20 million as a result of Government spending reductions and now the Authority is required to make a further £6.3 million of savings in 2015/16. It is also possible that future savings will be required – whichever party is in power: possibly up to £9.1 million in 2016/17 and up to £20 million in total by 2020.

MFRA has already had to make significant reductions in its support services and back office staff. The number of firefighters MFRA employs has reduced from 1,400 to 764, with fire appliances reducing from 42 to 28 across the county. All but two stations have only one appliance. What has not changed in more than 20 years is the number of community fire stations (26) and the Authority will not be able to afford to maintain all of them in the future.

To save £6.3 million in 2015/16 the Authority aims to deliver £2.9 million from support services (such as Finance, Human Resources and Estates management) and technical areas such as debt financing. The remaining £3.4 million would then come from our emergency response and this will require the equivalent of at least four station mergers or outright closures.

The Authority is making these changes reluctantly, but the situation is such that the existing number of fire stations cannot be maintained in the future.

The options considered

Before making proposals to change fire cover in Merseyside the Authority considered a number of other options and consulted with the public about them.

The options were:

- Some outright station closures.
- Increasing the number of “Low Level of Activity and Risk” (LLAR) stations.

- Some station mergers.
- Crewing some stations only during the day.
- Using community retained firefighters to crew some stations.

The merger of stations was recognised by the public as the best option given the circumstances; with least impact on operational response. The closure of stations was preferred over changes to the way fire stations and fire engines are crewed (because they understood that it is firefighters and fire engines that save lives, not the fire stations).

Following this consultation, three possible mergers were identified as offering opportunities to replace old buildings with new facilities in locations which offer the best incident response coverage possible in the circumstances. The draft proposals were to:

1. Close the stations at Huyton and Whiston while building a new station at Prescott;
2. Close the stations at Upton and West Kirby while providing a new station at a central location (initially the Frankby Road site);
3. Close the stations at Eccleston and St Helens while providing a new station in the proximity of St Helens Town Centre.

Each of these merged stations would have two fire engines. In each case, one fire engine would be crewed 24/7 (as now) while the other would be a “reserve”, or “back-up” vehicle to be crewed by “wholetime retained” firefighters on a 30-minute recall basis for periods of exceptionally high demand.

A fourth merger in Liverpool has also been considered but, given the age and proximity of stations, it is proposed that outright closure of a station would be the most sensible option.

The Fire and Rescue Authority believes that each of these changes may be made safely and will provide significant savings. The information on the next page gives more detail about why the Authority has approved the draft proposal for Allerton.

The information below is a detailed explanation of the alternative options to station mergers or outright closure and the operational rationale as to why these have been considered and discounted by the Chief Fire Officer at this time.

Context

1. *Paragraph 3.2 of the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority scheme of delegation places the following responsibilities on the Chief Fire Officer:*

To control all matters of the day to day administration of the Fire & Rescue Service which shall include taking and implementing decisions that are:-

*(a) Concerned with maintaining the operational effectiveness of the Service,
(b) Matters incidental to the discharge of the Authority's functions which fall within a policy decision taken by the Authority.*

2. *The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England directs that "The Fire and rescue authority must hold their Chief Fire Officer to account for the delivery of the fire and rescue service".*
3. *The Chief Fire Officer is therefore responsible for all operational matters and is held to account by the Authority for decisions taken in this regard.*
4. *In 2015/16 the Authority must make savings of £6.3 million in addition to the £20 million savings required as a result to cuts in the Authority budget over the period 2011/12 – 2014/15.*
5. *The Authority has increased its council tax by the maximum amount it can (2%) without undertaking a referendum. A referendum is estimated to cost £1m.*
6. *The Authority has also identified all the non-operational savings available to it and adopted them in full. These total £2.9m. However, this still means that of the £6.3m savings, £3.4m must be delivered from operational response. This equates to a reduction of around 90 wholetime equivalent (WTE) Firefighter posts. These posts will be lost through natural turnover as firefighters retire.*
7. *The Authority currently has 26 fire stations and 28 fire appliances. Of the 26 fire stations, 24 have one fire appliance and two, Kirkdale and Southport, have two fire appliances. Kirkdale is the Operational Resource Centre for the Authority housing all of the non-Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) special appliances (which are located at Croxteth with the USAR team). The second appliance at Kirkdale operates as a support appliance to the special appliances. Southport has two fire appliances because of its geographic location and the travel distances involved for additional appliances responding from elsewhere on Merseyside.*

8. *Of our 26 stations, 10 are designated as Key Stations. From these stations we can provide a 10-minute response to all areas of Merseyside on 90% of occasions (our response standard).*
9. *The number of wholetime Firefighters employed directly equates to the numbers of fire appliances that can be staffed for an immediate response by fully trained Firefighters and therefore the numbers of fire stations the Authority can operate.*
10. *The removal of 90 Firefighter posts will result in the loss of 4 wholetime fire appliances. It is the view of the Chief Fire Officer that the Authority should maintain two appliances at Kirkdale and Southport, because of the location of Southport and the fact that Kirkdale is the Operational Resource Centre for Merseyside. In maintaining two appliances at Kirkdale and Southport the Authority can only staff enough appliances to maintain 22 fire stations on a wholetime basis. The Authority could, as an alternative, maintain 26 stations through altering the crewing arrangements on specific stations or across the Service. The reasons why these options have been discounted by the Chief Fire Officer in favour of station mergers or outright closures are detailed in paragraphs below.*
11. *The operational logic for station mergers is to close two adjacent stations (which each currently house one appliance on a wholetime basis) and build a new station (that would house one wholetime appliance and one appliance staffed on a wholetime retained basis). Building the new station at a location in between the two existing stations would deliver the best response times achievable in the circumstances from the one remaining wholetime appliance. Such an option is possible in Knowsley, Wirral and St Helens due to the age and proximity of the stations.*
12. *In each of the merged stations, the second appliance would be crewed on a “wholetime retained” basis. “Wholetime retained” crewing in this instance means wholetime Firefighters having a second retained contract whereby they provide cover on their days off to respond and crew the second appliance within 30 minutes of an alert - because a 30-minute response time delay would attract volunteers from sufficient numbers of existing staff to make the system viable.*
13. *The retained (second) appliance would only be called in during periods of high operational demand and they would not be used for immediate response to incidents in the station area. Its function is as part of a strategic reserve, not as a first-line response until such time as the crew had been called in, which would take up to 30 minutes. The advantage of this option is that it uses wholetime firefighters rather than community retained firefighters (see paragraphs 33 – 39 below).*
14. *There are no viable merger options in Liverpool due to the age and proximity of the stations across the city. An outright closure and the relocation of the wholetime appliance to be crewed on a wholetime retained basis at a*

neighbouring station has been proposed in these circumstances as it delivers the least impact on response times of all of the achievable options.

Low Level of Activity and Risk

- 15. The Low Level of Activity and Risk (LLAR) duty system is currently in operation at four of the Authority's 26 stations. The system consists of a 12-hour wholetime day shift followed immediately by a 12-hour retained night shift (spent off the station) where the crew must respond to an incident within 1 minute 54 seconds of an alert thus maintaining a comparable alert to mobile time as achieved by other wholetime staff during their night-time rest period.*
- 16. Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to LLAR would deliver a saving of 8 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order to deliver the same savings as for a station merger, 3 wholetime stations would need to convert to LLAR. Whilst this option would maintain an immediate emergency response (assuming it was possible to secure accommodation for the night-time retained period separate from the station but within a 1 minute 54 seconds alert to mobile time) it is less resilient than wholetime crewing as the same staff cover the 12-hour wholetime period and the 12-hour retained period. For example, if a crew attends incidents during the night-time period they will then require a period of stand down time to recover during the day shift, meaning they are either not available to provide operational response or unable to undertake prevention work or normal scheduled duties. As the number of appliances reduces the ability for Fire Control to not mobilise LLAR appliances during the retained period is also reduced meaning they will attend more incidents and potentially no longer meet the Low Level of Activity and Risk threshold.*
- 17. To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response, the Authority would need to convert 12 wholetime appliances to LLAR in addition to the existing 4 LLAR appliances. This would result in 16 of the Authority's 28 appliances being crewed in this way.*
- 18. In order to comply with working time regulations the Authority would be required to provide separate accommodation for the retained duty period that is within a 1 minute 54 second response from the stations in question. The cost of building accommodation at existing LLAR stations has been around £300k. Converting 12 appliances to LLAR would therefore require a capital spend of around £3.6m for accommodation. Of the 10 key stations only one, Formby, is currently crewed LLAR which is as a result of its geographic location and the very low numbers of incidents on the station ground and number of appliance mobilisations. In any other circumstances a key station would not be crewed on the LLAR duty system. Of the stations not designated as "key" a number have appliance mobilisation numbers which exceed the LLAR threshold of 825 incidents to the station area agreed in 2006 (Kirkdale, Kensington, City Centre and Birkenhead). A number also do not have sufficient space within the curtilage of the station to build separate accommodation necessary to make the 1 minute 54 seconds alert to mobile time during the retained period (Toxteth and Aintree).*

19. *There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew an additional 12 LLAR appliances. Whilst the Authority could recruit Firefighters directly on to the LLAR system this would result in crews on LLAR stations with a disproportionately high number of inexperienced Firefighters until such time as they were able to demonstrate competence in role. It would also invariably result in existing wholetime firefighters who did not wish to volunteer for the LLAR duty system being placed at risk of compulsory redundancy.*
20. *It is for these reasons that LLAR has not been proposed by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness at this time.*

Day Crewing

21. *The Authority does not currently operate the Day Crewing duty system at any station on Merseyside. This system consists of a wholetime day shift (typically 10 hours duration) immediately followed by a 14-hour retained night shift where a response is made by a Firefighter from home within 5 minutes of an alert.*
22. *Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to Day Crewing would deliver a saving of 10.8 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts (assuming a 10% retaining fee). In order to deliver the same savings as a station merger would, 2 wholetime stations would need to convert to Day Crewing.*
23. *To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response the Authority would need to convert 8 wholetime appliances to Day Crewing in addition to the existing 4 LLAR appliances. This would result in 12 of the Authority's 28 appliances either on Day Crewing or LLAR crewing. Day Crewing is less resilient than wholetime crewing for similar reasons as for LLAR as the same staff cover the 10 hour wholetime period and the 14-hour retained period. As the number of appliances reduces the ability for Fire Control to not mobilise LLAR or Day Crewing appliances during the retained period is also reduced.*
24. *This option would introduce a 5-minute delay in responding from 8 appliances for 14 hours each day. Assuming the 5-minute delay in responding in to the station and given the geography of Merseyside, it is likely that the nearest wholetime appliances would be able to attend an incident in at least the same time as the Day Crewing appliance if not quicker during the retained period.*
25. *There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew 8 Day Crewing appliances. Whilst the Authority could recruit Firefighters directly on to the Day Crewing system this would result in crews on Day Crewing stations with a disproportionately high number of inexperienced Firefighters until such time as they were able to demonstrate competence in role. It would also invariably result in existing wholetime firefighters who did not wish to volunteer for the Day Crewing duty system being placed at risk of compulsory redundancy.*

26. *It is for these reasons that Day Crewing has not been proposed by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness. If, as expected, the Authority faces further cuts beyond 2015/16 this option may have to be reconsidered as a means of maintaining capacity during the daytime period.*

Day only crewing

27. *The Authority does not currently operate day only crewing at any station on Merseyside. This system involves Firefighters crewing the station for a 12-hour wholetime day shift only in order to maintain capacity to undertake training and community safety activities.*

28. *Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to day only crewing would deliver a saving of 12 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order to deliver the same savings as the station merger option, 2 wholetime stations would need to convert to day only crewing.*

29. *To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response the Authority would need to convert 8 wholetime appliances today only crewing in addition to the existing 4 LLAR appliances. This would result in 12 of the Authority's 28 appliances either on day only crewing or LLAR crewing.*

30. *Whilst an immediate response to incidents would be achieved during the 12-hour day shift there would be no response at all during the 12-hour night-time period from day only crewed stations.*

31. *There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew 8 days only appliances. Whilst the Authority could recruit Firefighters directly on to day only crewing this would result in crews on day only stations with a disproportionately high number of inexperienced Firefighters until such time as they were able to demonstrate competence in role. It would also invariably result in existing wholetime firefighters who did not wish to volunteer for day only crewing being placed at risk of compulsory redundancy.*

32. *It is for these reasons that day only crewing has not been proposed by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness at this time. If, as expected, the Authority faces further cuts beyond 2015/16 this option may have to be reconsidered as a means of maintaining capacity during the day time period. It should be noted that these appliances would in all likelihood be used as a pan-Merseyside resource to, for example, stand in at key stations to facilitate the key appliance crew attending the Training and Development Academy for crew-based training. It would make more financial sense therefore to relocate the day crewed only appliance permanently to a key station thus allowing the Authority to make permanent savings on premises overheads (on average around £100k per year) through closing the non key station.*

Retained

33. *The Authority does not currently operate retained only crewing at any station on Merseyside. This system involves members of the community who live or work within 5 minutes of a fire station volunteering to be available for up to 120 hours per week for a retaining fee equivalent to 10% of a wholetime Firefighter's salary.*
34. *Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to retained would deliver a saving of 22 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order to deliver the same savings as for a station merger 1 wholetime station would need to convert to retained crewing.*
35. *To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response the Authority would need to convert 4 wholetime appliances to retained in addition to the existing 4 LLAR appliances. This would result in 8 of the Authority's 28 appliances either on retained or LLAR crewing.*
36. *Pursuing this option would require the Authority to either seek volunteers from existing Firefighters who would be required to live within a 5-minute response time of the station (wholetime retained) or for the Authority to recruit members of the public who live or work within 5 minutes of the station.*
37. *There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew 4 wholetime retained appliances on a 5-minute recall. That being so, the Authority would need to recruit almost a full crew of retained Firefighters. It is the view of the Chief Fire Officer that a retained Firefighter does not have sufficient contact (training) time within the Grey Book (Firefighters' nationally agreed conditions of service) retained contract to acquire and maintain the skills of an existing Merseyside wholetime Firefighter. Also, the Merseyside Trainee Firefighter course is currently 40 weeks long and the wholetime work routine allocates in excess of 20 hours per week to on station training. A retained firefighter has approximately 2/3 hours per week contact time at station for training, development and maintenance duties). If the Authority were minded to still pursue this option they would have to accept that the retained Firefighters would not be trained to the same level as their wholetime counterparts and it would take a long period of time to train the crew to a position whereby they were deemed fit to ride. Additionally to maintain retained appliance availability a minimum of 4 members of the crew including a driver and an officer in charge would have to be permanently available within 5 minutes of the station.*
38. *With 3 hours contact time each week retained Firefighters would not be able to undertake any amount of community safety work.*
39. *Assuming the 5-minute delay in responding in to the station and given the geography of Merseyside, it is likely that the nearest wholetime appliances*

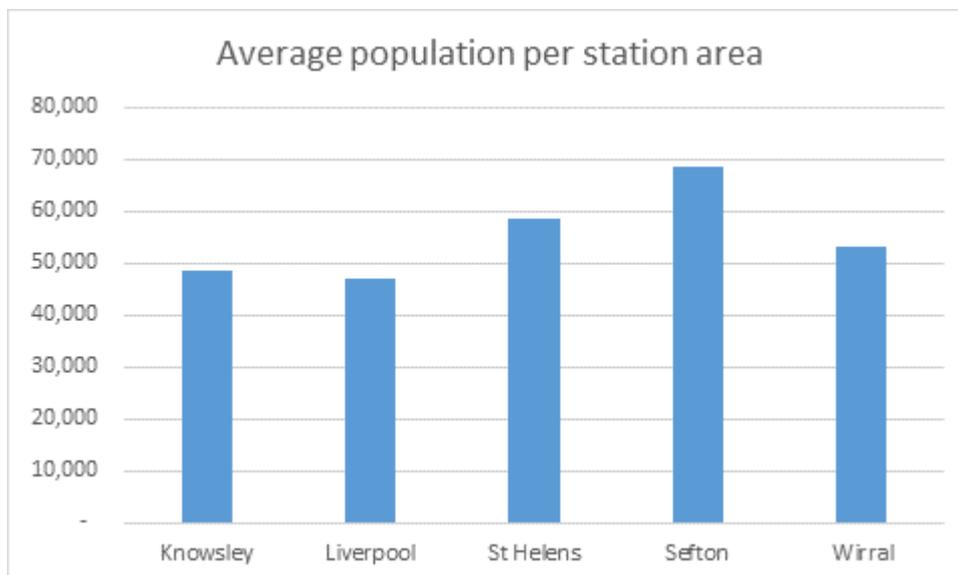
would attend an incident in at least the same time as the retained crew if not quicker.

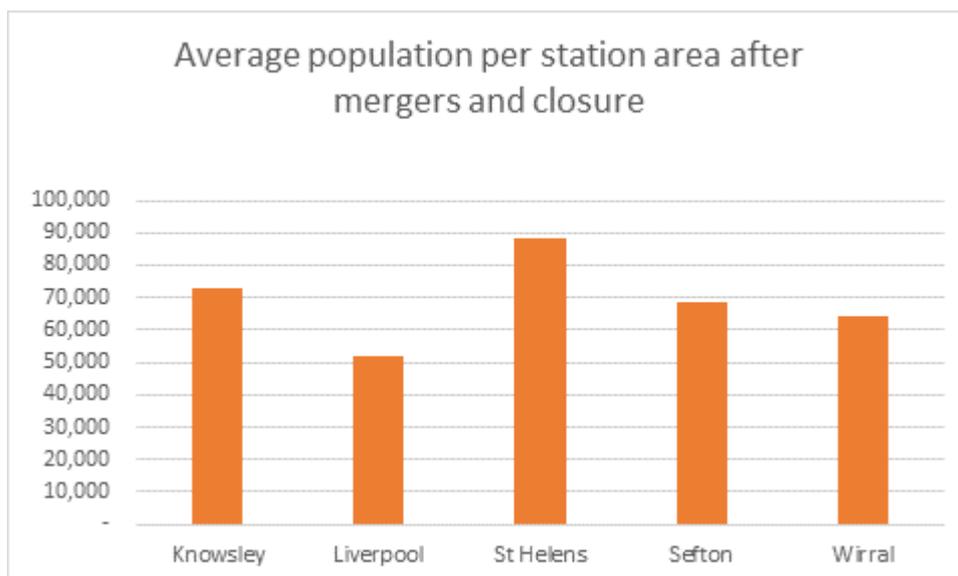
It is for these reasons that retained crewing has not been proposed by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness at this time.

Why Allerton is the Authority's proposed option for closure.

The draft proposal is to close Allerton Fire Station and relocate the Allerton fire appliance to Old Swan Fire Station, where it would be crewed on what is known as a wholetime retained basis. More detail on this system has been provided earlier in this document, but in summary, this would involve our existing wholetime firefighters providing cover on two of their days off, providing a 30-minute response to stations. This fire appliance would only be used during periods of very high demand and will not offer an immediate emergency response.

Merseyside has a greater density of fire stations than any other fire and rescue service and this density is most evident in Liverpool which has 10 stations in a relatively small geographic area. Liverpool stations also provide services to fewer people per station than in any other Merseyside district, as is shown in the graph below:





Our analysis of Liverpool stations shows that because Liverpool has so many stations and those are located so close to each other, the closure of any station makes little or no difference to overall emergency response performance.

Of the ten stations, however the closure of Kensington, Aintree or Allerton would have the least impact on operational response. There is no discernible difference between these three stations in terms of overall performance.

Because the effect on performance is minimal whichever of the three stations is closed, we then considered the number of calls in each station area. Kensington has a greater number of incidents occurring in the station area and the fire appliance is used more than the appliances at Aintree and Allerton.

Aintree has a greater number of incidents occurring in the station area and the fire appliance is used more than the appliance at Allerton.

The tables below illustrate this:

Incident Numbers by Station Ground

Station	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Grand Total
13 - Allerton	513	396	280	1189
18 - Aintree	875	641	569	2085
12 - Kensington	1137	946	929	3012

Appliance Mobilisations

Appliance	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	Grand Total
13 - Allerton	611	724	717	2052
18 - Aintree	909	982	1021	2912
12 - Kensington	2103	1040	956	4099

Difference Between 2004/05 and 2013/14

Station	2004/05	2013/14	Difference	% Difference
13 - Allerton	791	280	-511	-64.60%
18 - Aintree	1267	569	-698	-55.09%
12 - Kensington	1962	929	-1033	-52.65%

The analysis also demonstrates that neighbouring stations are so closely located together that they already provide good cover for Allerton and would continue to do so if Allerton was closed.

In Liverpool, the merger of stations would be less beneficial as there are no pairs of older stations which could be closed and a new one built to replace them.

Allerton is also one of the older fire stations and would require significant expenditure to bring it up to modern standards.

The potential impact on response times to life risk incidents

Over the last decade, incidents across Merseyside have reduced by 55% (18,428 incidents). Allerton has seen a fall of 64.6% (from 791 incidents in 2004/5 to 280 incidents in 2013/14 – the highest reduction across all three stations).

If Allerton station is closed, our most up-to-date analysis shows that the average response to life risk incidents (such as house fires and road traffic collisions) in the station area would increase from the current 5 minutes 9 seconds to a predicted 5 minutes 56 seconds*. The national average for house fires is 7 minutes 24 seconds.

But when an incident does occur, particularly where there is a risk to life, the Authority wants to continue to provide the fastest response possible.

Allerton station area is well covered by Old Swan, Speke Garston, Belle Vale and Toxteth.

How you can share your views during the consultation period

The Authority is interested in how reasonable the public and other stakeholders consider our plans for Allerton are given the major cuts we continue to face. We are continuing with our extensive consultation programme in Allerton before any final decisions are made.

This will involve public meetings at 7pm on the 9th of December and 7pm on the 15th of January, both to be held at Bluecoat School, Church Road, Allerton, L15 9EE.

There will also be a focus group, a meeting of our Liverpool consultation forum and a stakeholders meeting. In addition, representatives from the Fire and Rescue Service attended an Allerton Farmers Market on Saturday the 15th of November to provide information.

Our online survey remains available on www.merseyfire.gov.uk on the page: <http://surveys.merseyfire.gov.uk/surveys/allerton/allerton.htm> and you can also email consultation2@merseyfire.gov.uk or write to us at Allerton Consultation, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Bridle Road, Bootle, L30 4YD.

***The attendance times have been revised from those previously published to include data up to 31st October 2014. The results are a marginal improvement on those previously published.**