



Draft Fire Station Options for West Wirral

Report of Deliberative Consultation with Members of the Public and a Residents' Survey

June 2015

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Spin-out company of Swansea University



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Acknowledgements

Opinion Research Services (ORS) is pleased to have worked with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) on the public consultation programme reported here. In the deliberative consultation (through focus groups and a forum) the participants engaged with the issues under consideration and discussed their ideas readily; and a total of 1351 responded to postal residents surveys (577 from Upton and 774 from West Kirby); so we trust that this report of findings will contribute to service planning by MFRA at a time of serious financial constraints.

We thank MFRA for commissioning the project as part of its on-going programme of public and stakeholder engagement and consultation about its risk management and budget planning. We particularly thank the senior officers and staff who attended the sessions to listen to the public's views and answer questions. Such meetings benefit considerably from the readiness to answer participants' questions fully and frankly, as in this case.

We are grateful to all the members of the public who took part in the four meetings and residents' survey to share their views with us. Those in the deliberative forums were patient in listening to background information before entering positively into the spirit of open discussions about challenging topics, with some controversial aspects.

At all stages of the project, ORS's 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.

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Executive Summary

Commission and Background

1. ORS was commissioned by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) to conduct deliberative consultation and a residents' survey about draft options for the west Wirral fire stations. The main consultation issues were two draft options and a further draft proposal regarding the number of fire engines deployed full-time in the area:

MFRA's Draft Fire Station Options

Whether to close the West Kirby and Upton fire stations while building a new one in Saughall Massie **or** whether to locate west Wirral emergency cover at Upton while closing the West Kirby station. The former option may fairly be called a 'merger' while the latter option would simply be a closure of the West Kirby fire station.

MFRA's Draft Fire Engine Proposal

To reduce the wholetime fire engines by making one of the current two pumps a reserve or resilience back-up vehicle for periods of exceptional demand.

2. Because centralising emergency cover at Upton would lengthen response times to West Kirby significantly, compared with providing a new station at Saughall Massie, MFRA prefers the 'merger' option – even while recognising the sensitivities of developing a green belt site.

Deliberative Research

3. The four consultation meetings reported here all lasted for at least two-and-a-half hours and in total there were 49 diverse participants. The participants were recruited by random-digit telephone dialling from the ORS Social Research Call Centre. 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.
4. Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the four meetings reported here gave diverse groups of Wirral residents the opportunity to comment in detail on MFRA's draft options. Because the participants were diverse, the outcomes of the meeting (as reported below) are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.

5. The meetings began with a short review of the background issues and the range of options considered by MFRA in order to reduce its expenditure. The introduction also showed how risk, measured in terms of the number of critical and other incidents, has reduced by more than half in nine years. Based on its population of about 1.4 million people, MFRA has more wholtime fire stations than any other area of the country, including London, and so each of its 25 stations (following the closure of Allerton station on April 1st 2015) covers a relatively small area.
6. The participants were also told that both draft options, when combined with the proposed crewing changes would save at least £863,000 per annum by allowing up to 22 fire-fighter posts to be phased out, probably without the need for compulsory redundancies.
7. The meetings were informed explicitly about the impact on response times of closing two stations and covering their areas primarily with one full-time engine from Saughall Massie *and also* closing West Kirby and providing the same cover from Upton.

Deliberative Findings

8. The focus groups' conclusions regarding the two draft options and draft proposal to reduce the number of fully-crewed wholtime engines from two to one were as follows:

Saughall Massie

Seven out of nine people in the group opposed a new station in Saughall Massie: only one person found it acceptable and there was one 'don't know'

Above all, most of the group wanted to protect the green belt area from development of all kinds

They were unanimously opposed to the inclusion of a large tower on any fire station in Saughall Massie (on the grounds that it would be visually very intrusive)

Seven out of nine did not want the fire station (if developed) to include an ambulance base (on the grounds that this would increase the scale of the development)

The group was broadly divided on the question of whether some community facilities should be included

By a ratio of two-to-one the participants also rejected the proposed changes to the crewing of the second fire engine

The group raised no specific equality and diversity issues

If a station were to be built there, the Saughall Massie residents wanted it to be as small and unobtrusive as possible.

West Kirby

The participants all accepted that the proposed merger of two fire stations was reasonable in principle

They were also unanimous that the Saughall Massie site was a suitable location for the new station

Nine of the ten participants felt it was reasonable to site a fire station in the green belt (in this case)

The option of centralising cover at Upton fire station was opposed by everyone

The group was concerned that centralising cover at Upton would disproportionately jeopardise the elderly and socially deprived in West Kirby

Everyone agreed that the proposed changes to the crewing of the second fire engine would be reasonable

Four out of ten participants thought that the introduction of some community retained firefighters is an option that should at least be explored by MFRA, as an alternative way of saving money; but six were opposed to this idea.

Upton

Half or slightly more of the eight participants accepted that, in principle, the closure of two fire stations and their replacement with a new station would be reasonable, but the others were 'don't know's'

Five of the eight thought it reasonable to site the proposed new station in Saughall Massie, but two were opposed and there was one 'don't know'

Most of the group opposed the use of a green belt site: no one specifically supported it, but there were three 'don't know's'

The group was equally divided on whether a fire station in Saughall Massie should include a tower; but all agreed that alternative training facilities would be reasonable

The group also unanimously supported the inclusion of an ambulance base and community facilities, if the station were built there

Everyone agreed that the proposed changes to the crewing of the second fire engine would be reasonable

The group raised no specific equality and diversity issues.

All-Wirral Forum

All except one of the 22 participants readily accepted that the proposed merger of two fire stations was reasonable in principle

The same majority supported using the Saughall Massie site rather than centralising services at Upton

The forum was unanimous that in this case it was reasonable to develop a green belt site

The option of locating emergency cover at Upton fire station was supported by only one person

One member of the forum was concerned that basing emergency cover at Upton would jeopardise young people in a special needs school in West Kirby

However, by a ratio of ten-to-one the forum felt that, if the Saughall Massie site became unavailable for any reason, it would be acceptable then to base local emergency services at Upton

With only one dissenter, the participants thought it was reasonable to include a tower on the Saughall Massie site in order to facilitate training – but they thought its visual impact should be minimised

All the participants thought that the inclusion of some community facilities was reasonable

There was a broad division of opinion in respect of whether ambulance facilities should be co-located at the site – and those against were concerned that ambulance mobilisations would cause more disturbance than the less frequent fire engine movements.

A large absolute majority of participants (19) accepted that it was reasonable to change the status of the second fire engine: there were only three ‘don’t knows’.

Quantitative Research

9. MFRA also commissioned ORS to undertake a conscientious and ambitious residents’ survey, using a postal questionnaire which was sent to a large random sample of 10,000 households. The random sample was stratified to include 5,000 to addresses in the Upton fire station area (including Saughall Massie) and 5,000 to addresses in the West Kirby fire station area. Questionnaires were sent out in the week commencing 13th April 2015 and the cut-off date for their return was 15th May 2015.
10. A total of 1,351 completed questionnaires were returned – with 577 from the Upton station area and 774 from the west Kirby area, an overall response rate of 14% (12% for Upton and 16% for West Kirby). Saughall Massie residents amounted to 11% of the initial contact sample, but accounted for 17% of the survey respondents – so the village was certainly not under-represented.
11. The returned sample for each fire station area was compared with census data and then weighted by age, gender, ethnicity and whether people were suffering long term illness/disability.
12. The survey questionnaire covered the same issues as the deliberative meetings – namely, MFRA’s two options and further draft proposal for the second fire engine. As well as the questionnaire, the 10,000 randomly selected households received a copy of MFRA’s Consultation Newsletter.

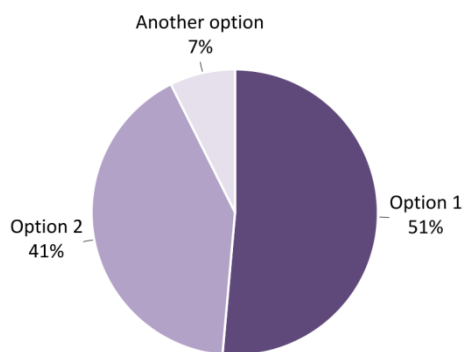
Residents' Survey Findings

13. As Figure 1 shows, an absolute majority of residents in both fire station areas preferred option 1 – 51% in Upton and 70% in West Kirby. In Upton, just over two-fifths (41%) preferred option 2, but in West Kirby only a just over a fifth (21%) preferred that option.

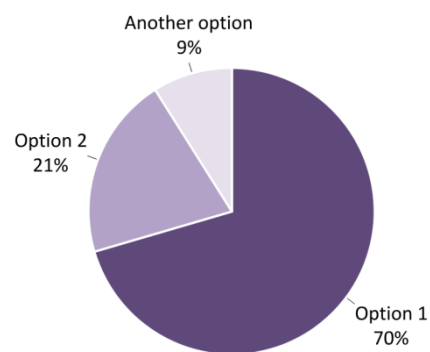
Figure 1: Residents survey responses to whether they prefer option 1, 2 or another option

Do you prefer option 1 (merging Upton and West Kirby fire stations by building a new fire station in Saughall Massie), option 2 (closing West Kirby fire station and using Upton fire station to cover both areas) or another option?

Upton



West Kirby

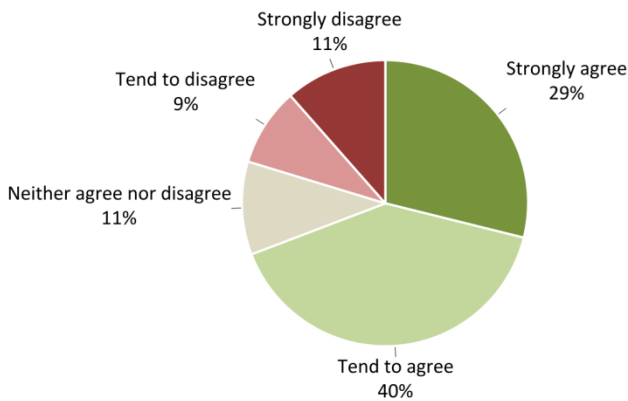


14. When responses for the two areas are combined to yield 'overall results' the absolute majority for option 1 is 57%.
15. Very large absolute majorities in both Upton (69%) and West Kirby (70%) also agreed with MFRA's additional draft proposal to keep one immediate response (24/7) fire engine at the proposed station while making the second fire engine a reserve or back-up vehicle with its crew subject to recall within 30 minutes in the event of exceptional incidents or spate conditions. The findings are shown in Figure 2 on the next page.

Figure 2: Agreement with the additional proposal

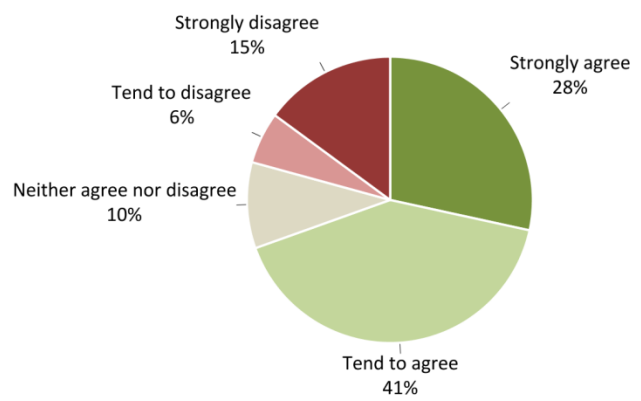
Do you agree or disagree with the additional proposal to keep one immediate response (24/7) fire engine at the proposed station while making the second fire engine a reserve or back-up vehicle with its crew subject to recall within 30 minutes in the event of exceptional incidents or spate conditions?

Upton



Base: All Respondents (563)

West Kirby



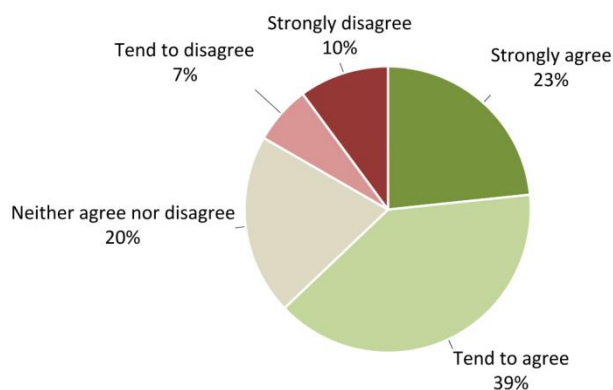
Base: All respondents (754)

16. Absolute majorities in both Upton (63%) and West Kirby (59%) agreed with including community facilities at the proposed station, as Figure 3 shows.

Figure 3: Agreement with including community facilities at the proposed station

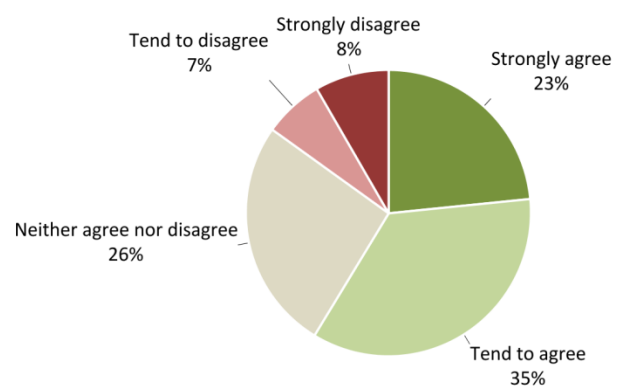
To what extent do you agree or disagree with including community facilities at the proposed station?

Upton



Base: All Respondents (559)

West Kirby



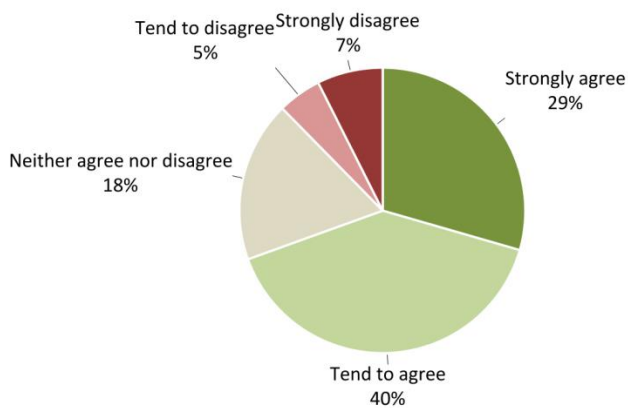
Base: All respondents (747)

17. Even larger absolute majorities (69% in Upton and 76% in West Kirby) agreed with sharing the proposed station with other blue light emergency services, as Figure 4 shows.

Figure 4: Agreement with including community facilities at the proposed station

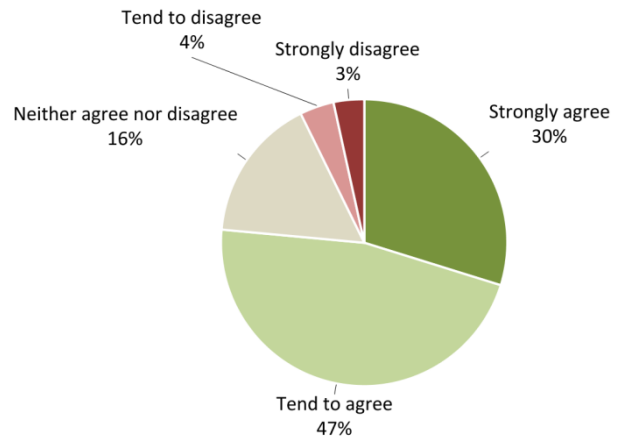
To what extent do you agree or disagree with sharing the proposed station with other blue light emergency services?

Upton



Base: All Respondents (562)

West Kirby



Base: All respondents (745)

18. Some residents in the Upton station area were concerned that the proposed new fire station would adversely affect people living in supported accommodation and retirement bungalows in Saughall Massie. In West Kirby, the concerns were about the impact of possible longer response times on elderly and/or disabled residents there.

Overall Conclusions

Four Deliberative Meetings

People's opinions about the location of the fire station varied sharply depending on their place of residence

The Saughall Massie site was strongly opposed *only in* the Saughall Massie focus group (though small minorities had some reservations in the other meetings)

Overall, support for the fire station to be located at Saughall Massie was overwhelming in the two other focus groups and in the all-Wirral forum

Centralising emergency cover in Upton was unanimously opposed in West Kirby; there was majority opposition in Upton; and in the all-Wirral forum opposition to Upton was almost unanimous

However, the Upton focus group also has a majority opposed to the development of a green belt site, whereas the West Kirby focus group was

almost unanimous, and the all-Wirral forum was unanimous, that this green belt development would be satisfactory

Overall, the Saughall Massie group wanted to minimise the scale and visual impact of any station (if built there); but most members of the other groups had fewer reservations

Outside of Saughall Massie, the meetings supported the provision of community facilities; but there were reservations about a tower and ambulance facilities (though alternative training facilities were more acceptable).

19. The Saughall Massie residents had three main concerns about locating the fire station in their village:

The local road infrastructure is unsuitable for fire engines attending incidents in West Kirby from Saughall Massie

A fire station would intrude on the green belt

It would also adversely affect residents' amenity/environment and lower their property values.

Residents' Survey

20. MFRA's draft proposals were widely supported in the residents' survey:

Absolute majorities in both Upton (51%) and West Kirby (70%) supported option 1 – and when the responses for the two areas are combined to yield 'overall results' the absolute majority for option 1 is 57%.

Very large absolute majorities in both Upton (69%) and West Kirby (70%) agreed with MFRA's additional draft proposal to keep one immediate response (24/7) fire engine at the proposed station while making the second fire engine a reserve or back-up vehicle with its crew subject to recall within 30 minutes in the event of exceptional incidents or spate conditions.

Absolute majorities in both Upton (63%) and West Kirby (59%) agreed with including community facilities at the proposed station.

Even larger absolute majorities (69% in Upton and 76% in West Kirby) agreed with sharing the proposed station with other blue light emergency services.

Some residents in the Upton station area were concerned that proposals would adversely affect people living in supported accommodation and retirement bungalows in Saughall Massie. In West Kirby, there were concerns were about the impact of possible longer response times on elderly and/or disabled residents there.

Overall Conclusions

21. Both the deliberative meetings and the residents' survey show that opposition to the Saughall Massie site (option 1) is largely confined to the village itself, with intense opposition there.
22. In general, though, there is considerable support for the Fire Authority's preferred merger option and also for its draft proposal to designate one of the two fire engines as a reserve or back-up resilience vehicle.
23. In fact, the levels of support manifest in the residents' survey and deliberative meetings might fairly be described as 'emphatic'; so MFRA may proceed on the basis that it has considerable community support for its draft proposals.
24. However, consultation is not a numbers game, in which the majority view necessarily prevails (like in a referendum), so the Fire Authority will wish to consider carefully all the arguments, evidence and considerations relevant to this case before taking its decision based upon its assessment of the public good.

Important Note

25. This executive summary cannot do justice to the arguments and reasons of the participants in the deliberative forum and focus groups, so readers are encouraged to refer to the full report (in the following chapters) for further important information about people's opinions.

Introduction

Commission and background

26. ORS was commissioned by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) to conduct deliberative consultation and a residents' survey about draft options for the west Wirral fire stations. ORS's role was to recruit and facilitate the deliberative meetings and to design and conduct an appropriate residents' survey before reporting the findings to MFRA.
27. The main consultation issues were two draft options for the north-west Wirral fire stations and a further draft proposal regarding the number of fire engines deployed full-time in the area. In summary, the issues were:

MFRA's Draft Fire Station Options

Whether to close the West Kirby and Upton fire stations while building a new one in Saughall Massie or whether to locate west Wirral emergency cover at Upton while closing the West Kirby station. The former option may fairly be called a 'merger' while the latter option would simply be a closure of the West Kirby fire station.

MFRA's Draft Fire Engine Proposal

To reduce the wholetime fire engines by making one of the current two pumps a reserve or resilience back-up vehicle for periods of exceptional demand.

28. MFRA has conducted extensive engagement and consultation with residents for a number of years and, in this context, ORS has facilitated both district-based and all-Merseyside forums regularly. Within this on-going framework, MFRA has conducted both 'listening and engagement' and 'formal consultation' meetings on a regular cycle. Hence, the consultation programme reported here followed an earlier all-Merseyside 'listening and engagement' process that considered hypothetically a wide range of policies and options for MFRA in the context of its reduced budget due to public expenditure reductions.
29. The current programme also followed closely on a previous consultation in respect of the proposed merger of the same stations based upon a new fire station to be built in Greasby. Following local protests, the local authority withdrew the Greasby site from consideration. Having taken account of all those earlier consultations and meetings, and all the other available evidence, the MFRA has formulated the draft options and proposal for the west Wirral outlined above.

MFRA's preferred option

30. Because option 2 (not developing a new station at Saughall Massie and locating emergency cover at Upton) would lengthen response times to West Kirby significantly, MFRA prefers option 1. In other words, the Fire Authority's preferred option is a 'merger' of two fire stations rather than just the closure of the West Kirby station. On the other hand, MFRA recognises that the Saughall Massie option is sensitive and controversial since the site lies in a Green Belt area and is unpopular with local residents.

Deliberative Research

Methodology

31. The four consultation meetings reported here all used 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 the draft options in detail. The meetings lasted for at least two-and-a-half hours and in total there were 49 diverse participants. The dates of the meetings and attendance levels by members of the public at each forum were as shown in the table immediately below.

AREA OF WIRRAL	TIME AND DATE (2015)	TYPE OF MEETING AND NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
Saughall Massie	18.00 – 20.45 Monday 13 th April	Focus Group 10
West Kirby	18:00 – 20.45 Wednesday 15 th April	Focus Group 9
Upton	18.00 – 20.45 Thursday 16 th April	Focus Group 8
All-Wirral	18.00 – 20.45 Wednesday 13 th May	Forum 22

32. The attendance target for each of the focus group meeting was between 7 and 10 people, and for the forums it was at least 15 – so the total of 49 participants was better than anticipated.
33. 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 come 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.

34. 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).
35. Consequently, there was a diverse range of participants from the local areas and, as standard good practice, they were recompensed for their time and efforts in travelling and taking part.

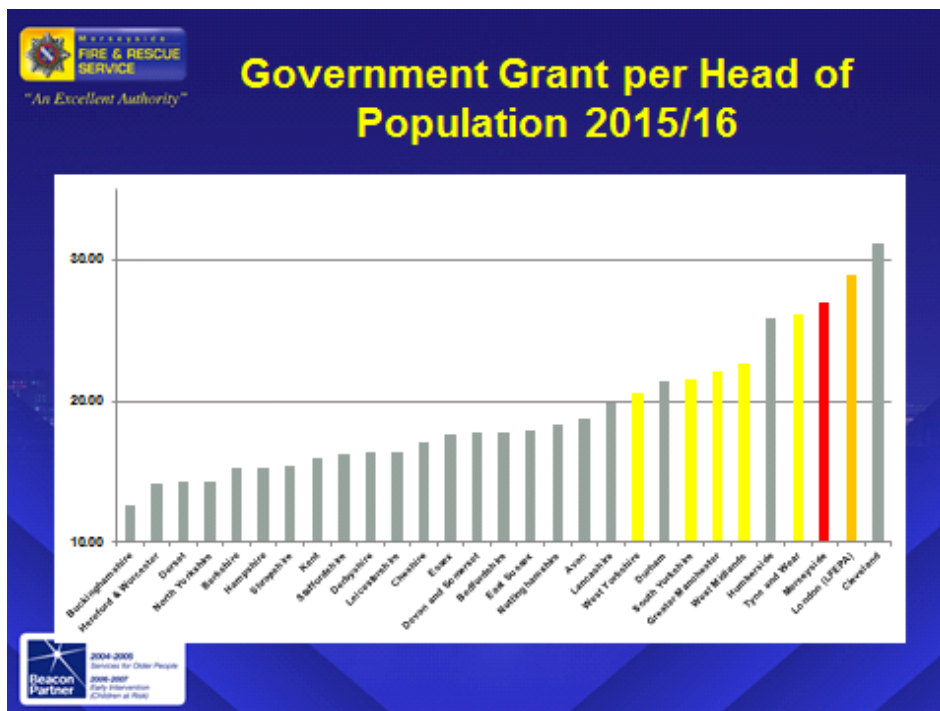
CRITERIA	SAUGHALL MASSIE FG	WEST KIRBY FG	UPTON FG	ALL- WIRRAL FORUM	OVERALL
Gender	Male: 4 Female: 5	Male: 6 Female: 4	Male: 3 Female: 5	Male: 11 Female: 11	Male: 24 Female: 25
Age	16-34: 2 35-54: 4 55+: 3	16-34: 1 35-54: 4 55+: 5	16-34: 1 35-54: 3 55+: 4	16-34: 5 35-54: 7 55+: 10	16-34: 9 35-54: 18 55+: 22
Social Grade	AB: 2 C1: 3 C2: 2 DE: 2	AB: 3 C1: 3 C2: 1 DE: 3	AB: 4 C1: 2 C2: 1 DE: 1	AB: 4 C1: 10 C2: 4 DE: 4	AB: 13 C1: 18 C2: 8 DE: 10
Ethnicity	0 Non- White British	1 Non- White British	0 Non- White British	1 Non- White British	2 Non- White British
Limiting Long-term Illness	1	2	1	6	10

36. To conduct the deliberative meetings based on the fullest possible information for participants, ORS worked with MFRA to prepare informative stimulus material for the meetings before facilitating the discussions and preparing this independent report of findings.
37. Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative forums cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the four meetings reported here gave diverse groups of Wirral residents the opportunity to comment in detail on MFRA's draft options. Because the participants were diverse, the outcomes of the meeting (as reported below) are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.

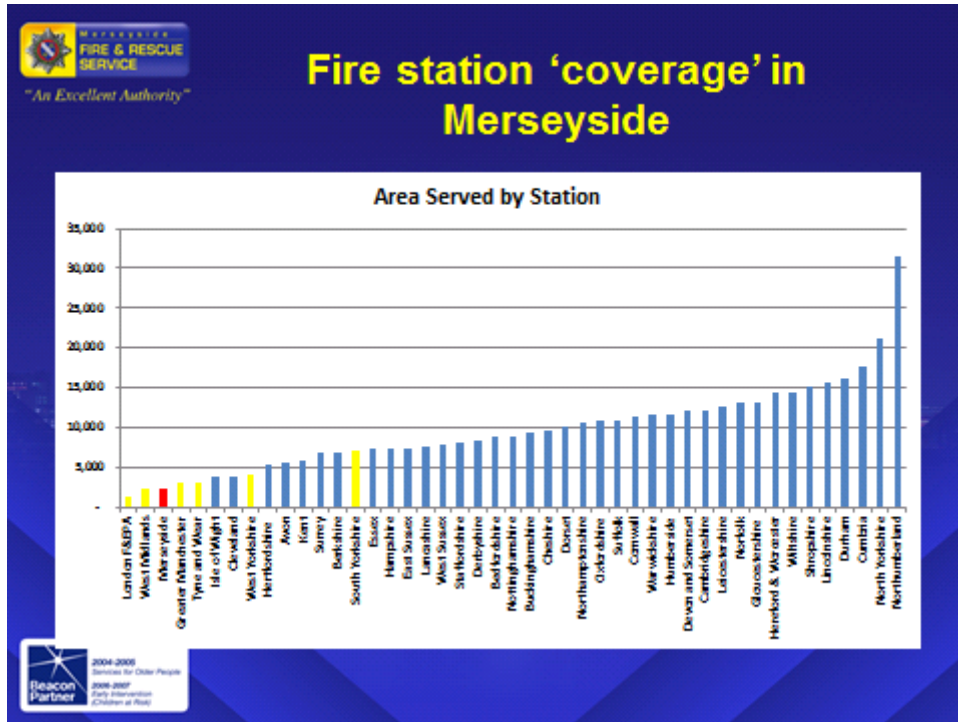
Conduct of the discussions

38. The first part of each meeting began, for the sake of context, with a short review of the background issues, including the:
- Importance of prevention and risk-management policies – particularly via home fire safety checks
 - Established trends showing a reduction in risk when measured in terms of the number of critical and other incidents per year
 - Sources of funding for MFRA – from the government and from council tax
 - Impact of public spending reductions on MFRA – including the previous reduction of fire engines from 42 to 28, and the corresponding reduction of 180 fire fighter and 90 support staff posts
 - MFRA's current financial constraints in the context of public spending reductions.
39. The four meetings were also informed of the wide range of options considered by MFRA in order to reduce its expenditure, including:
- More low-level-activity-and-risk (LLAR) fire stations
 - Some day-crewed fire stations
 - Some community retained (RDS) fire stations
 - Closing some fire stations
 - Merging some fire stations.
40. In passing, it is worth noting that earlier (January 2014) wide-ranging 'listening and engagement' meetings had demonstrated that, when faced with a broad choice between *either* keeping all stations and changing to cheaper duty systems *or* reducing stations while protecting current wholetime duty systems, the participants clearly favoured the latter option. That is, they made at least an implicit choice in favour of reducing stations rather than changing the way Merseyside is crewed. These 'conclusions' of the earlier meetings were not repeated to participants in the meetings reported here, but it is interesting to note them as general background.
41. Following the short review of the wider general range of options considered, the second part of each meeting briefly reviewed the implications of funding reductions that MFRA faces, including the:
- Projected budget deficit of £6.3 million by the end of 2015/16, based on projections of current expenditure levels and known financial information
 - Projected deficit of £9.1 million by the end of 2017/18, based on projections of current expenditure levels and plausible financial assumptions.

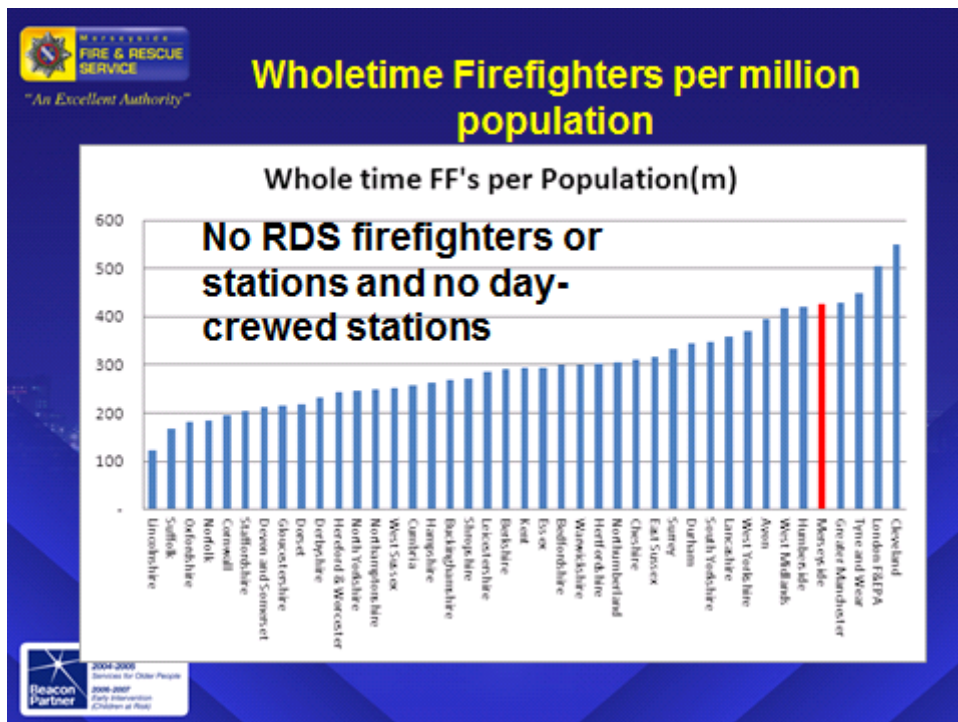
42. These financial challenges were explained neutrally as constraints requiring substantial reductions in spending to be made on a progressive basis. In order to encourage free discussion, the financial position was not used as a repeated justification of the draft proposed options: participants were invited to assess the options on their general merits, albeit within a generally constrained position.
43. In fact, in order to present a balanced picture, the ORS introduction to each meeting tried to 'take stock' of MFRA in terms of its much reduced risk levels (reduced by 53% over the last nine years) when measured in terms of the number of critical and other incidents, strategic roles and allocation of resources. Participants were shown comparative data on the (still relatively high) levels of government funding and the emergency cover resources that MFRA (and the other metropolitan fire and rescue services) continue to enjoy relative to other combined fire authorities.
44. For example, the following graphics were explained briefly – with Merseyside highlighted in red and the other big metropolitan authorities in yellow. The chart below shows that, relative to most other fire authorities, Merseyside still receives a high proportion of its total funding from the government and raises a relatively small proportion through council tax.



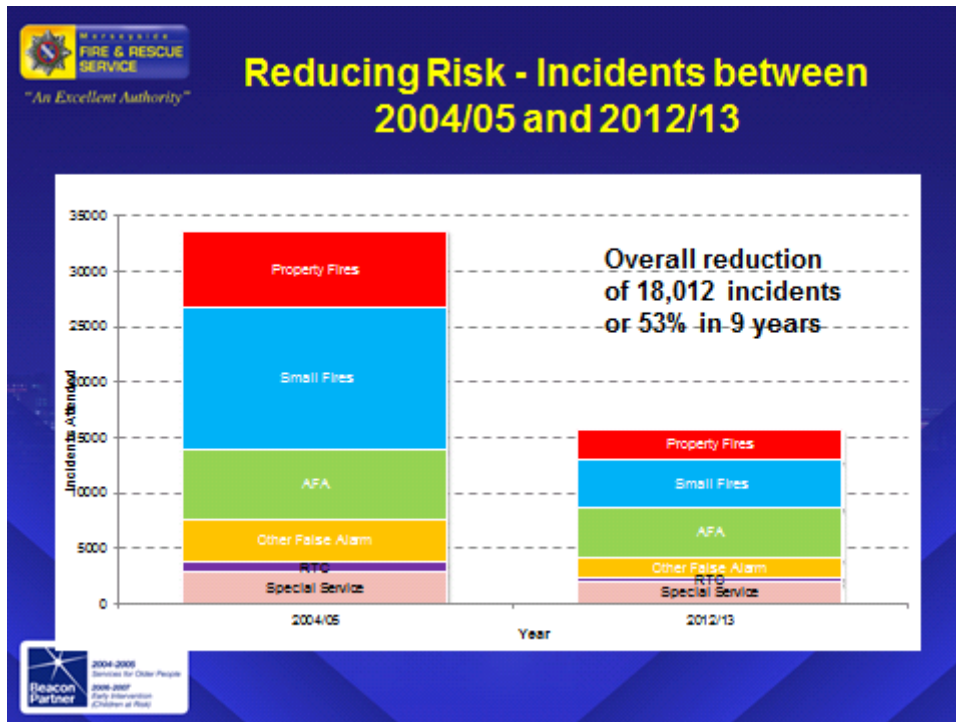
45. Therefore, even in recent years, MFRA has been able to maintain a relatively high level of expenditure per head of population – as the chart on the next page shows.



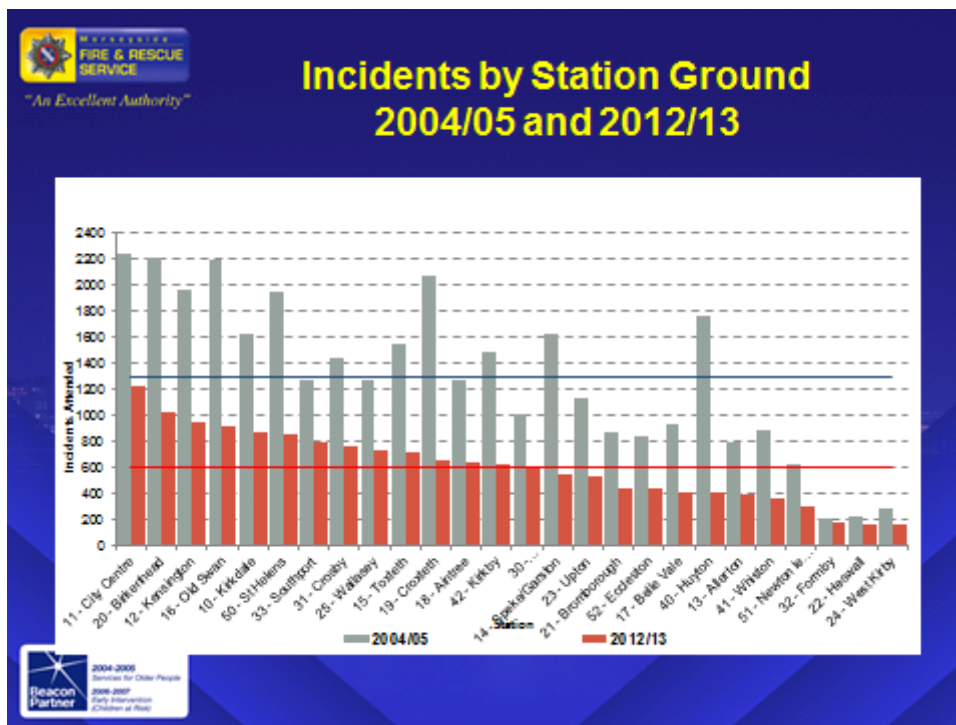
- 47. Indeed, on the basis of its population of about 1.4 million people, MFRA has more wholtime fire stations than any other area of the country, including London – and so, as the chart above shows, each of its 26 current stations covers a relatively small area.
- 48. Given its high levels of fire stations and fire engines, MFRA has managed to maintain a relatively large number of wholtime firefighters compared with most other combined fire authorities – as the chart below shows.



49. Partly as a result of MFRA’s very active preventative and educational work, all categories of incidents have reduced very significantly in Merseyside over the last nine years, as the chart below shows.

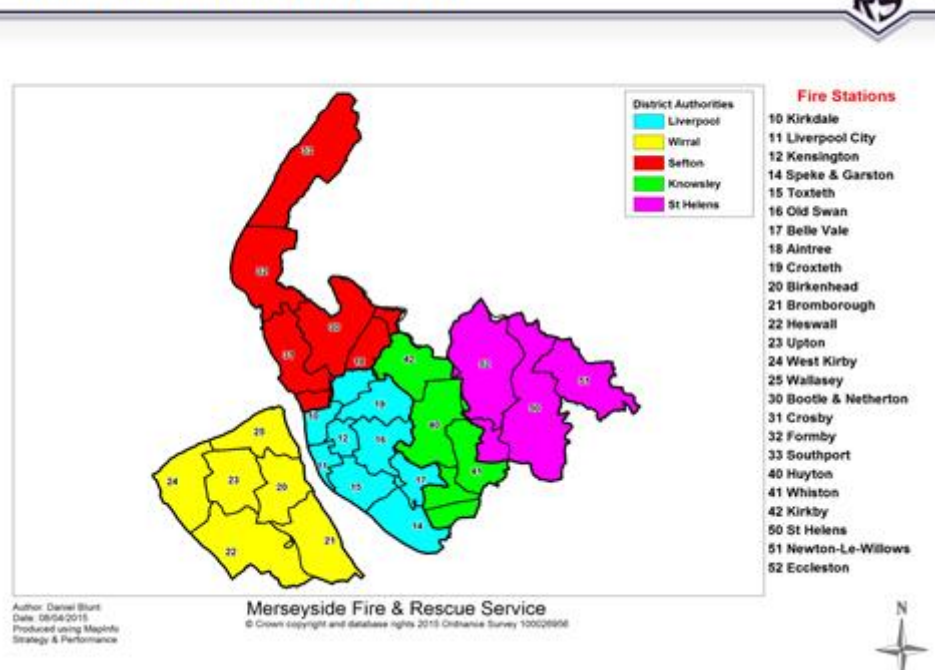


50. Not surprisingly, then, all of MFRA’s fire stations deal with many fewer incidents each year than they used recently to do – as chart below shows.



51. In the context of all the above data, the forums were shown the current distribution of MFRA's fire stations (following the closure of Allerton in Liverpool) with the following map.

MFRA Fire Stations (May 2015)



52. The final and longest part of each meeting was devoted to detailed discussion of the draft options for the west Wirral fire stations, which were explained as follows:

Option 1

Building a new community fire station at Saughall Massie

Closing the one-pump stations at Upton and West Kirby

Saughall Massie fire station then to have a single 24/7 pump, with another to be a reserve or back-up resilience vehicle and not normally crewed – but with its crew subject to recall within 30 minutes in the event of exceptional incidents or spate conditions

The back-up crew for the reserve second pump would be wholetime firefighters with supplementary retained contracts to provide the support cover duties when required.

Option 2

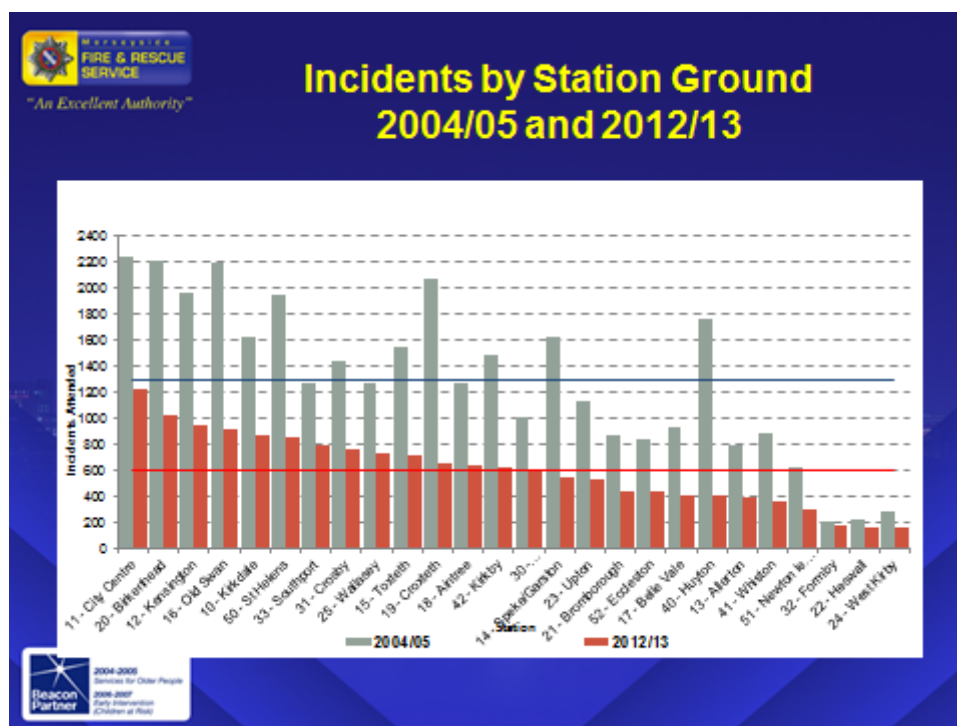
Closing the one-pump station at West Kirby

Providing emergency cover for west Wirral from Upton fire station

Upton fire station to have a single 24/7 pump, with another to be a reserve or back-up resilience vehicle – not normally crewed, but with a crew subject to recall within 30 minutes for exceptional incidents or spate conditions

As with Option 1, the back-up crew for the reserve second pump would be wholetime firefighters with supplementary retained contracts to provide the support cover duties when required.

53. In other words, there were two draft options and a further draft proposal regarding the number of fire engines deployed full-time. The *draft fire station options* were: to close two fire stations while building a new one in Saughall Massie or to locate west Wirral emergency cover at Upton while closing the West Kirby station. The former option may be called a 'merger' while the latter would simply be a closure of the West Kirby fire station.
54. The further *draft proposal* for consultation was to reduce the wholetime fire engines by making one of the current two engines a reserve or resilience back-up vehicle for periods of exceptional demand. In each meeting great care was taken to ensure that participants understood the two fire station options as well as how the second (reserve) fire engine would be crewed and used.
55. The participants were also told that the merger and proposed crewing arrangements would save at least £863,000 per annum by allowing up to 22 fire-fighter posts to be phased out, probably without the need for compulsory redundancies.
56. As well as the financial context, the four meetings considered the relevant evidence about reducing risk levels and current response times in the three areas under consideration. For example, they reviewed the reduction in risk measured by the number of incidents – down over just five years by 48% in Upton and 24% in West Kirby – resulting in far fewer incidents for all fire stations (and with West Kirby as the quietest of all), as shown in the chart below.



57. In addition, the meetings considered MFRA's response time target (to attend critical incidents within 10 minutes on at least 90% of occasions) and they also compared the national average response time for domestic fires (7 minutes 24 seconds) with MFRA's average time for life-risk incidents (5 minutes 24 seconds).
58. Finally, but very importantly, the meetings were informed explicitly about the impact on response times of closing two stations and covering their areas primarily with one full-time engine from Saughall Massie *and also* closing West Kirby and providing the same cover from Upton. The significance of the Saughall Massie option was explained in all four meetings because locating the relevant fire cover resources at Upton station would lengthen emergency response times into West Kirby.
59. From the two current stations, the average response times in the Upton and West Kirby areas are 4 minutes 34 seconds and 5 minutes 24 seconds respectively. From the Saughall Massie base, these average times would increase to 5 minutes 3 seconds and 6 minutes 38 seconds respectively. The average over the whole area would be 5 minutes 41 seconds.
60. However, if services were located at Upton (rather than Saughall Massie), then the average response to West Kirby would lengthen to 8 minutes 43 seconds (and would be more than 10 minutes in some parts). In other words, the average time to West Kirby would be more than two minutes longer from Upton than from Saughall Massie.
61. It was made clear throughout the discussions that MFRA would not bring forward such options if it was not facing an urgent need to reduce expenditure in the context of reduced central government grant funding and restrictions on council tax increases. In response to questions, the options were described by senior MFRA officers as the '*least worst options*' in the current situation. Nonetheless, the facilitator encouraged participants to consider the options *in principle* – on their merits in terms of suitability, sustainability, resilience and acceptability for the Wirral and Merseyside – rather than to just accept them without scrutiny as inevitable. In other words, financial issues were not the primary focus of the discussion: the options were examined carefully and at length. Participants were given extensive time for questions and discussion prior to being invited to make up their minds on each discussion topic.
62. Finally, while considering the draft options, participants in all the meetings were encouraged to consider whether they have any adverse implications for any vulnerable people and in particular groups with 'protected characteristics': in other words, this question was not just a 'footnote' to the main discussion but an intrinsic part of the scrutiny of the draft options.

Residents' Survey

63. MFRA's consultation programme also included a conscientious and ambitious residents' survey, which ORS was commissioned to design and implement.
64. To achieve the best combination of economy and inclusiveness a postal questionnaire was sent to a large random sample of 10,000 households – stratified to include 5,000 addresses in the Upton fire station area (including Saughall Massie) and 5,000 addresses in the West Kirby fire station area. Questionnaires were sent out in the week commencing 13th April 2015 and the cut-off date for their return was 15th May 2015. Of the questionnaires despatched, a total of only 161 were returned as 'failed mail.'
65. A total of 1,351 completed questionnaires were returned – with 577 from the Upton station area and 774 from the west Kirby area, yielding an overall response rate of 14% (12% for Upton and 16% for West Kirby). Saughall Massie residents amounted to 11% of the initial contact sample, but accounted for 17% of the survey respondents – so the village was certainly not under-represented.
66. The returned sample for each fire station area was compared with census data and then weighted by age, gender, ethnicity and whether people were suffering long term illness/disability.
67. The survey questionnaire covered the same issues as the deliberative meetings – namely, MFRA's two options and further draft proposal for the second fire engine. As well as the questionnaire, the 10,000 randomly selected households received a copy of MFRA's Consultation Newsletter.

Report

68. This report covers both the deliberative and quantitative consultation. The next chapter concisely reviews the sentiments and judgements of participants about MFRA's draft options for the two Wirral fire stations and the draft proposal for changes to one of the fire engines. 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.

Deliberative Findings

Summary by Area

69. The focus groups' conclusions regarding the two draft options and draft proposal to reduce the number of fully-crewed wholetime engines from two to one were as follows:

Saughall Massie

Seven out of nine people in the group opposed a new station in Saughall Massie: only one person found it acceptable and there was one 'don't know

Above all, most of the group wanted to protect the green belt area from development of all kinds

They were unanimously opposed to the inclusion of a large tower on any fire station in Saughall Massie (on the grounds that it would be visually very intrusive)

Seven out of nine did not want the fire station (if developed) to include an ambulance base (on the grounds that this would increase the scale of the development)

The group was broadly divided on the question of whether some community facilities should be included

By a ratio of two-to-one the participants also rejected the proposed changes to the crewing of the second fire engine

The group raised no specific equality and diversity issues

If a station were to be built there, the Saughall Massie residents wanted it to be as small and unobtrusive as possible.

West Kirby

The participants all accepted that the proposed merger of two fire stations was reasonable in principle

They were also unanimous that the Saughall Massie site was a suitable location for the new station

Nine of the ten participants felt it was reasonable to site a fire station in the green belt (in this case)

The option of centralising cover at Upton fire station was opposed by everyone

The group was concerned that centralising cover at Upton would disproportionately jeopardise the elderly and socially deprived in West Kirby

Everyone agreed that the proposed changes to the crewing of the second fire engine would be reasonable

Four out of ten participants thought that the introduction of some community retained firefighters is an option that should at least be explored by MFRA, as an alternative way of saving money; but six were opposed to this idea.

Upton

Half or slightly more of the eight participants accepted that, in principle, the closure of two fire stations and their replacement with a new station would be reasonable, but the others were 'don't knows'

Five of the eight thought it reasonable to site the proposed new station in Saughall Massie, but two were opposed and there was one 'don't know'

Most of the group opposed the use of a green belt site: no one specifically supported it, but there were three 'don't knows'

The group was equally divided on whether a fire station in Saughall Massie should include a tower; but all agreed that alternative training facilities would be reasonable

The group also unanimously supported the inclusion of an ambulance base and community facilities, if the station were built there

Everyone agreed that the proposed changes to the crewing of the second fire engine would be reasonable

The group raised no specific equality and diversity issues.

All-Wirral Forum

All except one of the 22 participants readily accepted that the proposed merger of two fire stations was reasonable in principle

The same majority supported using the Saughall Massie site rather than centralising services at Upton

The forum was unanimous that in this case it was reasonable to develop a green belt site

The option of locating emergency cover at Upton fire station was supported by only one person

However, by a ratio of ten-to-one the forum felt that, if the Saughall Massie site became unavailable for any reason, it would be acceptable then to base local emergency services at Upton

One member of the forum was concerned that basing cover at Upton would jeopardise young people in a special needs school in West Kirby

With only one dissenter, the participants thought it was reasonable to include a tower on the Saughall Massie site in order to facilitate training – but they thought its visual impact should be minimised

All the participants thought that the inclusion of some community facilities was reasonable

There was a broad division of opinion in respect of whether ambulance facilities should be co-located at the site – and those against were concerned that ambulance mobilisations would cause more disturbance than the less frequent fire engine movements.

A large absolute majority of participants (19) accepted that it was reasonable to change the status of the second fire engine: there were only three ‘don’t knows’.

Reasoning about the Draft Options

Introduction

70. People’s reasons for their views are obviously important – particularly because consultation is not just a ‘numbers game’ in which majority support or opposition counts for everything: the key issue is not numbers but the cogency of the arguments for or against the various options. Therefore, this section concisely reviews the various opinions, reasons, considerations and attitudes of the participants.

General awareness and strategic issues

71. All the early discussions showed that, not surprisingly, many people were unaware of how the fire and rescue service is run in detail. For example, there were many factual questions about:
- How dynamic emergency cover is managed when there are big or multiple incidents
 - How fire engines are crewed?
 - How LLAR stations work compared with other wholetime fire stations
 - How community retained fire stations operate
72. However, as the discussions continued, there was also considerable interest in the policy and more strategic context, with some participants asking, for example:
- Is this all about money and reductions?
 - Has the preventive role of MFRA made a significant reduction to the number of emergency incidents?
 - Can MFRA maintain its prevention work with less resources and fire engines on the run?
 - Has the likely increase in the number of deaths as a result of less prevention and resources been taken into account?

How critical are response times in general?

Is there data about how longer response times affect the fatality rates?

Have there been times when there were too few fire engines to cope with the level of demand?

How does MFRA monitor and assess relative risk across Merseyside?

The MFRS does well, but what will be the consequences of having less resources – will it increase risk? When will incident rates start to increase?

Will station mergers lead to changes in MFRA's attendance and operational procedures? Will households continue to get the same level of attendance, with the same number of fire engines?

What is a strategic station – does it cover a radius to achieve the 10-minute response time?

Would a Saughall Massie Road station become the key station instead of Upton?

Could MFRA use some community retained firefighters?

What kind of training do community retained firefighters get?

How will MFRA manage potential redundancies?

Has MFRA ceased its government lobbying?

Was MFRA always over-resourced if it has been able to make such big reductions in operational resources without adverse effect.

Saughall Massie Focus Group

73. Almost all of the Saughall Massie group **strongly opposed a fire station in their village**, mainly on the grounds that:

The local road infrastructure is unsuitable for emergency vehicles travelling to incidents in West Kirby from the Saughall Massie site

It is inappropriate to develop a green belt site in the village

A fire station would spoil residents' amenity and lower property values

A station tower would be unsightly

Local residents would be disturbed by mobilisations and other noise from the site

The development would be a precedent for the Police and Ambulance services on the same site

A rapid response vehicle could be used to help cover West Kirby, and could be based there at busier times

It would be preferable to base local emergency services at Upton, for West Kirby's response times (from there) would still be generally within MFRA's 10-minute target

74. In this context, some typical comments in the Saughall Massie group were:

How would the fire engine get down the back lanes? It's ridiculous to consider that happening!

I'm worried about fire engines following my car down the back lanes when I'm doing 40 mph – it would panic me if I had nowhere to pull over!

We have a lot of country lanes here on the route to West Kirby!

Saughall Massie Road is a very dangerous route – and it will get worse! It's better to keep the fire engine where it is in Upton!

It's a foregone conclusion that West Kirby will be closed given the data on its use – but Saughall Massie is not better than Upton for the road infrastructure

You could have a Rapid Response Vehicle based in West Kirby to deal with incidents until a fire engine gets there!

The station would be right next to my home! I don't want a 48 foot tower – the whole thing is absolutely abhorrent so I am going to lose a proportion of my house value! It will hit me in the face when I get out of bed in the morning and look out the window – it will adversely affect my well-being every single day!

There is even a possibility that you could have ambulances based there and community facilities – which would be awful!

Is this going to be a general emergency centre?

It's devastating for people to lose their views from their properties

I'm worried about my children sleeping when disturbed by emergency sirens

There will be an impact on property prices – so will there be any proposals for compensation by the MFRA or the council?

You will have a massive impact on those who work nights – they don't want sirens going off all the time!

As an alternative, have you considered knocking Upton down and building something new?

Where would you look for a site if this one was rejected?

Option 2 (with a response of 8 minutes 43 seconds to West Kirby) is still compatible with the 10-minute response standard for MFRS

You should not reject a Rapid Response Vehicle based in West Kirby to avoid so many mobilisations from Saughall Massie and/or Upton – that seems a perfectly safe option to me

We're also going to have half the current fire engines

Did the local authority offer this land or did you choose it freely? Have you sought for other sites? Your hands seem to be tied in terms of sites

Could you increase the resources at Heswall rather than have them here? Is that feasible and safe?

75. There were, though, also some more supportive voices, even if they were a small minority:

You need a fire engine that can deal with all the incidents not just a RRV that deals with 40% of in the incidents It makes more sense to have a good new fire station for the firefighters and the public!

A new station could be built very sympathetically to fit in as much as possible

There are many old people's homes in West Kirby – so it's undesirable to lengthen the response times there

The main problem that worries me is the possible response times to parts of West Kirby from Upton – two or three minutes is a significant difference for parts like Moreton

The lanes allow more passing vehicles than most people think!

There is a possibility that risk will increase – and the fire service has a duty to keep that to a minimum – and also to balance the actual risk levels against the views of local residents.

76. The draft proposal to change the status of the current **second wholetime fire engine** to a reserve support vehicle (subject to 30 minutes mobilising time when required in exceptional circumstances) was also explained clearly and discussed. Some participants found this to be relatively uncontroversial, but by a majority of two-to-one the Saughall Massie group opposed to 'downgrading' the fire engine.
77. Overall, while clearly opposing the green field station, the focus group stressed that the design of any station built at Saughall Massie should be carefully managed: they were unanimous that it should not have a tower and in general should be as small and 'discreet' as possible.
78. There was also a big majority against the inclusion of an ambulance base on such a station; but opinion was divided on whether community facilities should be included. The overall judgement was that any station should be:

As small, low key and discreet as possible – but the current plan makes it look looming large! The diagram is not to scale!

West Kirby Focus Group

79. The West Kirby focus group **strongly supported Option 1** (a new fire station in Saughall Massie) given that the Greasby site was unavailable and the only other option would be to locate emergency resources at Upton. They were unanimous that a station merger was a good idea in principle and that a green belt site was appropriate and reasonable in practice. Some typical comments and questions raised by the group were:

Is the status quo possible?

Why not close Upton and keep West Kirby?

Is Saughall Massie the only available site now?

What do Saughall residents think about this?

Is the effect on property prices as great as the Saughall Massie residents fear?

Is the road infrastructure suitable for emergency vehicles travelling from Upton or Saughall Massie?

How often do both fire engines go out together? How often is the Upton engine already deployed at a time West Kirby has an incident to deal with?

How will the firefighters be affected – will there be cuts?

How do the staff in the two stations feel about these proposals?

Have you considered population trends and the possible impact on risks?

Can the staff reductions be achieved through natural wastage?

80. The following quotations indicate that the group's main reasons for strongly supporting option 1 were the increased response time from Upton compared with Saughall Massie – and the fact that alternative options (such as an retained service in West Kirby) would not be feasible either.

Option 1 sounds the best generally. Option 2 would really hit us in Hoylake and West Kirby!

Hoylake would have longer response times from Upton

There cannot be many people living near the proposed site

You could use retained firefighters to save money instead – but an RDS service in West Kirby would add 5 minutes to all the attendance times for West Kirby

Why is 10 minutes the target response time? How significant would the 2 minute difference be in practice?

81. Some other pertinent comments about the proposed new station were:

You don't use the fire station really, but the nearest fire engine

Are you looking at this holistically – by considering combined bases with the Police and Ambulance?

82. The West Kirby group felt that Option 2 would be inferior to Option 1 in terms of **equality and diversity issues** – by disproportionately disadvantaging elderly and socially disadvantaged residents in West Kirby.
83. In terms of **alternative options**, some members of the group thought that various forms of RDS cover might be considered in order to maintain local stations at a reduced cost – though others pointed out that this would lengthen current response times.
84. There was also a suggestion about developing a charitable arm:
- I have always had an excellent service from the MFRS – with smoke detectors and inspections – so I think you could develop a charity arm for the public to donate to by gift aid*
85. In contrast to the Saughall Massie group, the West Kirby focus group unanimously accepted that the draft proposal to change the **status of the current second wholetime fire engine** to a reserve support vehicle (subject to 30 minutes mobilising time when required in exceptional circumstances) was feasible and reasonable – as the main way to save money in the merger of two stations.
86. Questions were asked about where the reserve/resilience vehicle would be based and whether it would be dispensed with automatically in future; but the group readily accepted MFRA assurances that the new status would be safe.

Upton Focus Group

87. There were broad **divisions of opinion** in the Upton focus group. A wide range of questions were raised and comments were made – including all the following issues:
- MFRA has kept an excellent level of resources despite financial reductions
 - Is the primary reason for making these changes purely financial?
 - How much does LLAR save per fire engine?
 - How does the LLAR shift system work? How many days do they work?
 - Could West Kirby station be made LLAR – is that another option?
 - How concerned should we be about response times?
 - How much would the new station cost to build?
 - What money would be gained from the two sites released?
 - What would be the running costs of the new station?
 - Would the new station be smaller than say Birkenhead?
 - Could just use one of the existing stations be used satisfactorily?
 - Could you work more closely and combine resources with the ambulance service?

88. There was also a diverse range of other comments and questions:

We want an excellent service to continue

Could the Wirral not retain the status quo – is that an option for here?

Greasby would have been a good site!

I don't understand why they don't want a fire station in Saughall Massie

There are houses for sale there [Saughall Massie] already!

Why is the site near bungalows? Is that necessary?

West Kirby does not seem to be very active in protesting about the possible relocation to Upton

Have you concentrated on council-owned land?

Do you know what the council will charge for the land?

Does the land have planning permission?

Have you seriously approached the farmer about selling his plot?

The longer time to West Kirby would be dangerous – the FRS says “you can lose a life in 3 minutes” – and here you are talking about lengthening the response time

[But] the response time there would be within the target

Upton has longer response times to West Kirby

Upton alone is a non-starter because it means much longer response times to some parts of West Kirby – some times will be well outside the target for 10 minutes

A so-called merger is really two closures – even if you do have a new station! And Option 2 is an outright closure!

The decision has to be made on response times!

You should be guided by efficiency but not to the detriment of social factors

What's the total number of incidents per year for both stations?

What happens in the Wirral if there's a major incident – what would happen if the tender from the new station went out to a long and serious incident? How would you manage the risk then?

Could Heswall cover West Kirby more quickly?

The Wirral is distinctive in being a peninsula with a lot of coast

Public meetings are concerned with local issues mainly, rather than strategic ones.

89. A recurring theme of the Upton discussions was the importance of rapid response times, but in the final assessment of the options that factor was clearly counter-balanced by sympathy with Saughall Massie residents and an inclination to protect the green belt.
90. For example, in the final assessment, half the group favoured a merger in principle, but half were undecided – though no one definitely opposed the principle of merging suitable stations.
91. A majority of the group opposed developing a green field site in principle, but three were ‘don’t knows.’ However, despite opposing a green field site in principle, a clear majority in the group supported a Saughall Massie fire station (option 1) and only two supported locating services at Upton (option 2).
92. In terms of **alternative options** the Upton focus group was interested in the wider use of LLAR stations as a way of reducing costs, but there were also some reservations about the system at Upton:

That’s a good idea if people can be flexible, but not every station has this system...

The system is not practical in, say, Upton, where risks are higher

The LLAR system is more stressful in being called out at nights over longer periods of working.

93. In relation to **design issues** for the proposed new station, the Upton group was exactly divided on whether there should be a tower on the site; but they accepted unanimously that there should be alternative training facilities if not a tower. And the group unanimously supported locating community and ambulance facilities on site.
94. In contrast to the Saughall Massie group, but like the West Kirby focus group, the Upton group unanimously accepted that the draft proposal to change the **status of the current second wholetime fire engine** to a reserve support vehicle (subject to 30 minutes mobilising time when required in exceptional circumstances) was feasible and reasonable – as the main way to save money in the merger of two stations. On the basis of the evidence, the group did not find this proposal controversial or doubtful. In particular, they accepted that the Wirral as a whole would have sufficient emergency resources.

All-Wirral Forum

95. The all-Wirral forum had 22 diverse participants, but there was a high degree of **consensus – in favour of the merger in principle, the Saughall Massie site in particular, and also the re-designation of the second fire engine**. A wide range of questions and comments were made – including all the following issues:

Why does MFRA not penalise false AFAs by charging/fining the commercial premises for the calls-out?

Public bodies should also be accountable for their false AFAs

Do accidental fire death levels reflect differences in response time standards in different FRSs?

How do the staff feel about the implications of the risk and financial data?

Are the unions on board with the possible changes?

MFRA should limit expenditure – and service reductions – by having a pay freeze in place. Other industries have had to face pay restraint!

Are there any wider initiatives to make the savings?

What proportion of fires are caused by irresponsible actions?

The education and prevention budget should be protected or even increased – it is short-sighted not to do so!

96. Some of the typical specific questions and comments about the options were:

What's the response from Heswall to West Kirby? Could the Heswall fire engine sometimes get to West Kirby more quickly than one from Saughall Massie?

How much would the new station cost in practice?

How expensive and suitable is the Upton station?

Where would the fire engine be located in Saughall Massie and will you face the same objections there as in Greasby?

What is the timescale for this proposal? How long will it take to develop the new site?

Would you close West Kirby while Saughall Massie is being built?

What happens if West Kirby and Upton don't close and the new station is not built – is there a third option?

There are a lot of elderly people in West Kirby – and they are higher risk residents.

97. The overall tone of the meeting was very positive and two notable statements in support of the Fire Authority's preferred option were:

You would cover Upton or Saughall Massie with covering fire engines if the engine from there was called out – because it is a strategic station

I supported the Greasby site for a fire station – but there was a big lack of understanding – so will the same thing happen in Saughall Massie? You need to convince them!

98. On the basis of the evidence and answers to questions, all except one of the 22 forum participants readily accepted that the proposed merger of two fire stations was reasonable in principle. The same majority supported using the Saughall Massie site rather than locating services at Upton (and basing cover at Upton fire station supported by only one person). The forum was unanimous that in this case it was reasonable to develop a green belt site.

99. With only one dissenter, the participants thought it was reasonable to include a tower on the Saughall Massie site in order to facilitate training – but they thought its visual impact should be minimised. All the participants thought that the inclusion of some community facilities was reasonable, but there was a broad division of opinion about whether ambulance facilities should be co-located at the site (those against were concerned that ambulance mobilisations would cause more disturbance than the less frequent fire engine movements).
100. While preferring option 1, by a ratio of ten-to-one the forum felt that, if the Saughall Massie site became unavailable for any reason, it would then be acceptable to base local emergency services at Upton.
101. A large absolute majority of participants (19) accepted that it was reasonable to change the status of the second fire engine: there were only three ‘don’t knows’.

Quantitative Findings

Introduction

102. MFRA's consultation programme also included a conscientious and ambitious residents' survey, which ORS was commissioned to design and implement. To achieve the best combination of economy and inclusiveness a postal questionnaire was sent to a large random sample of 10,000 households – stratified to include 5,000 addresses in the Upton fire station area (including Saughall Massie) and 5,000 addresses in the West Kirby fire station area. Questionnaires were sent out in the week commencing 13th April 2015 and the cut-off date for their return was 15th May 2015. Of the questionnaires despatched, a total of only 161 were returned as 'failed mail.'
103. A total of 1,351 completed questionnaires were returned – with 577 from the Upton station area and 774 from the west Kirby area, yielding an overall response rate of 14% (12% for Upton and 16% for West Kirby). Saughall Massie residents amounted to 11% of the initial contact sample, but accounted for 17% of the survey respondents – so the village was certainly not under-represented.
104. The returned sample for each fire station area was compared with census data and then weighted by age, gender, ethnicity and whether people were suffering a long term illness/disability.
105. The survey questionnaire covered the same issues as the deliberative meetings – namely, MFRA's two options and further draft proposal for the second fire engine. As well as the questionnaire, the 10,000 randomly selected households received a copy of MFRA's Consultation Newsletter.
106. Where appropriate and possible in the following report, many of the following charts use a standardised colour-coding or 'traffic light' system in which:
 - Green shades represent positive responses
 - Beige and purple/blue shades represent neither positive nor negative responses
 - Red shades represent negative responses
 - The bolder shades are used to highlight responses at the 'extremes', for example, very satisfied or very dissatisfied.
107. Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of "don't know" responses or to multiple-response questions.

108. Some of the charts shown below were also included in the executive summary, with the same numbering.

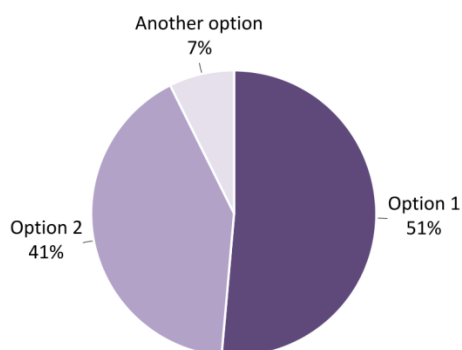
The Options

109. Residents in both Upton and West Kirby were asked whether they preferred option 1 (merging Upton and West Kirby fire stations by building a new fire station in Saughall Massie), option 2 (closing West Kirby fire station and using Upton fire station to cover both areas) or another option.
110. As Figure 1 shows, an absolute majority of residents in both fire station areas preferred option 1 – 51% in Upton and 70% in West Kirby. In Upton, just over two-fifths (41%) preferred option 2, but in West Kirby only a just over a fifth (21%) preferred that option.

Figure 1: Residents survey responses to whether they prefer option 1, 2 or another option

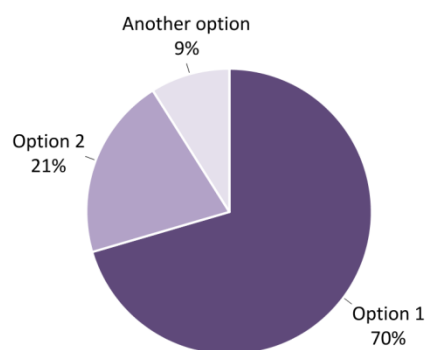
Do you prefer option 1 (merging Upton and West Kirby fire stations by building a new fire station in Saughall Massie), option 2 (closing West Kirby fire station and using Upton fire station to cover both areas) or another option?

Upton



Base: All Respondents (558)

West Kirby



Base: All respondents (746)

111. When responses for the two areas are combined to yield 'overall results' the absolute majority for option 1 is 57%.
112. In Upton and West Kirby respectively, only 7% and 9% of residents would prefer another option. In Upton, the main alternative option that residents gave was to find another location for building a new station. Others were also supportive of option 1 but thought that a new station should be built at a Brownfield site. Some typical comments were:

A better alternative would be to situate the fire station at the roundabout between Sainsbury's and Greasby. There is an exit which was never used. This would be a better position because the road through Greasby is wider for the engine to travel through rather than the narrow lanes from Saughall Massie through to West Kirby, which would be dangerous and would slow the engine, also tractors use this route.

The old adult training centre, Pasture Road Moreton; in-between the library and the ambulance station.

Building on a green field site down a country lane isn't a good idea. Merging both stations at a brownfield site would be better. Two possible sites: one opposite Upton station behind Champion Spark Plugs site which is currently for sale or use the Old Moreton brick works site on the Meols Stretch.

Build a new fire station in a central location as per option 1 but on a brown field site rather than use green belt lands.

113. The main alternative options suggested by West Kirby residents were: to close Upton station while keeping West Kirby station open or to find another location for a new station or to keeping both stations open but with retained firefighters. Some example comments included:

Close both and rebuild at: a) land near old 'Champion Spark Plugs' land. b) stretch between Meols and Moreton

Merging makes economic sense, building on the green belt does not. What about siting on or near the business parks on Saughall Road and Arrowe Brook Road?

Close Upton and keep Kirby open to serve both areas and save money by using existing facility.

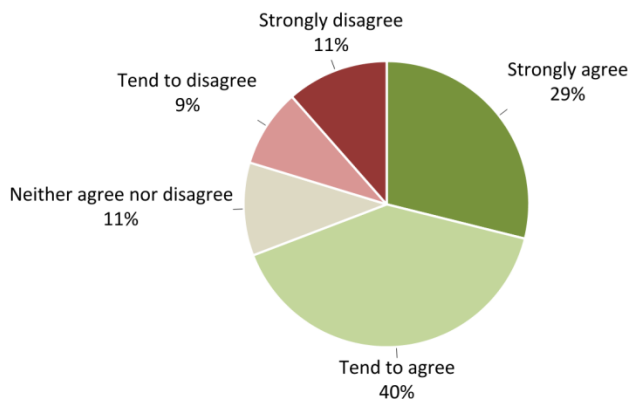
Keep both existing stations on a retained basis.

Status of second fire engine

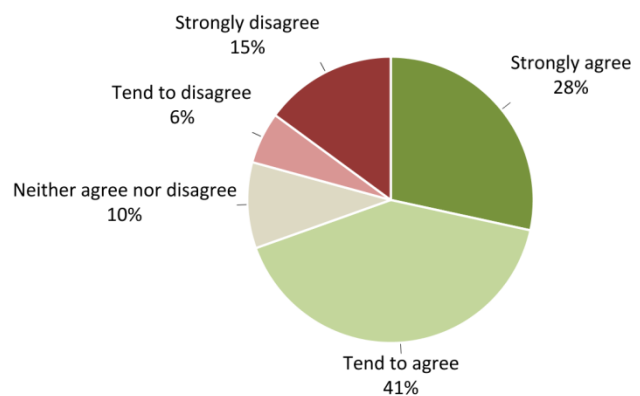
114. Very large absolute majorities in both Upton (69%) and West Kirby (70%) agreed with MFRA's additional draft proposal to keep one immediate response (24/7) fire engine at the proposed station while making the second fire engine a reserve or back-up vehicle with its crew subject to recall within 30 minutes in the event of exceptional incidents or spate conditions. The findings are shown in Figure 2 on the next page.

Figure 2: Agreement with the additional proposal

Do you agree or disagree with the additional proposal to keep one immediate response (24/7) fire engine at the proposed station while making the second fire engine a reserve or back-up vehicle with its crew subject to recall within 30 minutes in the event of exceptional incidents or spate conditions?

Upton

Base: All Respondents (563)

West Kirby

Base: All respondents (754)

115. A fifth of Upton residents disagreed with the proposal – their main reasons being that:

The 30 minute response time is too long.

For the area the station has to cover there should be a minimum of two immediate response 24/7 fire engines available.

If there were 2 incidents at the same time which one would they go to?

In the event of an emergency I feel it would put too much pressure on one machine and small number of men / women.

Reduced cover will put lives at risk.

One immediate response fire engine is not sufficient engines to cover the stated area and be adequate to cope with the level / amount of fire and rescue incidents.

This feels like a third party, fire and theft option. When fully comp is required, the only gamble is lives, not the value of a car.

116. Just over a fifth (21%) of Upton residents disagreed with the proposal – mainly because:

The thirty minute seems very long in the event of a spate of calls or exceptional incident. Both areas deserve a further response than this would give.

Because of the increase in distance for one station to get to West Kirby area as many roads are narrow.

For the size of the area there should be two immediate response fire engines at all times.

I don't think amalgamating into one operational fire station covering what is in effect a combined larger area, that one operational fire engine can be regarded as effective and efficient equipment. It really would be selling the public short and putting lives and livelihoods at unacceptable risk.

I live in West Kirby and have been aware over many years that particularly during the spring, summer season the fire engines are kept busy with gorse fires along Caldys Ridge. I really am not convinced it is a safe option to have just one 24/7 engine.

The reduction of service to what amounts to one fire engine to cover a large geographical area must be unsafe.

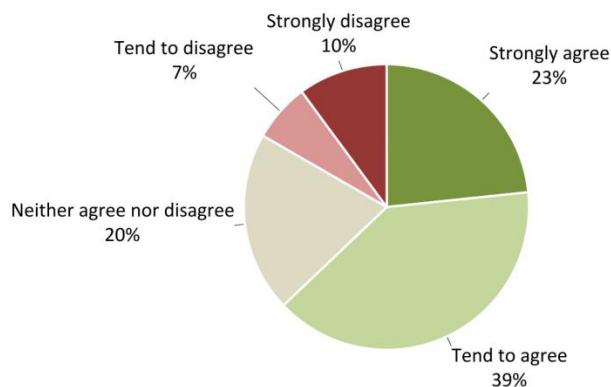
Other issues

- 117. Absolute majorities in both Upton (63%) and West Kirby (59%) agreed with including community facilities at the proposed station, as Figure 3 shows.

Figure 3: Agreement with including community facilities at the proposed station

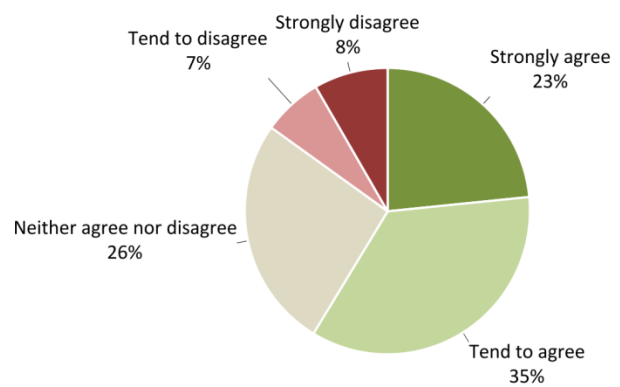
To what extent do you agree or disagree with including community facilities at the proposed station?

Upton



Base: All Respondents (559)

West Kirby



Base: All respondents (747)

118. Some typical comments about facilities for the community were:

I think a community gym facility and youth facility, but I have concerns with the lack of public transport access.

Community building with wheelchair access.

Community rooms are a good idea, as I have viewed a number of them and been impressed. Think they should be advertised as I'm sure a number of community groups would welcome usage in return MFRS also gets to know the community they serve.

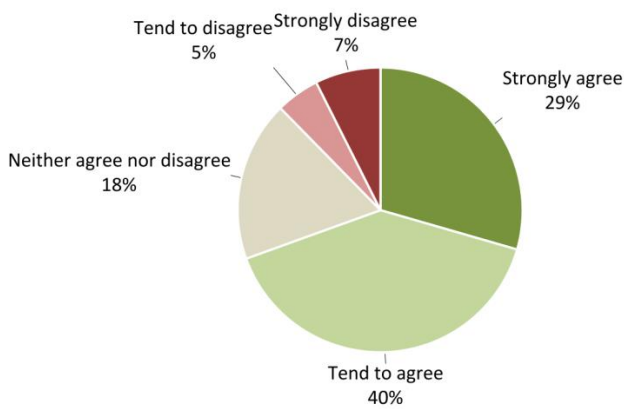
Community usage is essential. Clinic/health centre facilities?

119. Even larger absolute majorities (69% in Upton and 76% in West Kirby) agreed with sharing the proposed station with other blue light emergency services, as Figure 4 shows.

Figure 4: Agreement with including community facilities at the proposed station

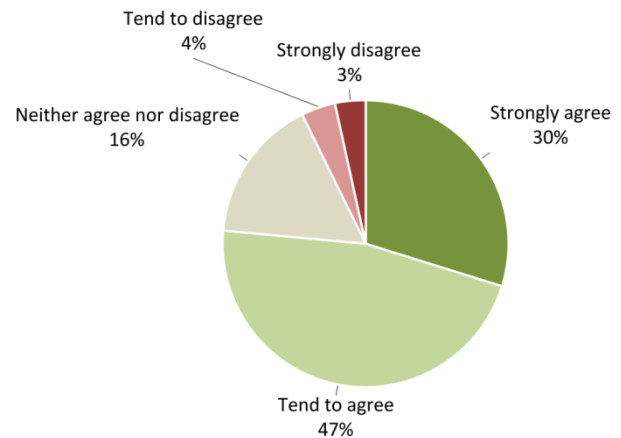
To what extent do you agree or disagree with sharing the proposed station with other blue light emergency services?

Upton



Base: All Respondents (562)

West Kirby



Base: All respondents (745)

120. Residents were also asked whether they had any suggestions about its appearance, design features or facilities that should be included if a fire station was to be built on Saughall Massie Road. A large number of residents thought that if a new station was built it should be in keeping with the surrounding area/environment:

I would like the building to blend in as much as possible with the environment.

If it was to be built on Saughall Massie Road, it should have an appearance that totally blends in with surroundings and not stand out in the green belt area!

121. Some residents suggested specific design features:

Cottage style. See Sainsbury's at Upton

Design to blend in with surroundings. Area - single storey design. - brick construction. - pitched roof design, tiled. - landscaped garden area.

The tower should be a colour, which blends into the countryside, as so should be the rest of the building.

It should be built in colours that blend in with the countryside as well as possible e.g. green/brown, rather than black/red.

Possibly a smart tower that can be adapted so it's not as high when not in use.

122. Several residents also suggested landscaping and trees:

Masked by trees to keep the appearance of greenbelt.

Back a little from the road with trees in front as much as possible to provide sympathetic natural camouflage.

The design of the building should be sympathetic to its location. Landscaping and tree planting should be an integral part of the plan.

123. Others noted that a new building should be eco-friendly and energy efficient:

Solar panels across the entire roof for energy efficiency or plant a green roof for ecological reasons.

Have it green friendly. Possible solar panels at ground level and living green roof to merge with areas greenbelt.

Consider ecological impact e.g. if roof and orientation make solar panels sensible then include these, maximise insulation etc.

124. There were mixed views on whether, if a station is built, it should have a modern look or not:

Should look like a shining beacon of modernity, technology and community. Shouldn't be afraid to look contemporary, though should still be functional and appropriate.

A strong design statement as it's a new build.

Not too modern looking; country natural look would fit in with surroundings.

The outer shell should be rural in its appearance while the business part of station should be modern and able to accommodate all interests relevant to the community.

For the appearance to be modern but in keeping with the local area and accessible.

125. There were also mixed views on whether the building should be single or double storey – though more residents said they would prefer a single storey building:

A two storey would give more facilities for leisure and training of staff.

Double storey building, saving on land that can be used for other things.

I would prefer the single storey option, this would cause less visual impact.

I prefer the single storey proposal as this would be less obtrusive.

It should be as environmentally neutral as possible, and built 'low level' wherever possible, so as to minimise the 'eye-sore' effect for local residents. It should also have some green space/trees.

Equalities

126. Residents were asked if MFRA's proposals would have any positive or negative impacts on people with protected characteristics – and how any adverse effects could be mitigated. The following possible negative impacts were mentioned in relation to the proposed Saughall Massie site:

The proposed site is near a 'supported living' accommodation area. The noise may disrupt these individuals, who are elderly and/or disabled.'

Proposed development would be immediately adjacent to bungalows occupied by elderly and some disabled people...The addition of a fire station with associated sirens and traffic would have...negative impacts.'

I think there is sheltered housing for elderly residents near the proposed fire station. The noise and disruption to residents should be avoided.

Next to the Saughall Massie site are a large number of specialist housing units for people with a wide range of disability. I believe the additional noise etc. from an operational training facility could impact significantly on their wellbeing.'

Adjacent to proposed site in Saughall Massie are for elderly/ disabled residents. Continuous call out noise [is] not acceptable.'

Yes, the area on Saughall Massie road has many retirement bungalows which will have noise disturbance, extra traffic, pollution and reduce the tranquillity of their residence.'

127. In West Kirby, the concerns were about the impact of possible longer response times on elderly and/or disabled residents:

Increased likelihood of older or disabled residents living in West Kirby area being disadvantaged by response times in emergencies. These groups are more likely to have longer reaction times to emergencies when they occur in the first place and this would further compound this issue.

Largely elderly population may be more vulnerable in West Kirby if response times are reduced.

The proposal has a negative impact. West Kirby has a particularly strong ageing demographic. It has more old people than average. They are more likely to need support quickest.

Other suggestions

128. Residents were asked whether they had any other suggestions on how MFRA can make the required savings. Some of the varied suggestions made were as follows:

Adopt retained status for all smaller stations

Centralise all training facilities and structures as have many other brigades.

Merge Wirral stations with Cheshire FRS

Community facilities to be combined with local authorities and other services

Adopt retained status for all smaller stations. 2. Centralise all training facilities and structures as have many other brigades. 3. Merge Wirral stations with Cheshire FRS. 4. Community facilities to be combined with la and other services

A reduction in salaries at higher level CFO, DCFO and higher paid civilian staff.

Lesser pension scheme for those who retire at 50. 50 year olds can still drive engines and work machinery. More economic shift patterns in relation to mean number of call outs. I thank our wonderful firefighters for their amazing work but think these are things that can be done.

A small charge for non-emergencies and severe penalties for false alarms.

Rather than making savings, why can't an increase in council tax help to contribute to a leaner, more modern service?

Continue to consult with all parties: staff, neighbours, local communities, local charities, schools and businesses. Public safety is of vital importance to all of us.

Prevention is better than cure. Keep trying to raise the culture regarding safety.

Reduce cost of senior management and administration by merging with another fire and rescue authority. Reduce your support service costs further, by having them done by the council.

Look at the management, administration and other ancillary services connected to front line service.

Respondent profile

Figure 5: Are you...?

Base: All Respondents (1,286)

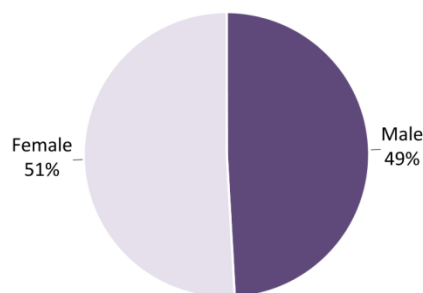


Figure 6: What was your age on your last birthday?

Base: All Respondents (1,281)

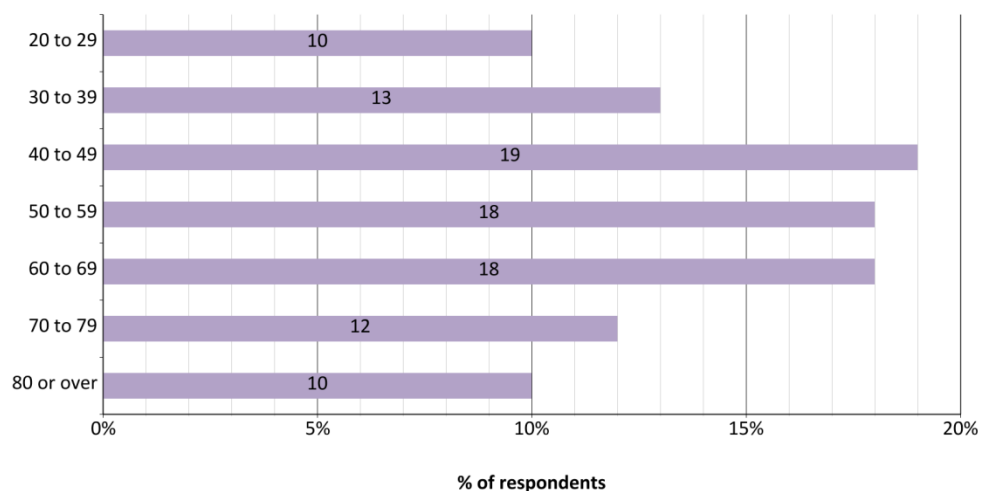


Figure 7: Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?
Base: All Respondents (1,268)

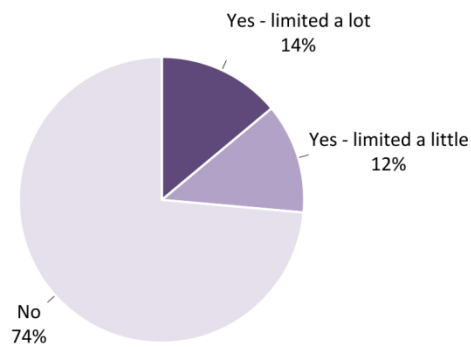


Figure 8: Including you, how many adults in total aged 16 or over are living here?
Base: All Respondents (1,298)

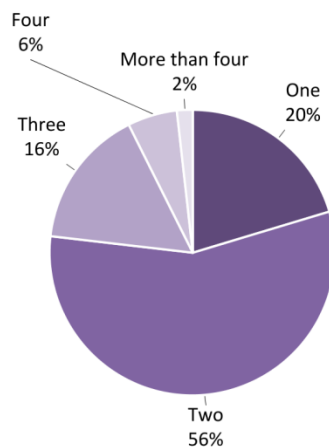


Figure 91: What is your ethnic group?
Base: All Respondents (1267)

