Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

ST HELENS DISTRICT FIRE COVER CONSULTATION

August 2015

Introduction

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority has begun a 12-week consultation on proposed changes to emergency response cover in the St Helens district. The consultation runs from 3rd August 2015 to 25th October 2015.

The public consultation will consider two options:

The proposed merger of Eccleston and St Helens fire stations at a new station to be built on Canal Street, St Helens.
The re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime fire engines as "wholetime retained" (with a 30-minute recall) whilst;

Inviting suggestions for other suitable alternative options to deliver savings required as a result of further cuts to the Authority budget.

OR:
The outright closure of Eccleston fire station as the alternative to the merger.
The re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime appliances as "wholetime retained" (with a 30-minute recall) whilst;

Inviting suggestions for other suitable alternative options to deliver savings as a result of further cuts to the Authority budget.

St Helens fire station.

The outcome of the consultation will be reported back to Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority following the conclusion of the consultation period.

The consultation process will involve public meetings at locations near Parr, St Helens town centre and Eccleston, a stakeholders' meeting in St Helens, three focus groups and a joint forum.

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

- ☐ **Tuesday, 29th September, starting at 6.30pm at Cowley International College, Hard Lane, St Helens, WA10 6PN.**
- ☐ **Thursday, 1st October, starting at 6.30pm at St Augustine of Canterbury Catholic High School, Boardmans Lane, Blackbrook, St Helens, WA11 9BB.**
- ☐ **Tuesday, 6th October, starting at 6.30pm at St Helens Town Hall, Corporation Street, St Helens, WA10 1HP.**

This consultation document is being distributed in public buildings, local stores and businesses across St Helens district. It is available on our website www.merseyfire.gov.uk along with an online questionnaire at https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/sthelensmerger **.** You can email us at consultation2@merseyfire.gov.uk , or write to us at St Helens Consultation, Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, Headquarters, Bridle Road, Bootle, L30 4YD.

Why is Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority having to change?

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) is responsible for providing fire and rescue services for Merseyside's 1.4 million residents at 25 fire stations across five districts (Allerton Fire Station closed on the 1st of April 2015). This currently includes three stations in St Helens: St Helens (Parr Stocks Road), Eccleston and Newton-le-Willows.

Over the last four years, the Authority has had to make savings of £20 million as a result of Government spending cuts. The Authority is required to make a further £6.3 million savings in 2015/16. It is also clear that the Authority will also face further significant cuts over the course of the next Parliament.

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

Prior to the start of this change process, what had not altered was the number of fire stations (26). This number has now reduced to 25 with the closure of Allerton fire station on 1st April 2015.

To save £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 station 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 Prescot.
2. Close the stations at Upton and West Kirby while providing a new station at a central location (initially at Frankby Road, Greasby and then at Saughall Massie Road, Saughall Massie).
3. Close the stations at Eccleston and St Helens while providing a new station in 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 had also been considered, but given the age and relatively close proximity of stations in that area, it was proposed that outright closure of a station would be the most sensible option. Following a 12-week public consultation, the Authority closed Allerton Fire Station. The merger at Prescot has been approved and is progressing. The merger at Saughall Massie was approved at a meeting of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority on 30th June, 2015, following a 12-week public consultation.

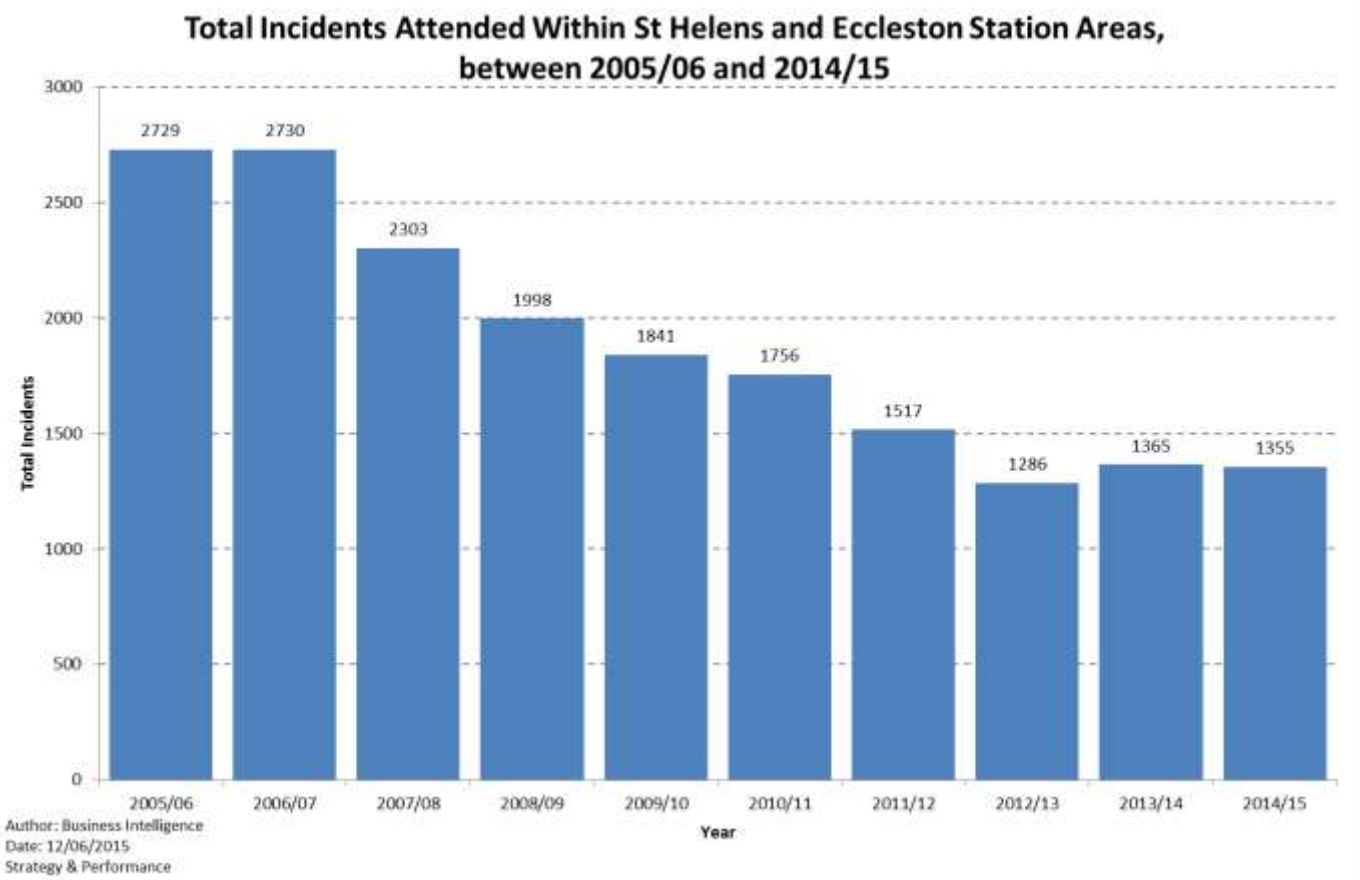
The Authority believes that each of these changes results in the least impact on operational performance and will deliver the savings required as a result of the cuts to its budget from Government.

Incident reductions

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

St Helens fire station area has seen a fall of 51.75% (1,888 incidents attended in 2005/6 compared to 911 in 2014/15). Eccleston fire station area has seen a reduction of 47.21% (841 incidents attended in 2005/6 compared to 444 incidents attending in 2014/15).

While the number of fatalities, in house fires caused by accident, experienced across St Helens district in that decade is relatively low (8), the level of risk is still high as the worst potential outcome from any fire or other emergency is death.



Response implications of the merger option or outright closure of Eccleston

Introduction

How quickly a fire engine is able to respond when a fire or other life risk incident occurs remains a priority for the Authority in order to minimise the impact on people

and property. However, we also recognise that cuts to budgets and the structural changes that result will always have an impact on emergency response.

Therefore, 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 the St Helens district.

Current response times

The current mean average response time to a life risk incident in the St Helens station area is **5 minutes 51 seconds**. The current mean average response time to life risk incidents in the Eccleston station area is **5 minutes 40 seconds.**

This is significantly quicker than the Authority **10-minute response standard** and the national mean average response time for all fire and rescue services of **7 minutes 24 seconds,** which is only for dwelling fires and does not include road traffic collisions and other life risk incidents.

Predicted response times

Merger option

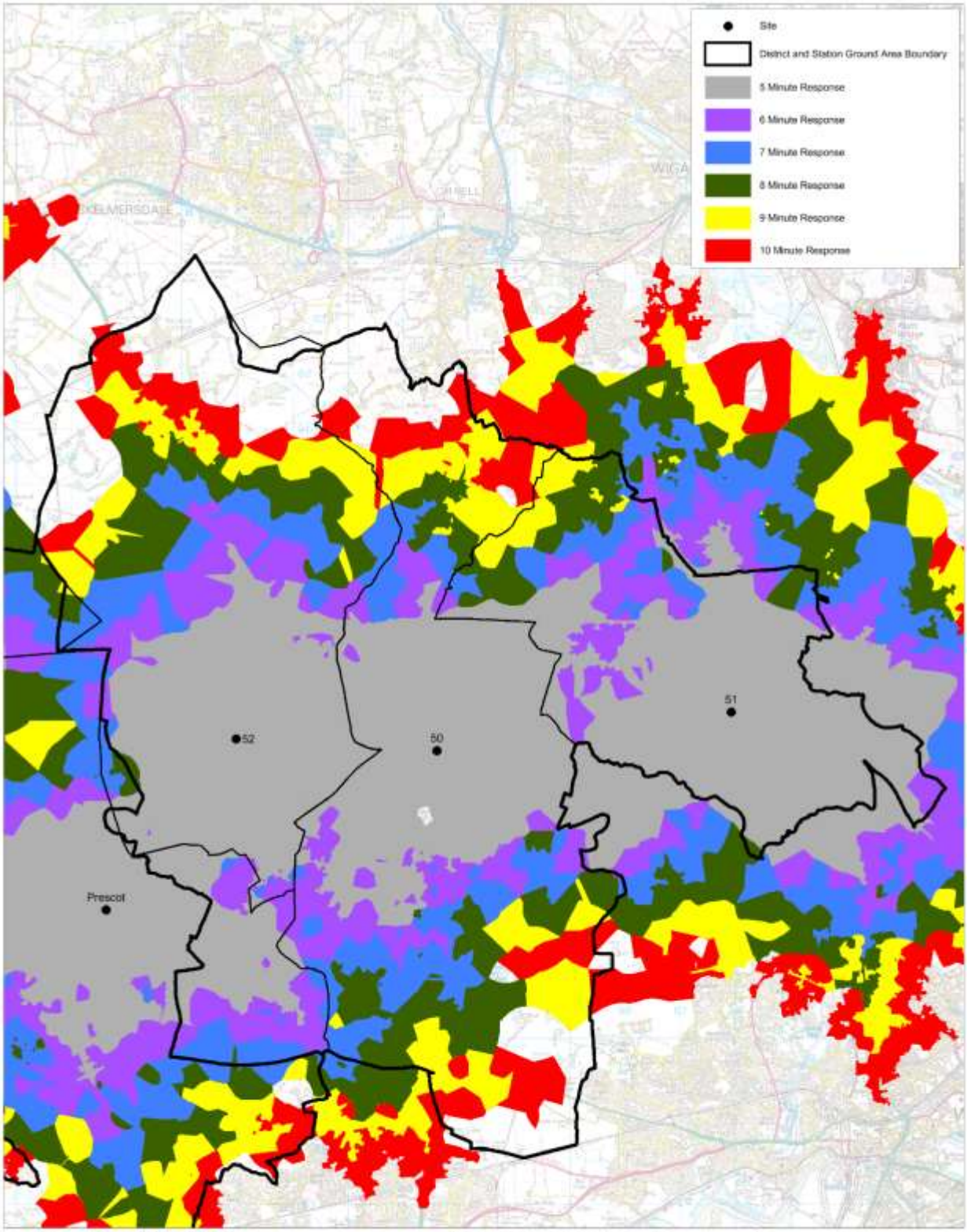
If, following consultation, the Authority decided to close St Helens and Eccleston fire stations and build a new station on Canal Street, the predicted mean average time taken to attend life risk incidents in the St Helens station area would be 5 minutes 26 seconds. The predicted mean average time taken to respond to incidents in the Eccleston station area from Canal Street would be 4 minutes 47 seconds, 1 minute 57 seconds quicker than the alternative outright closure of Eccleston Station and very close to the current average attendance time.

The predicted average time for attending incidents in the St Helens station area improves with this option because the proposed site in Canal Street is in a better location from which to reach the areas where the majority of incidents occur.

Eccleston outright closure

If, following consultation, the Authority decided to close Eccleston station and retain the current St Helens station in Parr Stocks Road, the predicted mean average response time to a life risk incident in the Eccleston station area from the current St Helens station, would increase to **6 minutes 44 seconds**. This option would not affect the response times of the St Helens' fire appliance attending incidents in the St Helens station area as the station location would not change.

1. **The map below shows how far fire engines can travel within 10 minutes (under emergency conditions) from current fire station locations and a new proposed fire station in Prescot.**



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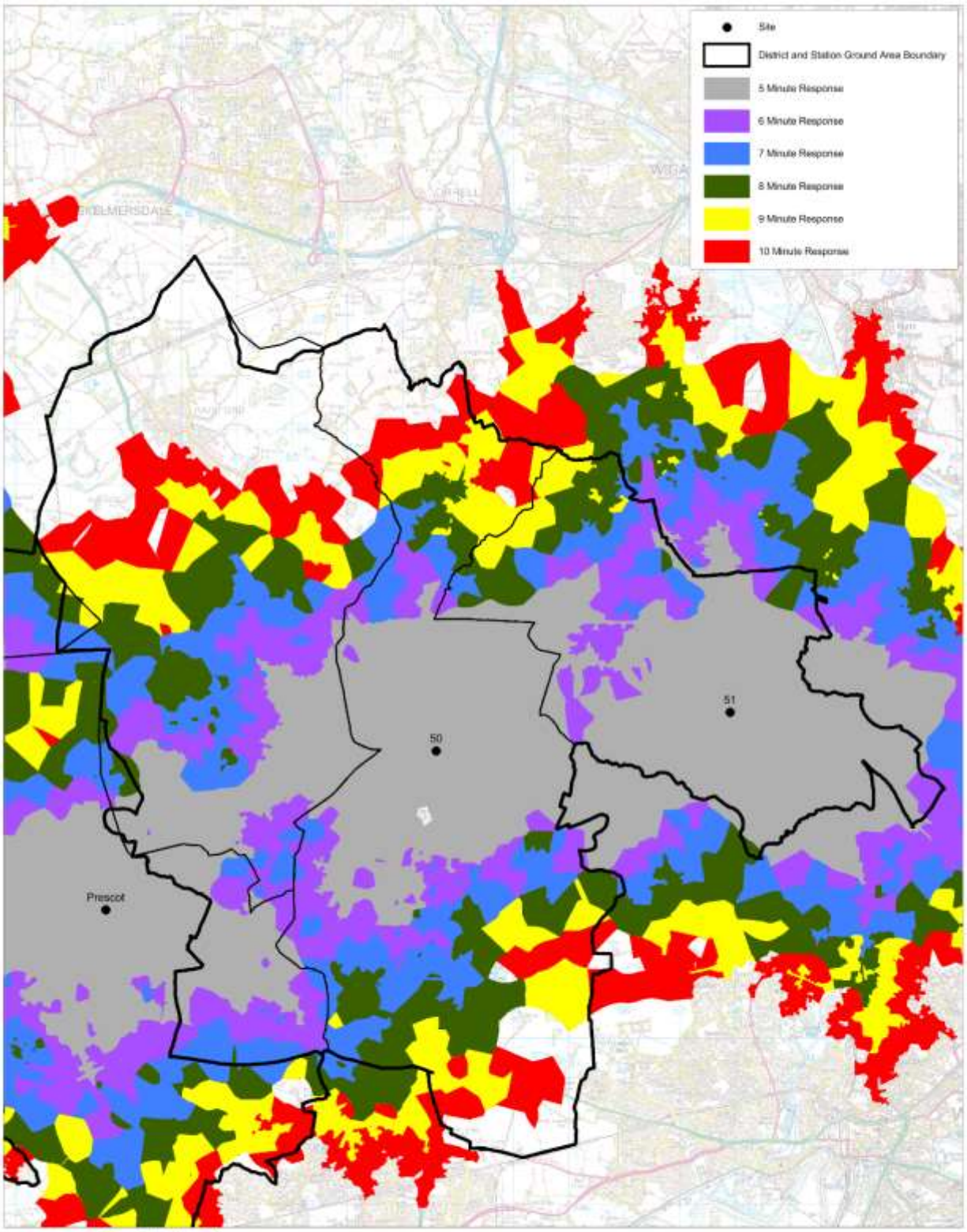
5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 Minute Response Coverage Time from Prescot, Kirkby (42), St Helens (50), Newton-le-Willows (51) and Eccleston (52) Community Fire Stations

2. The map below shows how far fire engines could travel within 10 minutes (under emergency conditions) if Eccleston fire station only was closed.



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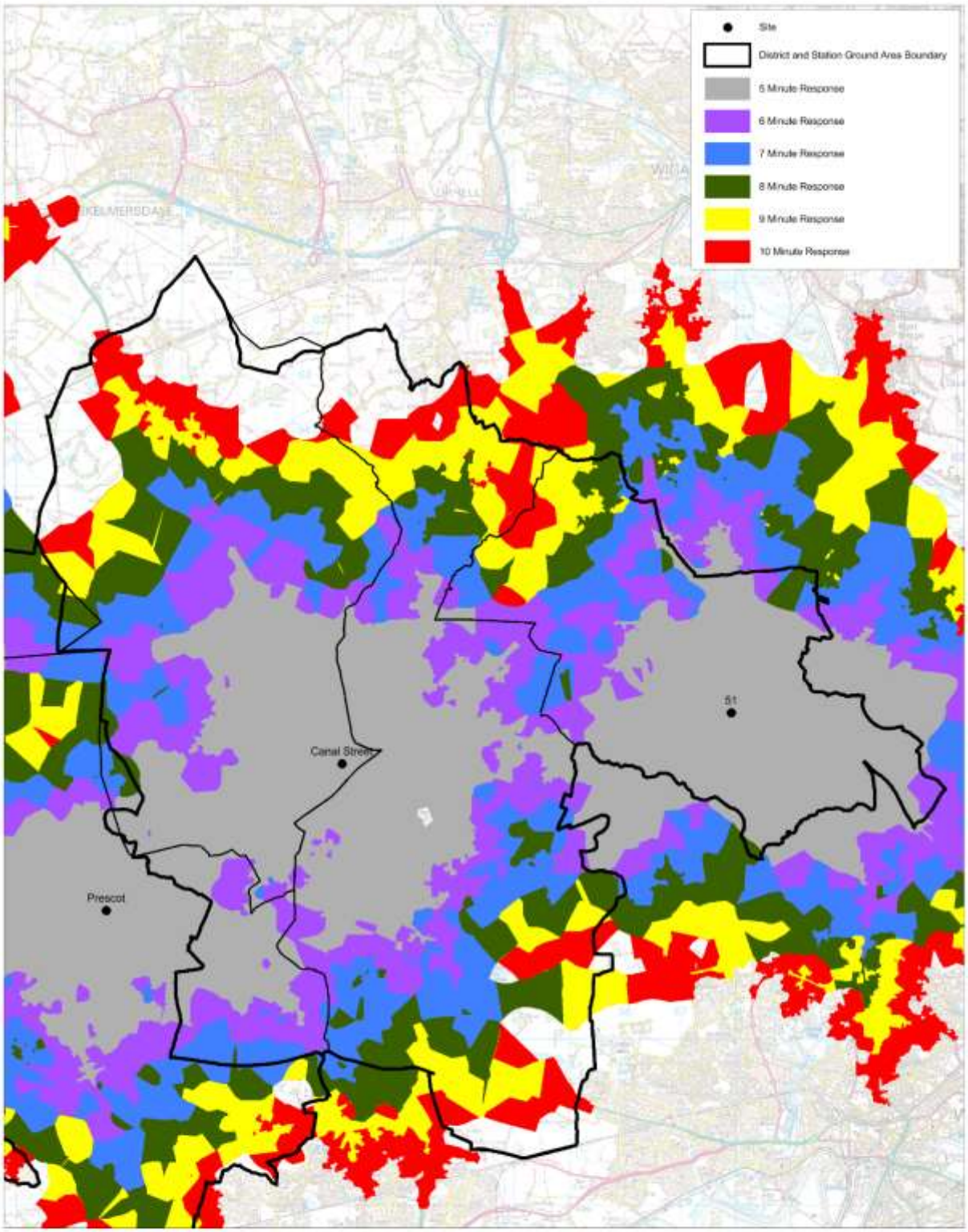
5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 Minute Response Coverage Time from Prescot, Kirkby (42), St Helens (50) and Newton-le-Willows (51) Community Fire Stations

3. **The map below shows how far fire engines could travel within 10 minutes (under emergency conditions) if the Canal Street, St Helens, site replaced Parr Stocks Road and Eccleston fire stations.**



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5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 Minute Response Coverage Time from Proposed Canal Street Location, Prescot, Kirkby (42) and Newton-le-Willows (51) Community Fire Stations

Option 1 - St Helens and Eccleston station closures and proposed new station at Canal Street, St Helens

The merger of two stations into one new station would not usually improve operational performance, but in St Helens it would because of the proximity to the St Helens Linkway. **If the new station was located in Canal Street, St Helens, it would result in faster average attendance times in the St Helens and Eccleston station areas because the location is closer to where most of the incidents occur.**

If the merger of the current St Helens and Eccleston fire stations was to go ahead, the vast majority of the area would still be covered from a new Canal Street station and surrounding stations within ten minutes.

However, as can be seen on the maps, there are sections of the station areas that cannot currently be reached within the Authority 10-minute attendance standard and this will remain the case if a new station is built at Canal Street to replace Eccleston and the current St Helens station. Additional preventative work already takes place in these areas to help reduce risk from fire and other emergencies and this work will continue to ensure residents and visitors receive the best possible service in an emergency.

The proposed new station would have one fire engine staffed on a wholetime basis (24 hours a day, 365 days a year) and a second staffed on a wholetime retained basis. This crewing system would involve wholetime firefighters providing cover for a retained fire engine during their days off. This fire engine would only be used in periods of exceptionally high demand (recalled to duty in 30 minutes), and would not form part of an immediate response to emergencies.

Converting a fire engine to wholetime retained would have an impact on the delivery of community safety services, as there would be fewer firefighters to carry out those activities. However, the Service's safety strategies are flexible enough to deal with such changes and would target premises and people that are at greatest risk.

Option 2 – Outright closure of Eccleston fire station, retaining St Helens fire station, Parr Stocks Road

If, after consultation, the Authority decides that a merger is not suitable, then the alternative option is outright closure of Eccleston fire station. The fire engine at Eccleston would be moved to the existing St Helens Parr Stocks Road station and be crewed wholetime retained as outlined above.

This would result in more areas on the edges of the Eccleston station area not receiving a 10-minute response and that is why the merger option is the one preferred by the Authority as the "least worst" in the circumstances.

If, however, this option was eventually chosen by the Authority, those areas not reached within ten minutes would be the subject of additional preventative measures.

The proposed Canal Street station

The proposed Canal Street site is currently part of the Pilkington Glass site. The new station would include modern firefighter facilities, training facilities and community rooms.

A number of local organisations currently have space in our Parr station and would be offered an opportunity to move to Canal Street. The Authority is also in discussions with other potential partners to share the proposed new building. The North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) may be interested in sharing the site and Merseyside Police may be interested in using any training facilities, but do not need space on the site. Discussions will continue with NWAS and Merseyside Police.

Moving to Canal Street and converting one wholetime fire engine to wholetime retained would save 22 wholetime firefighter posts, which equates to a £864,000 annual saving. The firefighter posts would be lost through natural turnover and reserves would be used to avoid compulsory redundancy.

The forecast cost of a new station is £4.8 million. The Authority has been successful in securing some grant from the government to contribute towards its programme of station mergers. In addition the sale of the old fire station sites would contribute towards the cost of the new station. The remaining balance would be met from reserves already ring-fenced for the merger process. As a result, the Authority would be able to avoid borrowing to build the proposed station. The cost of a building over its entire life including all the maintenance and upkeep is significant and this proposal would allow the overall number of buildings to be reduced thus making a further saving in the long-term.

The Authority has considerable recent experience of building new community fire stations, for example at Newton-le-Willows, (see photo further below), and its design would go through a further consultation process at the planning stage if, following consultation, the merger proposal is approved by the Authority.

The proposed Canal Street station site is shown on the map on the following page.

Proposed Community Fire Station Location on Canal Street

This photo shows Newton-le-Willows Community Fire Station – an example of a recent newly-built fire station.

Alternative options considered

The information below is a detailed explanation of the alternative options to achieve the required levels of savings, and whether they are considered feasible options at this time.

Of the 25 current stations in Merseyside, 10 are designated as key stations. From these 10 key stations, the Authority can provide a 10-minute response to all areas of Merseyside on 90% of occasions (our response standard).

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 engines the Authority can operate on a wholetime basis.

The removal of 90 firefighter posts required to deliver savings of £3.4m will result in the loss of four wholetime fire engines. It is the view of the Chief Fire Officer that the Authority should maintain two fire engines at Kirkdale and Southport, because of the location of Southport and the fact that Kirkdale is the Operational Resource Centre for Merseyside.

In maintaining two fire engines 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 25 stations through altering the crewing arrangements on specific stations or across the Service.

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 25 stations. The system consists of a 12-hour wholetime day shift followed immediately by a 12-hour retained night shift (spent off the station) where the crew must respond to an incident within 1 minute 54 seconds of an alert, thus maintaining a comparable alert to mobile time as achieved by other wholetime staff during their night-time rest period.

Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to LLAR would deliver a saving of 8 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order to deliver the same savings as for a station merger, 3 wholetime stations would need to convert to LLAR. Whilst this option would maintain an immediate emergency response (assuming it was possible to secure accommodation for the night-time retained period separate from the station but within a 1 minute 54 seconds alert to mobile time) it is less resilient than wholetime crewing as the same staff cover the 12-hour wholetime period and the 12-hour retained period. For example, if a crew attends incidents during the night-time period they will then require a period of stand down time to recover during the day shift, meaning they are either not available to provide operational response or unable to undertake prevention work or normal scheduled duties. As the number of fire appliances reduces the ability for Fire Control to not mobilise LLAR appliances during the retained period is also reduced meaning they will attend more incidents and potentially no longer meet the Low Level of Activity and Risk threshold. To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response, the Authority would need to convert 12 wholetime fire engines to LLAR in addition to the existing 4 LLAR fire engines.

This would result in 16 of the Authority's 28 fire engines being crewed in this way. In order to comply with working time regulations, the Authority would be required to provide separate accommodation for the retained duty period that is within a 1 minute 54 second response from the stations in question. The cost of building accommodation at existing LLAR stations has been around £300,000. Converting 12 fire engines to LLAR would therefore require a capital spend of around £3.6 million for accommodation. Of the 10 key stations only one, Formby, is currently crewed LLAR which is as a result of its geographic location and the very low numbers of incidents on the station ground and number of appliance mobilisations. In any other circumstances a key station would not be crewed on the LLAR duty system. Of the stations not designated as "key" a number have fire appliance mobilisation numbers which exceed the LLAR threshold of 825 incidents to the station area agreed in 2006 (Kirkdale, Kensington, City Centre and Birkenhead).

A number also do not have sufficient space within the curtilage of the station to build separate accommodation necessary to make the 1 minute 54 seconds alert to mobile time during the retained period (for example Kensington and Aintree). There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew an additional 12 LLAR fire engines. Whilst the Authority could recruit firefighters directly on to the LLAR system, this would result in crews on LLAR stations with a disproportionately high number of inexperienced firefighters until such time as they were able to demonstrate competence in role. It would also invariably result in existing wholetime firefighters who did not wish to

volunteer for the LLAR duty system being placed at risk of compulsory redundancy. It is for these reasons that LLAR has not been proposed by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness at this time.

Day Crewing

The Authority does not currently operate the Day Crewing duty system at any station on Merseyside. This system consists of a wholetime day shift (typically 10 hours' duration) immediately followed by a 14-hour retained night shift where a response is made by a firefighter from home within 5 minutes of an alert. Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to Day Crewing would deliver a saving of 10.8 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts (assuming a 10% retaining fee). In order to deliver the same savings as a station merger would, 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 8 wholetime fire engines to Day Crewing in addition to the existing 4 LLAR appliances. This would result in 12 of the Authority's 28 appliances either on Day Crewing or LLAR crewing. Day Crewing is less resilient than wholetime crewing for similar reasons as for LLAR as the same staff cover the 10-hour wholetime period and the 14-hour retained period. As the number of fire engines reduces, the ability for Fire Control to not mobilise LLAR or Day Crewing fire engines during the retained period is also reduced.

This option would introduce a 5-minute delay in responding from 8 fire engines for 14 hours each day. Assuming the 5-minute delay in responding into the station and given the geography of Merseyside, it is likely that the nearest wholetime fire engines would be able to attend an incident in at least the same time as the Day Crewing fire engine if not quicker during the retained period.

There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew 8-Day Crewing fire engines.

Whilst the Authority could recruit firefighters directly on to the Day Crewing system, this would result in crews on Day Crewing stations with a disproportionately high number of inexperienced firefighters until such time as they were able to demonstrate competence in role.

It would also invariably result in existing wholetime firefighters, who did not wish to volunteer for the Day Crewing duty system, being placed at risk of compulsory redundancy. It is for these reasons that Day Crewing has not been proposed by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness. If, as expected, the Authority faces further cuts beyond 2015/16 this option may have to be reconsidered as a means of maintaining capacity during the daytime period.

Day only crewing

The Authority does not currently operate day only crewing at any station on Merseyside. This system involves firefighters crewing the station for a 12-hour wholetime day shift only in order to maintain capacity to undertake training and community safety activities. Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to day only crewing would deliver a saving of 12 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order

to deliver the same savings as the station merger option 2 wholetime stations would need to convert to day only crewing.

To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response, the Authority would need to convert 8 wholetime fire engines to day only crewing in addition to the existing 4 LLAR fire engines. This would result in 12 of the Authority's 28 fire engines 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.

There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew 8 days only fire appliances. Whilst the Authority could recruit firefighters directly to day only crewing, this would result in crews on day only stations with a disproportionately high number of inexperienced firefighters until such time as they were able to demonstrate competence in role. It would also invariably result in existing wholetime firefighters, who did not wish to volunteer for day only crewing, being placed at risk of compulsory redundancy. It is for these reasons that day only crewing has not been proposed by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness at this time. If, as expected, the Authority faces further cuts beyond 2015/16 this option may have to be reconsidered as a means of maintaining capacity during the day-time period.

It should be noted that these fire engines would, in all likelihood, be used as a pan-Merseyside resource to, for example, stand in at key stations to facilitate the key fire engine crew attending the Training and Development Academy for crew-based training. It would make more financial sense therefore to relocate the day crewed only appliance permanently to a key station thus allowing the Authority to make permanent savings on premises' overheads (on average around £100k per year) through closing the non-key station.

Retained

The Authority does not currently operate retained only crewing at any station on Merseyside. This system involves members of the community who live or work within 5 minutes of a fire station volunteering to be available for up to 120 hours per week for a retaining fee equivalent to 10% of a wholetime firefighter's salary. Changing the crewing at a station from wholetime to retained would deliver a saving of 22 wholetime equivalent (WTE) posts. In order to deliver the same savings as for a station merger, 1 wholetime station would need to convert to retained crewing. To make the £3.4m savings required from operational response, the Authority would need to convert four wholetime fire engines to retained in addition to the existing four LLAR fire engines. This would result in 8 of the Authority's 28 fire engines 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. There is a very low likelihood indeed that the Authority could attract and indeed retain sufficient volunteers from existing staff to crew 4 wholetime retained appliances on a 5-minute recall. That being so, the Authority would need to recruit almost a full crew of retained firefighters. It is the view of the Chief Fire Officer that a retained firefighter does not

have sufficient contact (training) time within the Grey Book (Firefighters' Nationally agreed Conditions of Service) retained contract to acquire and maintain the skills of an existing Merseyside wholetime firefighter.

Also, the Merseyside Recruit Firefighter course is currently 24 weeks long and the wholetime work routine allocates in excess of 20 hours per week to on station training. A retained firefighter has approximately 2/3 hours per week contact time at station for training, development and maintenance duties. If the Authority were minded to still pursue this option they would have to accept that the retained firefighters would not be trained to the same level as their wholetime counterparts and it would take a long period of time to train the crew to a position whereby they were deemed fit to ride. Additionally, to maintain retained appliance availability a minimum of 4 members of the crew, including a driver and an officer in charge, would have to be permanently available within 5 minutes of the station. With 3 hours' contact time each week, retained firefighters would not be able to undertake any amount of community safety work.

Assuming the 5-minute delay in responding in to the station and given the geography of Merseyside, it is likely that the nearest wholetime fire engines would attend an incident in at least the same time as the retained crew if not quicker. It is for these reasons that retained crewing has not been proposed by the Chief Fire Officer as an option to maintain operational effectiveness at this time.

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 along with an online questionnaire at https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/sthelensmerger . You can email us at consultation2@merseyfire.gov.uk , or write to us at St Helens Consultation, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service, Headquarters, Bridle Road, Bootle, L30 4YD.

Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service 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 .