



Merseyside  
**FIRE & RESCUE  
SERVICE**

---

# **Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority**

## **WEST WIRRAL FIRE COVER CONSULTATION**

**March 2015**

## **Introduction**

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) has begun a 12-week consultation on proposed changes to its emergency response cover in West Wirral. The consultation runs from 2<sup>nd</sup> March to 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

The decision to enter into a second round of consultation regarding proposals to merge West Kirby and Upton fire stations was taken by the Authority after considering the comments and responses made to the initial consultation, which ran from October 2014 to January 2015.

The second public consultation will consider two options that were agreed by the Fire and Rescue Authority on January 29, 2015:

- A)
  1. The closure of West Kirby and Upton fire stations, the building of a new station at Saughall Massie Road.
  2. The re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime appliances as "wholetime retained" (with a 30-minute recall), whilst;
  3. Inviting suggestions for other suitable alternative options to deliver the savings required as a result of further cuts to the Authority budget.
  
- B)
  1. The outright closure of West Kirby as the alternative to merger.
  2. The re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime appliances as "wholetime retained" (with a 30-minute recall), whilst;
  3. Inviting suggestions for other suitable alternative options to deliver the savings required as a result of further cuts to the Authority budget.



**West Kirby Fire Station**

The outcomes of the consultation will be reported back to the Fire and Rescue Authority in June 2015.

The consultation process will involve public meetings at locations in Saughall Massie, Upton and West Kirby, a stakeholders' meeting at Hoylake, three focus groups and a joint forum.

**The public meetings will be held for this consultation on the following dates:**

- **Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> April, starting at 6.30pm at the St Mary's Centre, 127 Saughall Massie Road, CH49 4LA.**
- **Tuesday, 28<sup>th</sup> April, at Holy Cross Church community rooms, Woodchurch, CH49 7LS, starting at 6.30pm.**
- **Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> May, at Hoylake Parade Community Centre, Hoyle Lane, Hoylake, CH47 3AG, starting at 6.30pm.**

This consultation document is being distributed in public buildings, local stores and businesses across West Wirral. It is available on our website [www.merseyfire.gov.uk](http://www.merseyfire.gov.uk) along with an online survey at [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/saughall\\_massie](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/saughall_massie) You can email us at [consultation2@merseyfire.gov.uk](mailto:consultation2@merseyfire.gov.uk) or write to us at Wirral Consultation, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Bridle Road, Bootle, L30 4YD.

## **Why is Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service having to change?**

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) is responsible for providing fire and rescue services for Merseyside's 1.4 million people at 26 stations across the five districts. This currently includes six Wirral stations: Birkenhead, Bromborough, Heswall, Upton, Wallasey and West Kirby.

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

MFRA has already made significant reductions in its support services and staffing. The number of firefighters MFRA employs has reduced from 1,400 to 764 over the period, with fire appliances reduced from 42 to 28 across the county. All but two stations now have only one appliance.

What has not changed 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 the £6.3 million in 2015/16 the Authority has identified £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, therefore, has to 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 producing proposals to change fire cover across Merseyside, the Authority considered a number of options and consulted 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.

**(Full details of these options are provided from Page 13)**

The merger of stations was recognised by the public as the best option given the circumstances; having the 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, Greasby, 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 was proposed that outright closure of a station would be the most sensible option. Following consultation, MFRA has confirmed the closure of Allerton Fire Station.

The Fire and Rescue Authority believes that each of these changes results in the least impact on operational performance and will provide significant savings.

## **Incident Reductions**

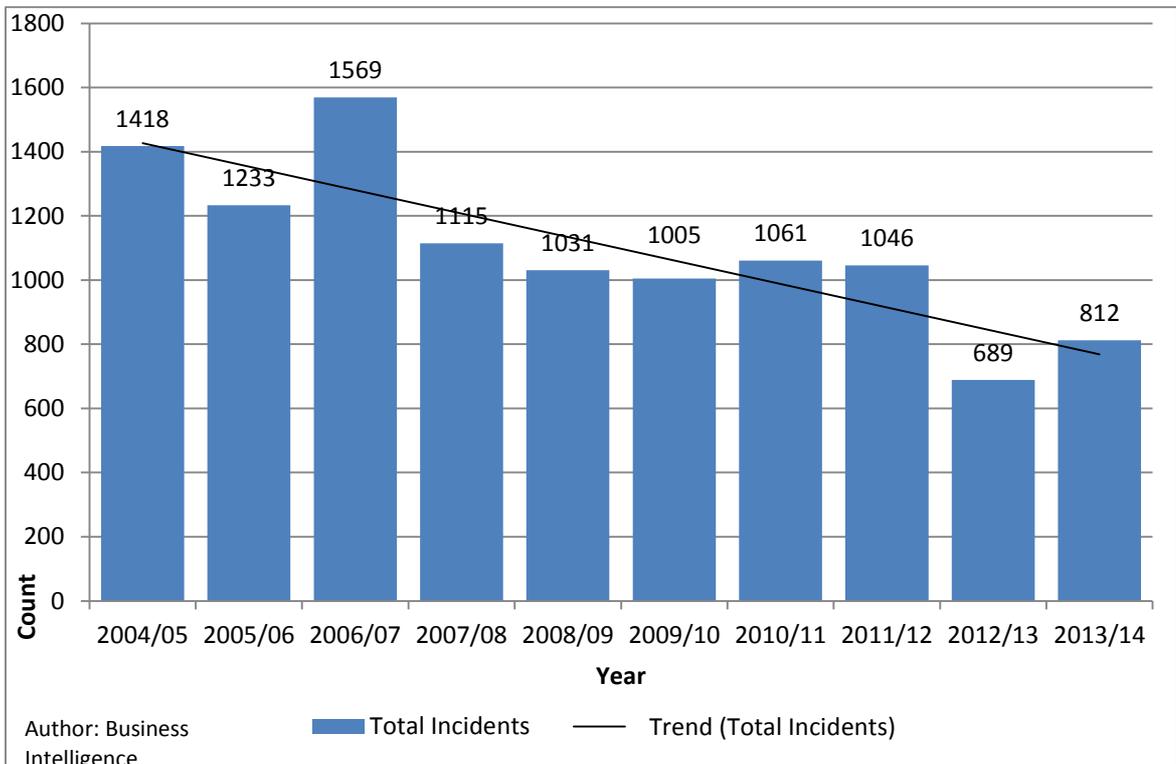
Over the last 10 years, incidents across Merseyside have reduced by 55%.

Upton has seen a fall of 47.5% (1,128 incidents attended during 2004/5 to 592 during 2013/14). West Kirby has seen a reduction in incidents of 24.1% (from 290 incidents attended during 2004/5 to 220 during 2013/14).

Over the last five years there have been two accidental fire deaths and one road traffic collision (RTC) fatality in the Upton station area. One accidental fire death and 1 RTC fatality have occurred in the West Kirby station area over the last five years.

While the number of fatalities is low, the level of risk is still high as the worst outcome from a fire or RTC is a fatality.

## **Total Incidents Attended within Upton and West Kirby between 2004/05 and 2013/14.**



## **Response implications of the merger option or outright closure of West Kirby**

### **Introduction**

How quickly a fire appliance is able to respond when a fire or other life risk incident occurs remains a top priority for Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service (MF&RS). Cuts to budgets and subsequent changes to emergency response will always have an impact on response times. The

Authority's proposal is designed to minimise the impact of the cuts and maintain as fast a response as possible to all parts of West Wirral.

## **Current response times**

The current mean average response time to a life risk incident on the West Kirby station area is **5 minutes 24 seconds**. The current mean average response time to a life risk incident on the Upton station area is **4 minutes 34 seconds**.

This is significantly quicker than the MFRA **10-minute response standard** and the national mean average response time of **7 minutes 24 seconds** which is only for dwelling fires and does not include road traffic collision.

## **Predicted response times**

### **West Kirby closure**

The mean average response time to a life risk incident in the West Kirby station area from Upton, following outright closure, would be **8 minutes 43 seconds** – with longer actual run times to Hoylake. Parts of Hoylake would not be reachable within the MFRA 10-minute response standard.

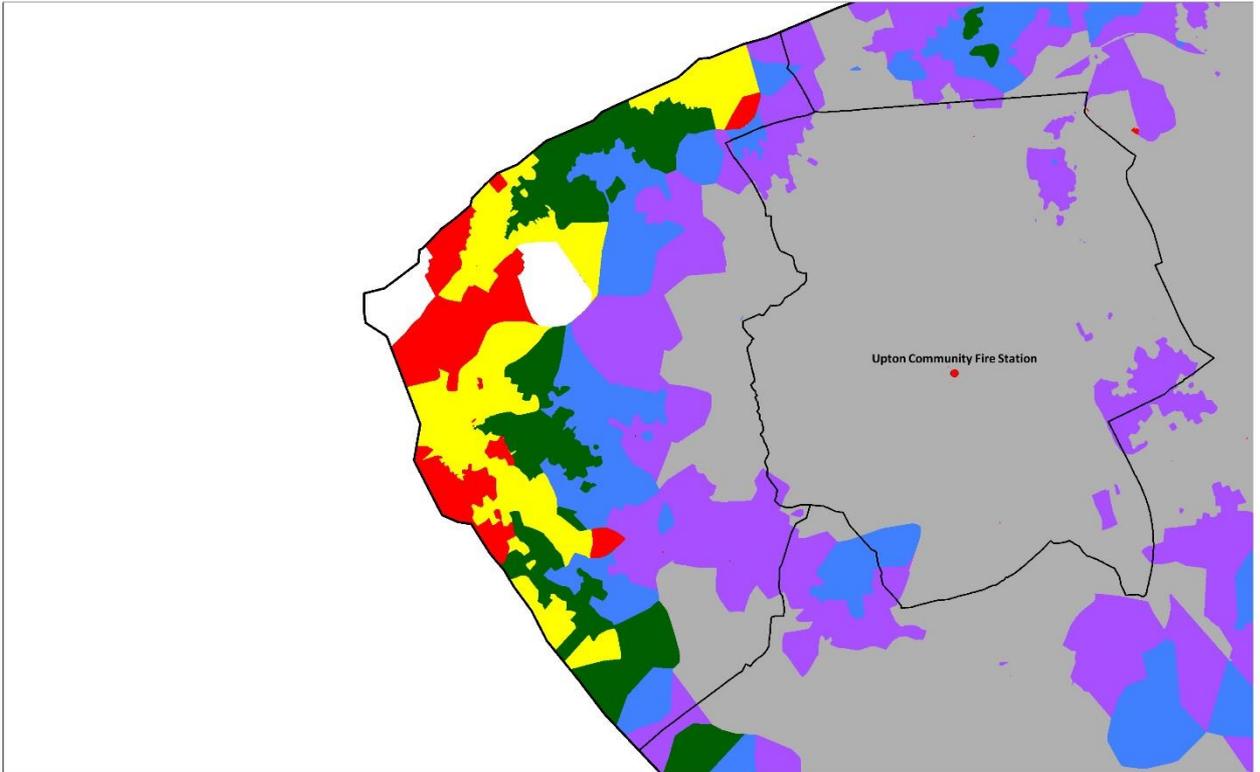
### **Merger option**

If West Kirby and Upton closed and a new station was built in Saughall Massie then the mean average run time to life risk incidents on the Upton station area would be **5 minutes 3 seconds**. The mean average run time to incidents in the West Kirby area from Saughall Massie would be **6 minutes 38 seconds, 2 minutes 5 seconds** quicker than the alternative outright closure of West Kirby Station.

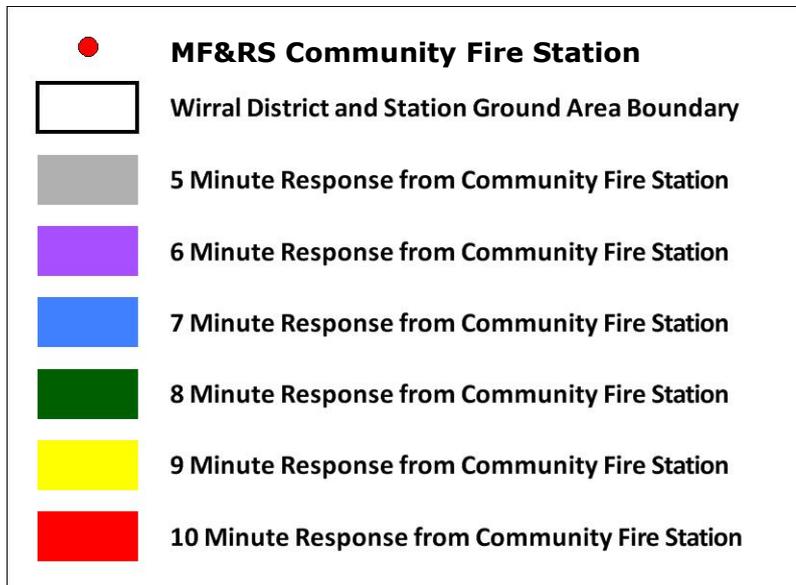
Overall, mean average response times to incidents for the combined station area of Upton and West Kirby would be **5 minutes 41 seconds**.

All the predicted response times, following a merger, remain faster than the national average.

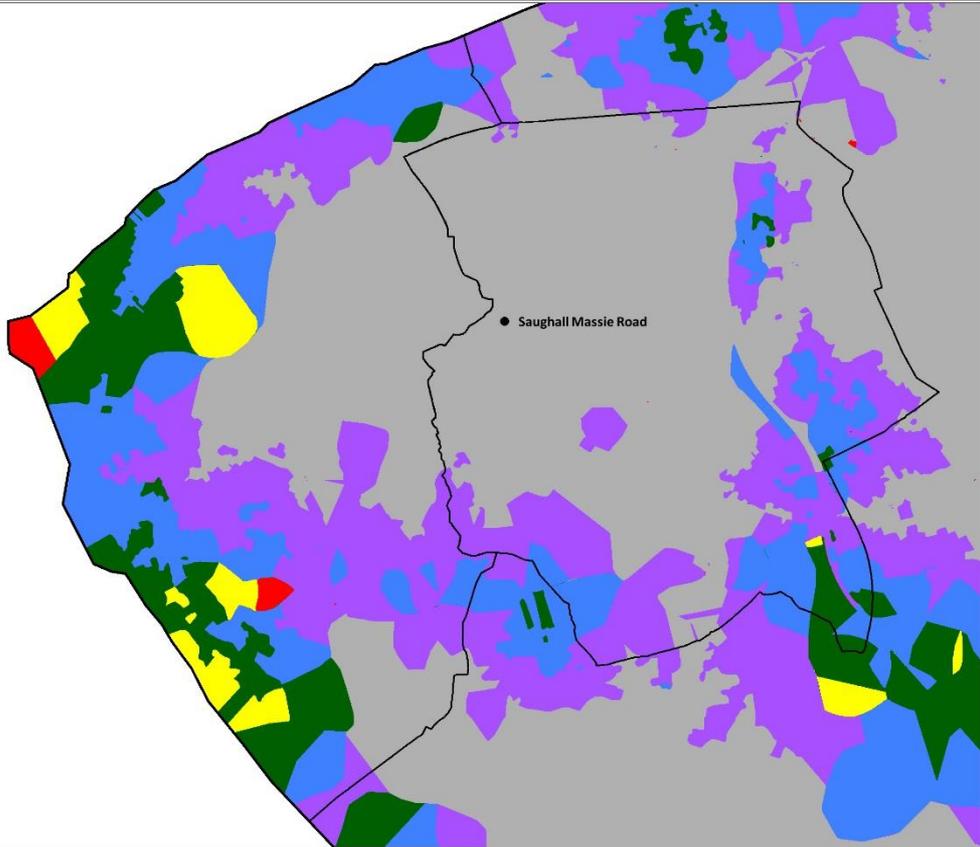
**The map below, shows the current response times on West Wirral from Upton Community Fire Station.**



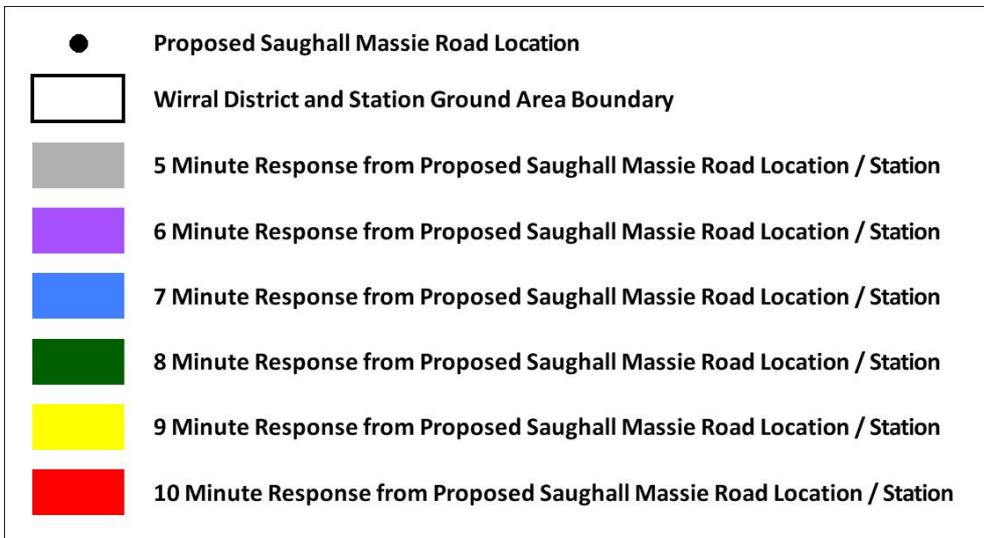
© Crown copyright and database rights 2015 Ordnance Survey 100026956.



**The map below, shows the response times to the West Kirby and Upton station areas from the proposed new station site at Saughall Massie Road.**



© Crown copyright and database rights 2015 Ordnance Survey 100026956.



# **Saughall Massie Road proposed station location**

The Fire and Rescue Authority proposal involves building a new fire station as close to the mid-point between West Kirby and Upton station areas as possible. The actual mid- point is the Three Lanes End roundabout. All the land in that area is Green Belt and with the exception of the proposed site, is in private ownership. The only land that is both close to the mid-point and available to the Fire and Rescue Authority is the proposed site on Saughall Massie Road.



## **Sketch Proposal of how the station could look**

On Pages 12 and 13 are sketch proposals to give an initial indication of how both the site and the building could look as a two-storey and single storey development.

These proposals are a work in progress and would need to be developed further so that any new community fire station would be an effective, fully

functioning operational and community facility and to ensure that its design would be sympathetic to its location.

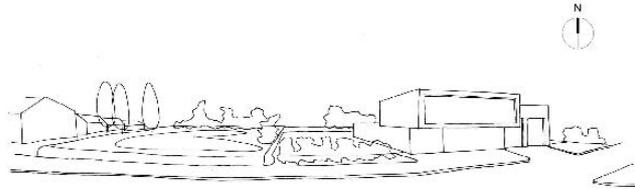
Using materials that are appropriate to the building's semi-rural location and to its proximity to the Saughall Massie Conservation area, a new fire station could be designed to integrate it into the local traditional building style in the area, while at the same time lessening its visual impact, so that it would maintain the character of its surroundings.

During this consultation, MFRA will be reviewing the developing design with the local planning authority and statutory consultees, prior to any final decision being made and to assist with this we would welcome comments from the local community.

The Service is also in discussions with the North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust (NWAS) regarding the housing of one or two ambulances and staff on the site. This would add an additional appliance bay, but no decision has yet been taken on this.

**The following facilities could be included in a fire station on Saughall Massie Road:** Three appliance engine bays, training facilities for firefighters including a training tower, staff accommodation, lecture room, gymnasium, community and youth team rooms.

**Two-storey sketch proposal.**



Initial Sketch Proposal

Adjacency Diagram



Site Location Plan (not to scale)

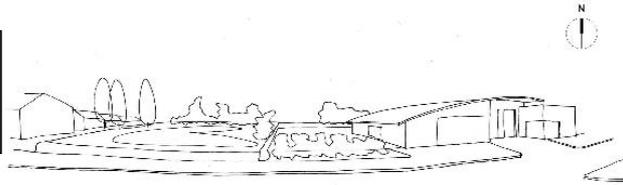


**The red arrow shows where the fire engine would exit the engine bays.**

**Saughall Massie Road.**

**Training facility.**

## Single-storey sketch proposal.



Initial Sketch Proposal

Adjacency Diagram



Site Location Plan (ref. to scale)



Site Plan - Single Storey Option

The red arrow shows where the fire engine would exit the engine bays.

**Saughall Massie Road.**

**Training facility.**

## **Summary**

For the reasons given in this document, the proposal to close both West Kirby and Upton fire stations and build a new station in Saughall Massie provide a better response to people living in the combined station areas than simply closing West Kirby.

The Authority is committed to minimising the impact of cuts and welcomes alternative suggestions about how the savings could be made. The Authority will take full account of your views before making a final decision.

## **Alternative Options Considered**

The information below gives more detail about why the Authority has approved the draft proposal for Wirral, a detailed explanation of the alternative options to closing stations and the operational rationale as to why the Chief Fire Officer has discounted them at this time.

## **Operational Context**

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.

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".

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.

The financial challenges faced by MFRA and why the changes need to be made are detailed earlier in this document.

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.

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.

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.

The proposed changes across Merseyside will result in the loss of 90 firefighter posts and four wholetime fire appliances. By 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 not been recommended at this time by the Chief Fire Officer in favour of station mergers or outright closures are detailed in paragraphs below.

## **Station Mergers**

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.

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 to provide cover on their days off to respond and crew the second appliance within 30 minutes of an alert. A 30-minute response time delay would attract sufficient numbers of existing staff to make the system viable. The retained (second) appliances 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.

## **Low Level of Activity and Risk**

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 in accommodation off the station) where the crew must respond to an incident within 1minute 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.

Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to LLAR would deliver a saving of eight wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order to deliver the same savings as a station merger, three wholetime stations would need to

convert to LLAR. Whilst this option would maintain an immediate emergency response, it is dependent on securing accommodation for the night-time retained period that is 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 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.

16 of the Authority's 28 appliances would need to be crewed in this way to deliver the £3.4 million saving.

Creating 12 more LLAR stations would require significant investment in accommodation close to the stations and would create considerable difficulties in staffing the appliances. Many existing staff would not want to work LLAR and recruiting new staff would leave LLAR with inexperienced crews.

## **Day Crewing**

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.

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, two wholetime stations would need to convert to Day Crewing.

To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response, the Authority would need to convert eight wholetime appliances to Day Crewing in addition to the existing four LLAR, appliances. This would result in 12 of the Authority's 28 appliances being either Day Crewed or LLAR crewed. Day Crewing is less resilient than wholetime crewing for similar reasons to 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 to not mobilise LLAR or Day Crewing appliances during the retained period is also reduced.

This option would introduce a 5-minute delay in responding from eight 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 Crewed appliance if not quicker during the retained period.

Recruiting staff to day crewing would have similar issues to LLAR. This option may have to be reconsidered if there are further cuts after 2015/16.

## **Day only crewing**

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.

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 two wholetime stations would need to convert to day only crewing.

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

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.

Recruiting staff to this system would have similar issues to day crewing and LLAR. This may be reconsidered if there are further cuts in 2015.

## **Retained**

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.

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 one wholetime station would need to convert to retained crewing.

To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response the Authority would need to convert four wholetime appliances to retained in addition to the existing four LLAR appliances. This would result in eight of the Authority's 28 appliances either on retained or LLAR crewing.

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.

Recruiting staff to this system would have similar issues to day crewing, day only and LLAR. No community safety work would be possible and, assuming a 5-minute delay to responding, a wholetime pump from the nearest station would probably get to the incident quicker. With far less contact with community retained staff compared to wholetime staff, training time and maintaining skills would be an issue for community retained staff.

**Thank you for taking time to read this document and for taking part in our consultation.**

This document is also available on our website [www.merseyfire.gov.uk](http://www.merseyfire.gov.uk) along with an online survey at [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/saughall\\_massie](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/saughall_massie) You can email us at [consultation2@merseyfire.gov.uk](mailto:consultation2@merseyfire.gov.uk) or write to us at Wirral Consultation, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Bridle Road, Bootle, L30 4YD.

**MF&RS urges people to have working smoke alarms on each level of your home. For free fire safety advice, including questions about smoke alarms, or to request a Home Fire Safety Check, call 0800 731 5958 or go to [www.merseyfire.gov.uk](http://www.merseyfire.gov.uk)**

