

CORRESPONDENCE FROM COUNCILLORS

CFO TO CLLR – 27TH JULY

As discussed at our meeting earlier today please find a summary of the St Helens merger proposal which forms the basis of our press release. An update on Prescott will follow under separate cover.

A 12-week consultation into proposed changes to fire cover across the St Helens district is launched on 3rd August.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority is proposing to close Eccleston and St Helens fire stations and build a new community fire station on Canal Street, St Helens. The alternative to the merger of the stations is the outright closure of Eccleston fire station.

Both proposals include the re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime fire appliances as “wholetime retained” (with a 30-minute recall).

Public meetings will be held on:

- *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 St Helens Town Hall, Corporation Street, St Helens, WA10 1HP.*

A consultation document with information on the proposals can be found at www.merseyfire.gov.uk and an online questionnaire can be found at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/sthelensmerger>. Focus group meetings, a stakeholders’ meeting and a joint forum are also being arranged as part of the 12-week consultation, which runs until 25th October.

Following the conclusion of the consultation process, a further report will be submitted to the Authority detailing the outcomes of the consultation and any operational implications.

Chief Fire Officer Dan Stephens said: “Over the last four years, MFRA has had to make savings of £20 million as a result of Government spending cuts and now the Authority is required to make a further £6.3 million savings in 2015/16. It is also clear the Authority will face significant further financial challenges over the course of this Parliament.

“The proposals are intended to minimise the impact of the ongoing cuts to the Authority budget and maintain as fast a response as possible to all parts of St Helens district.

“The consultation includes a document on www.merseyfire.gov.uk, as well as the document being distributed in the areas affected by the proposals, outlining why changes need to be made and details on the impact on fire cover across the St Helens district. The consultation will also 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.

“I urge people who may be affected by the proposals and who live and work in the St Helens district, to read the consultation document, fill in the consultation questionnaire and attend the public meetings.”

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

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

If St Helens and Eccleston fire stations closed and a new fire station was built on Canal Street then the predicted mean average run time to life risk incidents on the St Helens station area would be 5 minutes 26 seconds. The predicted mean average run time to incidents in the Eccleston station area from Canal Street would be 4 minutes 47 seconds, 1 minute 57 seconds quicker than it would be with the alternative outright closure of Eccleston fire station.

Moving to the Canal Street site and converting one wholetime appliance 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. Merseyside Fire and Rescue 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.

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

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

While the number of deaths in accidental fires in the home across the St Helens district in that decade is relatively low (8), every death is a tragedy, and despite falling incident numbers, the level of risk is still high as the worst potential outcome from a fire or Road Traffic Collision (RTC) is a death.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) is responsible for providing fire and rescue services for Merseyside's 1.4 million people at 25 stations across five districts. This currently includes three St Helens stations: St Helens (Parr Stocks Road), Eccleston and Newton-le-Willows.

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EMAIL SENT TO ALL COUNCILLORS IN ST HELENS AND OTHER AREAS IN WARDS AFFECTED – 3RD AUGUST

Message from Chief Fire Officer

The Chief Fire Officer has asked me to advise all Councillors in the St Helens District that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority is starting a 12 week consultation today on proposals to change fire cover arrangements in St Helens in order to deal with cuts to its budget. Below is the press release on the consultation, which also includes details of public meetings that will be held in September and October and links to a consultation document and on line questionnaire. Although the proposals only directly affect wards that are contained within our Eccleston and St Helens station areas, the Chief Fire Officer thought that all St Helens councillors may have an interest in this consultation.

St Helens Fire Cover Consultation Launched

A 12-week consultation into proposed changes to fire cover across the St Helens district launched on August 3.

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Both proposals include the re-designation of one of the two existing wholetime fire appliances as “wholetime retained” (with a 30-minute recall).

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A consultation document with information on the proposals can be found at http://www.merseyfire.gov.uk.aspx/pages/opsResponse/pdf/St_Helens_Consultation_Document.pdf and an online questionnaire can be found at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/sthelensmerger>. Focus group meetings, a stakeholders’ meeting and a joint forum are also being arranged as part of the 12-week consultation, which runs until October 25.

Following the conclusion of the consultation, a further report will be submitted to the Authority detailing the outcomes of the consultation and any operational implications.

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"The proposals are intended to minimise the impact of the ongoing cuts to the Authority budget and maintain as fast a response as possible to all parts of St Helens district.

"The consultation includes a document on www.merseyfire.gov.uk , as well as the document being distributed in the areas affected by the proposals, outlining why changes need to be made and details on the impact on fire cover across the St Helens district. The consultation will also 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.

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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.

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Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRA) is responsible for providing fire and rescue services for Merseyside's 1.4 million people at 25 stations across five districts. This currently includes three St Helens stations: St Helens (Parr Stocks Road), Eccleston and Newton-le-Willows.

If you require the consultation documents in a hard copy, please do not hesitate to contact me or email consultation2@merseyfire.gov.uk

The document will also be distributed in the areas affected by the proposals.

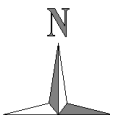
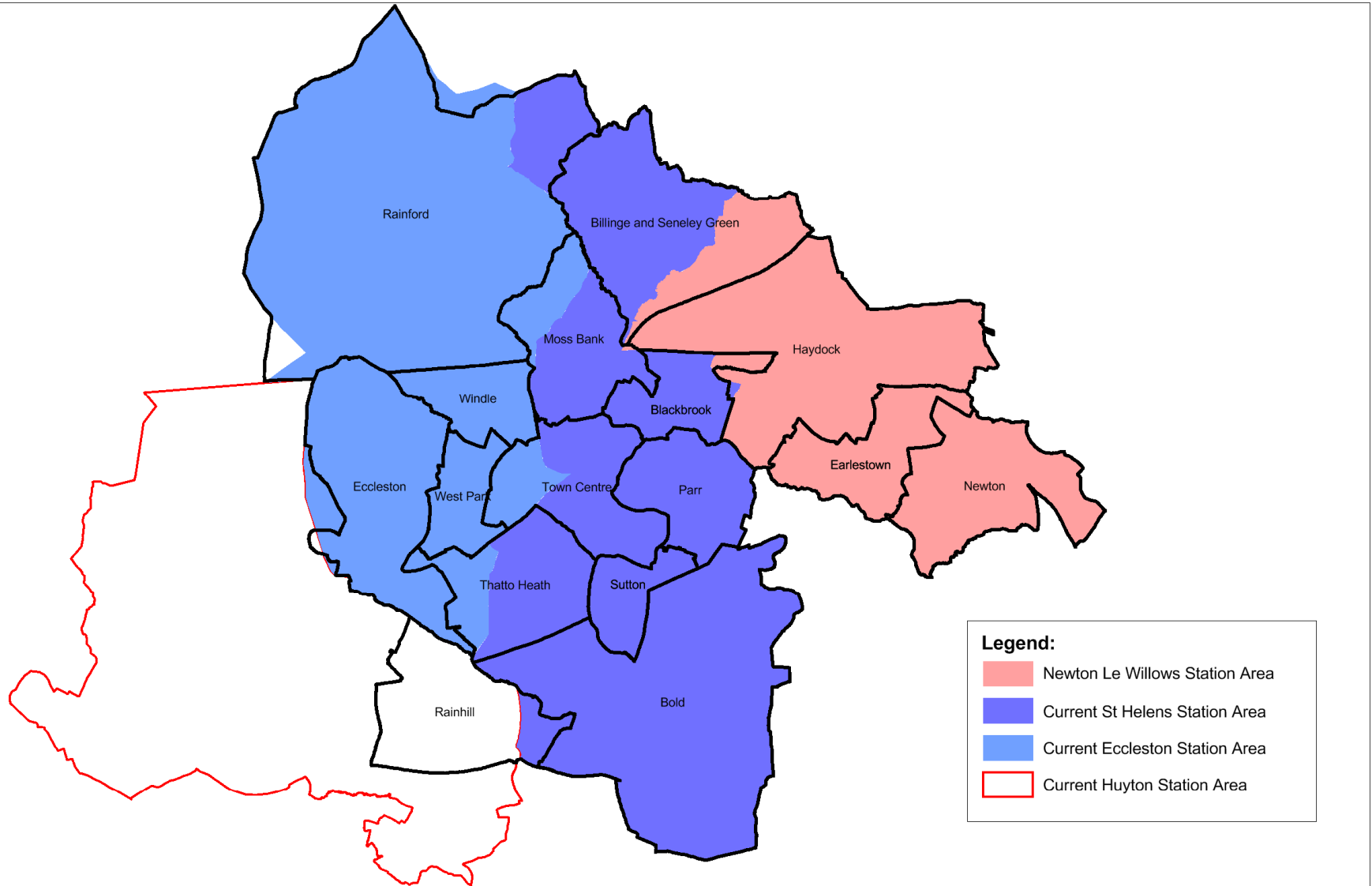
If you require any more information, or would like to discuss these proposals with a senior officer of the Service please let me know.

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EMAIL SENT TO CLLR ON REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION – 28TH AUGUST

Fire Engines against Population in St Helens

Map 1: Wards and Station Areas in St Helens



| | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Billinge and Seneley Green | 10913 |
| Blackbrook | 10497 |
| Bold | 9701 |
| Earlestown | 11005 |
| Eccleston | 11577 |
| Haydock | 11439 |
| Moss Bank | 10766 |
| Newton | 11477 |
| Parr | 12545 |
| Rainford | 7730 |
| Rainhill | 10891 |
| Sutton | 11947 |
| Thatto Heath | 12465 |
| Town Centre | 11189 |
| West Park | 11326 |
| Windle | 10753 |

Table 1 provides the populations of each ward within St Helens, colour coding which ward is (approximately) covered by which station.

In Summary the station areas in St Helens currently cover the following approximate populations:

| Station | Population | Fire Engines | Ratio |
|-------------------|------------|--------------|---------|
| Newton Le Willows | 33921 | 1 | 33921:1 |
| Eccleston | 52299 | 1 | 52299:1 |
| St Helens | 79110 | 1 | 79110:1 |
| Huyton | 10891 | 1 | N/A |

Not applicable as Rainhill is only a small part of the station area

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------|---|----------|
| <i>Proposed Merged Station</i> | 131409 | 1 | 131409:1 |
|--------------------------------|--------|---|----------|

nb under the merger proposals, the merged station area would have one wholetime fire engines and one “wholetime retained”. The wholetime retained appliance would be available on a 30-minute recall for major incidents and spate conditions only, so isn't included in the ratio.

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29 September 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

At a meeting of Rainford Parish Council on 28 September 2015, the consultation document for the options for altering the Fire Cover for St Helens was discussed.

Rainford Parish Council voted unanimously in support of Option 1 – St Helens and Eccleston station closures and proposed new station at Canal Street. It was the opinion of the meeting that this option would be the best outcome for the residents of Rainford from the proposed changes.

Yours faithfully

Clerk to Rainford Parish Council

23rd October 2015 - Consultation Response – Conor McGinn MP for St Helens North

I welcome the opportunity to comment on proposals for fire cover in the St Helens district.

The fire service in St Helens provide an excellent quality service and it is important that this not adversely effected by either proposal. I regret the situation forced upon Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) due to the cuts imposed by central government. This is in particular worrying amongst the back drop of a large reduction in firefighters and fire engines in recent years.

I recognise that the authority has already made significant savings of £20 million over the last 4 years, and that cuts imposed mean that £3.4 million of savings need to be made from emergency response. I also acknowledge the proposals are reluctantly put forward and are considered the best options available given the circumstances.

Whilst unhappy with the closure of any station, I welcome the proposal for a new build station in St Helens. However, I share concerns that the second fire engine will be crewed by whole-time retained firefighters and the potential impact this will have on response times, especially at periods of high demand. I am also concerned at the impact on community safety services and potential consequences in terms of heightening the risk of fire, I therefore welcome the targeting of resources towards those at greatest risk.

I acknowledge the excellent work MFRS undertake currently, and the exceptional response time of both stations is well below the national mean average; it is vital each that average response times will not be increased by either proposal. The figures for the proposal to merge and build a new station show that predicted response times would remain at a similar level to current ones. For this reason I think the option to merge stations represents the least worst option for my constituents in St Helens North and the borough as a whole, provided predicted response times can be delivered.

In terms of community activity currently taking place at the Parr station I welcome the fact that the opportunity will be given to move these activities to the new station, but I hope some of the activities currently delivered to the Parr community from Parr station are retained within the ward.

To conclude I would like to reiterate my disappointment that central government cuts have forced this situation upon MFRS. I do not wish to see any reduction in services or any fire station closed. Those options are not available in this **consultation** and therefore, having

listened to the views of my constituents, the Fire Brigades Union and management within the MFRS, I do believe that the least worst option is to merge the existing stations in to a new-build station.