Wednesday,
14 February 2024
10.30 am

Meeting of
Cheshire Fire Authority
Sadler Road
Winsford
CW7 2FQ

Contact Officer:
Donna Linton
Democratic Services

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire,
CW7 2FQ

Tel: 01606 868804
E-mail: donna.linton@cheshirefire.gov.uk

Cheshire Fire Authority
Notes for Members of the Public

Attendance at Meetings

The Cheshire Fire Authority welcomes and encourages members of the public to be at its meetings and Committees. You are requested to remain quiet whilst the meeting is taking place and to enter and leave the meeting room as quickly and quietly as possible.

All meetings of the Authority are held at the Training Centre, Sadler Road, Winsford. If you plan to attend please report first to the Reception Desk where you will be asked to sign in and will be given a visitors pass. You should return your pass to the Reception Desk when you leave the building. There are some car parking spaces available on site for visitors at the front of the building. Please do not park in spaces reserved for Fire Service personnel.

If you feel there might be particular problems with access to the building or car parking please contact the Reception Desk at Sadler Road Winsford Tel (01606) 868700.

Access to Information

Copies of the Agenda will be available at the meeting. A copy can also be obtained from the contact officer named on the front of the Agenda. Alternatively, the Agenda and individual reports are available on the Authority's website (www.cheshirefire.gov.uk)

The Agenda is usually divided into two parts. Most business is dealt with in the first part which is open to the public. On some occasions some business may need to be considered in the second part of the agenda, in private session. There are limited reasons which allow this to take place, e.g. as confidential information is being considered about an individual, or commercial information is being discussed.

This agenda is available in large print, Braille, audio CD or in community languages upon request by contacting; Telephone: 01606868414 or email: equalities@cheshirefire.gov.uk

Recording of Meetings

The Authority audio records its meetings. Please contact Democratic Services for a copy of the recording via DemocraticServices@cheshirefire.gov.uk. The recordings are not kept indefinitely.

Fire Evacuation

If the Fire Alarm sounds you should make you way to the nearest exit as quickly as possible and leave the building. Please follow any instructions from staff about evacuation routes.

MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
WEDNESDAY, 14 FEBRUARY 2024
Time: 10.30 am
Lecture Theatre - Fire Service Headquarters, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ

AGENDA

PART 1 - BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED IN PUBLIC

1   PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1A   Recording of Meeting
Members are reminded that this meeting will be audio-recorded.

1B   Apologies for Absence

1C   Chair's Announcements
To receive any announcements that the Chair wishes to make prior to the commencement of the formal business of the meeting.

1D   Declaration of Members' Interests
Members are reminded to disclose any interests that are relevant to any item on the Agenda.

1E   Questions from Members of the Public
To receive any questions submitted, in accordance with procedure rules 4.47 to 4.54 by members of the public within the area covered by the Fire Authority.

1F   Minutes of Fire Authority   (Pages 5 - 14)
To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the Fire Authority Meeting held on 6th December 2023.

1G   Minutes of Staffing Committee   (Pages 15 - 16)
To receive, for information, the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 1st December 2023.

1H   Minutes of Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee   (Pages 17 - 18)
To receive, for information, the minutes of the Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee meeting held on 22nd January 2024.

ITEMS REQUIRING DISCUSSION / DECISION

PART 2 - BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED IN PRIVATE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY held on Wednesday, 6 December 2023 at Lecture Theatre - Training Centre, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 10.30 am

PRESENT: Councillors Stef Nelson, Sherin Akhtar, Rachel Bailey, David Brown, John Bird, Kath Buckley, Steve Collings, Peter Coan, Razia Daniels, Brian Gallagher, Phil Harris, Marilyn Houston, Gina Lewis, Rob Moreton, Stuart Parker, Rob Polhill, Margaret Simon, Peter Walker, Peter Wheeler and Norman Wright

1   PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A   Recording of Meeting

Members were reminded that the meeting would be audio-recorded.

B   Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nick Mannion, Karen Mundry, Laura Smith and Peter Wheeler.

C   Chair's Announcements

The Chair asked Members to note the content of the Chair's announcements which included details of Authority achievements and events Members had attended since the last meeting of the Fire Authority.

The Chair advised that Crew Manager Steve Fellows had sadly passed away on Friday 20th October 2023 at the age of 42. Steve joined Audlem Fire Station as an On-Call Firefighter in June 2003. He was promoted to Crew Manager in July 2012 and received his 20-year Long Service and Good Conduct medal earlier this month. He leaves his wife Vick and seven children Jack, Jonny, Billy, Esme, Milly, Freddy and Phoebe.

The Chair advised that Councillor Gina Lewis (Deputy Chair) was currently the Lead Member for Cheshire West and Chester Council. She had recently been given significant additional responsibilities by the Council. Therefore, the Labour Group believed that Councillor Gina Lewis should no longer have the Lead Member responsibility. Whilst the appointment of Lead Member is determined by the respective Members of the constituent authority, the Labour Group had agreed that Councillor Steve Collings become the Lead Member for Cheshire West and Chester Council with effect from 1st January 2024. Members of the Authority were content that Councillor Collings fulfil this role.

1

D **Declaration of Members' Interests**

The Director of Governance advised that Members would have a disclosable pecuniary interest in the decisions concerning the Members' Allowance Scheme: the uplift to be applied to the Scheme for 2023-24; and approval of the Scheme for 2024-25. All Members indicated that they did. A dispensation had been granted to the majority of Members to allow them to take part in the debate and vote. It had been recommended that the dispensation was extended to Councillor John Bird. (minute 1H refers)

The Director of Governance referred to the two reports on the agenda concerned with North West Fire Control. Both the Chair and Deputy Chair sit on the Board of Directors of the company NW Fire Control Limited, (the body that provides the service to the Fire Authority). They were appointed on behalf of the Fire Authority. As a result, they would both need to confirm that they have an Other Registrable Interest according to the Members' Code of Conduct. Councillor Stef Nelson and Councillor Gina Lewis both did so.

Given that the reports concerned with North West Fire Control clearly related to the financial interest or wellbeing associated with the Other Registrable Interest that they disclosed, the Members' Code of Conduct required them both to leave the meeting room during the items concerned with North West Fire Control.

Prior to the meeting Councillor Rob Polhill had been asked to Chair the meeting when the Chair and Deputy Chair leave the room.

E **Questions from Members of the Public**

There were no questions submitted.

F **Minutes of Fire Authority**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Fire Authority meeting held on 27th September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

G **Minutes of the Audit Committee**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Audit Committee held on 26th September and 22nd November 2023 be noted.

H **Minutes of Governance and Constitution Committee**

The Director of Governance advised that there were two minutes where three recommendations needed to be considered:

2

Minute 2 – Dispensation.

Minute 4 – Members' Allowances Scheme: Uplift 2023-24; 2024-25 and Review.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the minutes of the Governance and Constitution Committee held on 8th November 2023 be noted;

[2]   the benefit of the dispensation be extended to Councillor John Bird;

[3]   an uplift of 5% be applied to the Members' Allowances Scheme 2023-24; and

[4]   the Members' Allowances Scheme for 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025 be based on the 2023-24 Scheme once the uplift had been applied.

Note: Members' Allowances Scheme for 2024-25 was contained in the Agenda Pack at pages 33 to 36.

I   **Minutes of Performance and Overview Committee**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Performance and Overview Committee held on 22nd November 2023 be noted.

J   **Minutes of Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Brigade Manager's Pay and Performance Committee held on 20th November 2023 be noted.

K   **Minutes of Staffing Committee**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Staffing Committee held on 20th November 2023 be noted.

L   **Programme of Member Meetings 2024-25**

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Programme of Member Meetings for 2024-25 be noted.

3

2   EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

The Treasurer introduced a report which presented the draft External Auditor's Annual Report 2022-23 that covered the Authority's arrangements for value for money during the year and confirmed the auditor's opinion on the Authority's 2022-23 Statement of Accounts.

The draft External Auditor's Annual Report 2022-23 was attached at Appendix 1 to the report. It remained in draft at this point and it had been considered in detail at the Audit Committee on 22nd November 2023. After appropriate scrutiny the Committee agreed that the draft report should be presented to the Authority.

The draft External Auditor's Annual Report did not identify any concerns, but it does include three recommendations. These would be monitored by Audit Committee on the Authority's behalf. Audit Committee did not identify any issues to bring to the attention of the Authority.

The External Auditors, through no fault of their own, had been unable to conclude their audit. This meant that it had not been possible to approve the 2022-23 Statement of Accounts or conclude the External Auditor's Annual Report. The issues that have held up completion of the audit were referenced in the draft External Auditor's Annual Report.

It was reported that the Authority's statement of accounts was due to be approved and signed by 30th September each year. The draft of the 2022-23 Statement of Accounts was presented to the Audit Committee on 26th September, but at the time there were unresolved technical issues. As a result, the 2022-23 Statement of Accounts was not signed at the meeting, but the Committee delegated its signing to the Chair of Audit Committee and the Treasurer, subject to the issues being satisfactorily resolved and upon receipt of the External Auditor's Audit Opinion. Whilst the original issues had been resolved, an additional issue had now emerged, and the 2022-23 Statement of Accounts had still not been signed. Once the accounts had been signed, any changes to the final version of the External Auditor's Annual Report would be provided to Members for information. No further report will be presented to the Authority unless any changes are material.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the draft External Auditor's Annual Report 2022-23 be noted; and

[2]   the Authority be informed of any changes to the External Auditor's Annual Report, if such changes are material, as soon as the Authority's 2022-23 Statement of Accounts is signed.

4

3   **TREASURY MANAGEMENT - MID YEAR REPORT 2022-24**

The Treasurer presented the report which provided an update on performance against the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy (TMS).

The table at paragraph 13 of the report contained a forecast of interest rates from December 2023 to December 2026. The latest forecast set out a view that short, medium and long-dated interest rates would be elevated for little while, as the Bank of England sought to squeeze inflation out of the economy.

The table at paragraph 16 of the report provided a forecast of the capital expenditure, the resulting amount of annual borrowing required and the associated revenue financing costs over the current and next 2 years. The Authority currently had a loan portfolio of £12.012m which included external borrowing of £11m to finance the Training Centre project, secured from Public Works Loan Board at favourably low fixed rates in March 2021 (£4m at 1.99%), July 2021 (£4m at 1.65%) and November 2021 (£3m at 1.63%).

The table also showed the amount of planned capital expenditure still to be financed by an additional borrowing requirement (around £5m), which was in addition to the additional borrowing requirement of £6.4m already incurred in 2022-23. The overall new borrowing requirement over the current financial planning period was therefore around £11.4m, which is in line with approved plans to finance the now completed major estates project in Wilmslow, progress new Crewe Fire Station and the continuing modernisation of Service houses. Additional new borrowing would be required.

Members were reminded that there was currently no financial provision included in any plans relating to either Ellesmere Port or Warrington Fire Stations. If significant additional capital expenditure was approved in respect of these sites, it would be necessary to increase the future borrowing requirement and to recognise the impact of associated financing costs in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

A Member asked the Treasurer whether borrowing arrangements involved organisations with ethical policies. In response, the Treasurer confirmed that for any banking organisation the Authority utilised, security was the first and major concern, i.e the ability to get all funds back when required. However, the Authority currently invested in UK based organisations only and all major banks in the UK had some form of ethical, social and environmental policy.

A Member asked the Treasurer for further information on the ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream which the Treasurer explained in detail.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the report be noted; and

[2]   the future requirement for borrowing to support the ongoing capital programme be noted.

5

4   DRAFT 2024-25 BUDGET, COUNCIL TAX AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024-29

The Treasurer presented the Authority's draft 2024-25 budget and the current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and asked Members' to consider whether officers should arrange a consultation in relation to the council tax precept for 2024-25.

The Treasurer advised that since the preparation of the report the referendum limit for Council Tax (not including adult social care precept) for local authorities had been confirmed at 2.99%, for fire authorities. A 2.99% increase to the Authority's Band D Council Tax would take it to £90.09 per annum, an increase of £2.61 on 2023-24. Given the latest taxbase forecast this would yield around an estimated additional £1.4m, compared to 2023-24. The Treasurer advised that this had now been assumed in the MTFP.

In order for the Authority to make a decision about the council tax precept in February 2024 it would normally consult.

Members were reminded about the separate report later on the agenda concerned with North West Fire Control (NWFC). This included some proposals with financial implications which will affect the MTFP, but as they were not agreed their impact had not yet been included. The proposal to revise the percentages which each of the authorities who contribute to the costs of NWFC make would lead to an increase in the Authority's base budget of approximately £112k. The proposal to replace the mobilising system, based on the latest NWFC estimate of the capital costs would cost the Authority around £1.2m as a one-off, but it is proposed that this would be met from the Authority's reserves. There would be a further approximately £40k to be included in the Authority's base budget. Further proposals to increase capacity and meet enhanced requirements in standards, personal development and to revise the operating model, would cost the Authority £92k as a one-off and add £34k to the base budget.

Members were also reminded that officers were considering how best to fund the proposed new fire stations at Ellesmere Port and Warrington in the lifetime of the new CRMP, which would significantly impact on the Authority's MTFP.

The Chair took the opportunity to thank the Treasurer and his team for all their hard work in preparing the report.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the information relating to the 2023-24 budget setting together with the Medium Term Financial Plan be noted; and

[2]   officers be authorised to arrange a consultation concerned with a council tax precept increase of 2.99%.

6

5   **DRAFT 2024-28 COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN - CONSULTATION UPDATE**

The Head of Communications and Engagement presented the report which provided an update on progress with the programme of consultation on the draft 2024-28 Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

Members were reminded that at the meeting of the Authority in September 2023 Members approved the launch of a 13-week programme of consultation, which began on 2nd October 2023 and was due to conclude on 2nd January 2024. The programme covered three main strands of public, staff and partner consultation. The report provided initial feedback on the proposals in the CRMP. The Head went on to highlight the partner consultation activity. Partner consultation had focused on briefings for key stakeholders such as unitary and town/parish councils, and MPs; as well as direct emails/letters.

A briefing had been provided to three of the four unitary authorities in Cheshire (with Warrington Council booked), as well as several town and parish councils and five Members of Parliament. Direct emails have been sent to all councillors and town and parish councils in Cheshire, as well as statutory and sub-regional partners, neighbouring fire and rescue services and partner agencies within the Cheshire Resilience Forum.

The Consultation Institute, a recognised independent provider of consultation assurance, training and guidance, had been contracted to provide advice and quality assurance of the consultation programme. An interim review with the Institute was held on 14th November and following this, confirmation was received that the consultation programme, to-date, had passed the mid-point review. Work was continuing to ensure that the programme adhered to recognised standards of practice and a final review was scheduled for late December 2023 before the Institute made a formal decision on the certification of quality assurance.

RESOLVED: That

[1] the report be noted.

6   **COLLABORATION STRATEGY**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced a report which sought approval of the Collaboration Strategy.

The Fire Authority approved the initial Collaboration Strategy, in February 2020. It was agreed that the document would be reviewed by the Fire Authority every two years. The Strategy had been reviewed by officers, considering best practice from other fire and rescue services. It contained minor amendments to reflect the current position of collaboration activity within the Services.

7

Resolved: That

[1]   the Collaboration Strategy be approved and reviewed in 2025.

7   MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2024-26

The Director of Governance introduced a report which sought approval of the Member Development Strategy for 2024-26.

The Member Development Strategy set out how the Fire Authority intended to develop its elected Members to ensure that they were effective in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. It provided a structured framework for the delivery of the Member Development and Induction Programme, future Member support and training and development and promoted continuous improvement.

The Chair took the opportunity to thank the staff in the Democratic Services team for their commitment to Member training and development.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Member Development Strategy for 2024-26 be approved.

8   NORTH WEST FIRE CONTROL - CONTINUING THE COLLABORATION

(Note: Councillors Stef Nelson and Gina Lewis left the room for the consideration of this item. Councillor Rob Polhill took the Chair)

The Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive introduced a report which provided an update about the future of North West Fire Control (NWFC). The report summarised the progress since that matter was last considered by the Fire Authority and set out the current position.

The financial implications had previously been considered as part of Minute 4 – Draft 2024-25 Budget, Council Tax and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024-29.

A Member stated that the considerations detailed in the report demonstrated value for money.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Fire Authority's continued commitment to the NWFC collaboration be confirmed;

[2]   the increase to the Fire Authority's contribution to the collaboration be confirmed;

[3]   the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive (in consultation with the Chair) be authorised to make all necessary decisions associated with the new mobilising system on behalf of the Fire Authority; and

8

[4] **the magnitude of funding described in the report (new mobilising system and additional resourcing) be approved.**

9 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

See Minute 10 below – there was no requirement to exclude the press and public.

10 NORTH WEST FIRE CONTROL - CONTINUING THE COLLABORATION

The Appendix was not discussed, however the content was noted when considering Item 8, above.

9

This page is intentionally left blank

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE held on Friday, 1 December 2023 at Fire Conference Room - Fire Service HQ, Clemonds Hey, Winsford, Cheshire, CW7 2UA at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillors Stef Nelson (Chair), Gina Lewis, Rob Moreton and Margaret Simon

1   PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A   Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence. The attendees formed the interview panel.

B   Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

C   Minutes of the Staffing Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Staffing Committee held on 20th November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

2   EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That:

That under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Order 2006, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the items of business listed below on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A to the Act in the paragraphs indicated:

Item 3 – Appointment of Head of Service Improvement

Paragraph 1 – Information relating to any individual

3   APPOINTMENT OF HEAD OF SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

The Committee conducted interviews for the Head of Service Improvement. The Committee was provided with a debrief about other elements of the assessment process.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   Candidate A be appointed Head of Service Improvement.

Note 1:   Candidate A was offered the position but ultimately decided not to accept.

Note 2:   Members of the Committee were clear that Candidate B's application and interview made a suitable appointee for the position.

Note 3:   Candidate B was offered the position.

2

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BRIGADE MANAGERS' PAY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE held on Monday, 22 January 2024 at HODs Conference Room - Fire Service HQ, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillors Stef Nelson (Chair), Gina Lewis, Karen Mundry, Stuart Parker, Margaret Simon and Peter Wheeler

1   PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A   Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rob Moreton.

B   Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

C   Minutes of the Brigades Managers' Pay and Performance Committee

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee held on 20th November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

2   EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That:

That under Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Order 2006, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the items of business listed below on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A to the Act in the paragraphs indicated:

Item 3 - 2024 Brigade Management Remuneration Review

Paragraph 1 - Information relating to an individual

3   2024 BRIGADE MANAGEMENT REMUNERATION REVIEW

The Independent HR Consultant presented his report to Members which provided details of the process to be followed regarding the 2024 Brigade Manager Remuneration Review.

The Independent HR Consultant informed Members that there was a contractual requirement to review the remuneration arrangements of the Chief Executive / Head of Paid Service, in the role of "Chief Fire Officer" (CFO), and the other Principal Officers (Brigade Managers) under the two track approach to pay and conditions, defined in paragraphs 10 and 11 of the 'NJC for Brigade Managers of Local Fire and Rescue Services; Constitution and Schemes and Conditions of Service' (the Gold Book).

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the presentation of the Independent HR Consultant be noted; and

[2]   having considered the benchmarked salaries of the Principal Officers and national recruitment and retention challenges of combined fire authorities across the country, that the base salary of the Principal Officer roles be increased by 4% with effect from 1st January 2024.

2

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE held on Wednesday, 24 January 2024 at Lecture Theatre - Fire Service Headquarters, Sadler Road, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ at 10.00 am

PRESENT:

Members:
Councillor Peter Wheeler (Chair)
Councillor Rachel Bailey
Suzanne Horrill, Independent Audit Committee Member

Auditors:
Charles Black, Merseyside Internal Audit Agency
Anne-Marie Harrop, Merseyside Internal Audit Agency

Officers:
Andrew Leadbetter, Director of Governance
Paul Vaughan, Finance Officer
James Cunningham, Head of Finance
Neil McElroy, Head of Service Improvement
Chris Astall, Project and Risk Officer
Jacqueline Guest, Information Manager
Emilie Salkeld, Governance Officer

1A   RECORDING OF MEETING

Members were reminded that the meeting would be audio recorded.

1B   APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Sherin Akhtar and Brian Gallagher.

1C   DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of Members' interests.

1D   MINUTES OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Independent Audit Committee Member requested sight of the minutes from 26th September 2023 to ensure the amendments to the minutes were finalised. The Director of Governance assured Members the minutes were corrected and agreed to circulate the minutes to all Members.

1

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the Audit Committee held on Wednesday 22nd November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

1E   ACTION TRACKER OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Director of Governance and the Finance Officer provided an update against each of the actions. The updates were to be included in the tracker for the next Audit Committee meeting unless the actions had been completed.

It was noted that the following actions could be closed:

26th September 2023:
Item 3 – Audited Statement of Accounts 2022-23 with Letter of Representation

2   UPDATE - ACCOUNTS AND ANNUAL AUDITOR'S REPORT 2022-23

The Finance Officer provided an update on the progress of the accounts and annual auditor's report for 2022-23. He advised that the causes to the previous delays to the signing of accounts had been resolved.

It had previously been agreed that Members would not require sight of the accounts if there were no material changes. However, the external auditors requested that the Chair of the Audit Committee had sight of the updated version of accounts prior to signing. The Chair confirmed he and officers were satisfied with the amendment and that the accounts with the letter of representation could be signed off after the meeting.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Statement of Accounts for 2022-23 and letter of representation be signed by the relevant officers and Chair of the Audit Committee.

3   ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT - PROGRESS AGAINST AREAS FOR ACTION 2023-24 (AND 2022-23)

The Finance Officer introduced the report which updated Members on the progress against the Areas for Action contained in the Authority's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2023-24 and the remaining unresolved Areas for Actions from the 2022-23 AGS. He provided an update against each of the actions contained within the report.

He explained that there were currently no formal arrangements for the Audit Committee to review the Areas for Action within the AGS. It was recommended that they are reviewed twice each year, at the meetings in July and November. This was to allow the results of the review to be incorporated into the following year's AGS

2

and the updates could be reported at the same time as the Auditor's Annual Report.

A Member queried when the Asset Management Strategy would be submitted to Members. The Finance Officer explained the strategy was currently in development and due for submission in Quarter 2 of 2024-25.

Members raised concerns that the absence of the Asset Management Strategy may have contributed to the valuation issues that arose in the delay to signing the Statement of Accounts for 2022-23. The Finance Officer assured Members that the valuations in the Statement of Accounts were not affected by the absence of the Asset Management Strategy. The Asset Management Strategy would assist with the maintenance of assets and budget setting within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

The Independent Audit Committee Member advised that there was an error with the documentation dates included in the report. The Finance Officer advised that the dates would be amended.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Annual Governance Statement – Progress Against Areas for Action 2023-24 (and 2022-23) by noted; and

[2]   the Audit Committee receives half yearly updates on the progress against the Areas for Action as described within paragraph 4 of the report.

4   INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

Anne-Marie Harrop, a representative from Merseyside Internal Audit Agency (MIAA), was in attendance to present the Internal Audit progress report. She drew Members' attention to the key messages: -

- The National Fraud Initiative review was complete.
- The reviews on the Key Financial Transactional Processing Controls and IT Asset Management were due to be submitted at the next Audit Committee meeting on 17th April 2024.
- The terms of reference for the Risk Management Core Controls review had been confirmed and was due to start fieldwork. There were no concerns regarding the delay in works.

The auditor advised that a draft internal audit plan for the upcoming year would usually be submitted to the Audit Committee. However, the draft plan for the upcoming year could not be developed/agreed as the tendering process for the internal audit contract had not been concluded.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Internal Audit Progress Report be noted.

3

5   INTERNAL AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOW UP REPORT

Anne-Marie Harrop, a representative from MIAA, was in attendance to present the report which updated Members on the progress made against recommendations from previous audit assignments' agreed actions. She provided an update against each recommendation within the report.

A Member requested that the report include the original agreed completion dates of recommendations going forward. The Auditor agreed to revise the report template to include the information.

The Independent Audit Committee Member queried whether the IT related recommendation timescales were underestimated, as many had revised dates. The Auditor explained that some IT related recommendations, such as the cybersecurity review, had many complex layers and involved the shared service for completion. The Auditor was satisfied with the revised dates. The Service also shared its own action tracker system which provided evidence of progress.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Internal Audit Recommendations Follow Up report be noted.

6   NATIONAL FRAUD INITIATIVE BRIEFING NOTE

Charles Black, a representative from MIAA, was in attendance to present the briefing note which provided a summary of the Service's data matches, outstanding matches and any overpayments identified as part of the National Fraud Initiative round for 2022-23. MIAA confirmed that all potential matches were investigated and there were no instances of fraud or overpayment identified.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the National Fraud Initiative Briefing Note be noted.

7   INTERNAL AUDIT PROCUREMENT UPDATE

The Finance Officer provided an update on the Authority's procurement for a new internal auditor. He advised that the Authority was on target to appoint internal auditors and the process was expected to be completed by the end of February 2024.

8   RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Finance Officer introduced the Risk Management Policy (the Policy) which was considered by the Service Leadership Team prior to submission to the Risk Management Group at its meeting on Wednesday 10th January 2024. The Policy was approved by officers and was presented to the Audit Committee for information.

4

The Independent Audit Committee Member queried the reference within the policy to employees undertaking risk management training where she believed that all employees would be concerned with risk. The Finance Officer advised that specific risk training was only conducted by those identified with corporate risk responsibilities, such as Heads of Department and risk champions; the learned training would then cascade into teams. The Project and Risk Officer also explained that each role provided different elements of risk and that it was important for all staff members to understand risk escalation routes.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Risk Management Policy be noted.

9   REVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

The Finance Officer introduced the document which summarised the Authority's Strategic Risk Register. He provided an update on each risk included within the table which had previously been reported to the Risk Management Group for evaluation at their meeting on Wednesday 10th January 2024.

A Member queried whether the wording surrounding the McCloud remedy within the overarching pensions risk, needed to be revised to encompass wider impacts to the Authority than what was currently recorded. The Finance Officer explained that the McCloud remedy was constrained by national issues and the risk register related to the ability to deliver the remedy in accordance with the national timescale. He stated that there were a small number of organisations that were able to provide assistance and they faced large demand of cases throughout the public sector.

A discussion was held to determine whether the pensions risk should also make reference to the impact on staff morale. It was determined that the staff morale was more of a cultural issue and the strategic risk register should focus on how the delivery of the remedy would progress through controls, actions and mitigation. However, the Director of Governance acknowledged the importance of ensuring the Service were doing all that was possible to ensure the progression of the McCloud remedy and communicating this work to staff and Members.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Summary of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's Strategic Risk Register be noted.

10   ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Independent Audit Committee Member requested that going forward the Audit Committee meeting agenda should include: an item for any other business; an item about the forward plan; and the date of the next Audit Committee meeting.

5

This page is intentionally left blank

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE LOCAL PENSION BOARD - FIREFIGHTERS PENSION SCHEME held on Tuesday, 5 December 2023 at Fire Conference Room - Fire Service HQ, Clemonds Hey, Winsford, Cheshire, CW7 2UA at 1.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor David Brown (Chair), Lee Shears, Neil McElroy and George Peers (Employee – FBU)

OFFICERS: Carmine Rabhani (Pension Scheme Manager), Graeme Hall (Head of Public Sector Relations – XPS Administration), Jill Swift (Pay and Pensions Manager), Emily Purslow (Pensions Advisor)

1   APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

2   DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest received.

3   NOTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the minutes of the meeting of the Local Pension Board – Firefighters' Pension Scheme held on 15th August 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

4   XPS CHESHIRE FIRE PENSION BOARD REPORT 2023-2024 (Q2)

Graeme Hall, Head of Public Sector Relations from XPS Administration, was in attendance and presented the Cheshire Fire Pension Board Report Quarter 2 2023-24 which contained the following information:-

- Overview
- Member Self Service
- Common Data
- Membership
- Completed Cases Overview
- Completed Cases by Month
- Complaints
- Telephony

Graeme provided an update on the Completed Cases Overview. The Board were advised that the KPI compliance figure for Quarter 2 was lower than reported in Quarter 1. Patterns of work continued to be the same as reported in previous

quarters, however, the additional workload and queries for the legislative changes due to the Remedy was starting to make more of an impact in Quarter 2. None of the failure cases represented an impact on any payment. XPS Administration would continue to monitor performance and raise any areas of concern where necessary. It was expected that the next few quarters would be challenging in terms of certain KPIs due to the requirements around implementing the Remedy.

The Board were advised that each McCloud case could take up to 4 to 5 hours to consider and complete; this was because of the complexity of cases which had to be considered dating from 2015 and the fact that all work had to be done manually.

A Board Member asked if members would be provided with advice on what to consider when the options were presented to them. In response, the Pay and Pension Manager stated that members were asked to consider seeking independent advice as the Service could only provide guidance.

Further guidance was due to be issued from the Local Government Association (LGA) relating to the Remedy once this was available the Service would try to make the guidance issued more user-friendly for members. XPS Administration would also publish a video presentation on their website providing further guidance.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the XPS Administration Cheshire Fire Pension Board Report Quarter 2 2023-24 be noted.

5   **FIREFIGHTER PENSION SCHEME UPDATE**

The Payroll and Pensions Manager presented a report that provided an overview of the current issues relating to Firefighters' Pension Scheme, including updates on the following:-

- Membership Statistics
- FPS Bulletin – action arising
- McCloud Remedy
- McCloud Remedy – Contingent Decisions
- Matthews Remedy – On Call Firefighters
- Revaluation Rate Correction
- Pension Tax Update
- General Updates

The Pay and Pensions Manager provided an update on the McCloud Remedy. It was reported that on 1st October 2023, all primary and secondary legislation to implement the McCloud Remedy came into force. Services had to complete several key tasks in readiness for the Remedy. An update of progress against these deliverables was provided at Appendix B of the report, along with a summary of the next group of key deliverables which need to be completed between October 2023 and March 2024.

2

The Government Actuary's Department (GAD) had now released a calculator to be used for the calculation of tax relief, compensation, and interest. Although the calculator had been tested, Services were still finding issues and the inputs required were complex. In addition, the calculator did not cover all scenarios that would require a compensation payment or interest. This meant manual interest calculations may be required in some cases.

The Home Office had recently clarified that any costs incurred by Services in relation to additional pension liabilities and compensation would be fully funded and this would be dealt with through the AME top up grant process.

The Board was updated on contingent decisions. These were decisions which members would have made differently had it not been for the discrimination. The LGA had now published an employer guide on contingent decisions which outlined the process to be followed, the relevant legislation and evidence requirements. Members would need to submit a claim within 12 months of receiving their initial remediable service statement (RSS). For most members this would be in August 2024. Employee guidance would be available in the near future.

For those wishing to purchase additional service or rescind opt out notices, they would need to pay the outstanding contributions. These contributions would also have interest added. Members purchasing opted out service would be able to repay this over a 14-year period. At present the GAD calculator did not support the calculations for this scenario. Discussions were ongoing about how this would be implemented by Services.

The Payroll and Pensions Manager provided an update on the Matthews Remedy – on-call firefighters. The Board was advised that because of this ruling, the Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2006 had been amended to allow members to backdate their pension service to their start date. The Firefighters' Pension Scheme (England) (Amendment) Order 2023 took effect from 1st October 2023. These regulations bring into force changes that allow Services to commence a second pension options exercise. Services would need to write out to eligible members with information about the scheme and invite them to express an interest in receiving a quote. This initial letter must be sent by 31st December 2023 to ensure compliance with disclosure regulations, which require Services to notify members of any material change to the scheme within 90 days.

The options exercise must be concluded by 31st March 2025. The Home Office had provided an indicative timeframe for each stage of the options exercise, but this was not mandated in the legislation, therefore Services were able to tailor this where appropriate.

The Board was advised that in the 2014 options exercise, attempts were made to trace leavers using the electoral register. However, a large number were not traceable. For the second options exercise, additional steps had been taken including posters for stations and liaison with retirement associations. Details of the options exercise had been posted to the Intranet and external website and a tracing

3

agency has been engaged to locate any remaining members that cannot be traced through other means.

The Board had a discussion on the methods used to trace leavers.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Firefighter Pension Scheme update be noted.

6   **MCCLOUD/SARGEANT JUDGEMENT UPDATE**

This was considered in minute 5 above.

7   **FIREFIGHTER PENSION SCHEME RISK REGISTER**

The Payroll and Pensions Manager presented the Firefighter Pension Scheme Risk Register that had been reviewed and updated in December 2023. Updates since the last meeting were highlighted in blue in the document.

The Pensions Manager provided a commentary on each of the updated risks.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Firefighter Pension Scheme Risk Register be noted.

8   **JCNP PENSIONS UPDATE**

The Pension Scheme Manager advised that at the meeting of the JCNP FBU on 9th November 2023, the FBU Trade Union Representation had raised concerns regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of the service provided by XPS for the administration of workforce pensions. Following consistent complaints over a long period of years and the previous lack of trust and confidence in the company following split/two-part pension issues raised by the FBU, the following information was requested:-

- When was the current contract with XPS due for renewal?
- What Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) were in place for the provision of the service by the contractor?
- Could all KPI reports for the provision of the contract be shared with the FBU.

The FBU had circulated several examples highlighting issues with the service provided by XPS administration.

The Pension Scheme Manager advised that on 30th November 2023 he had responded to the FBU representative by email explaining that in response to the 5 cases brought to officers' attention at the last JCNP FBU Meeting, the Payroll and Pensions Manager had reviewed the individual circumstances of each case. As names were not provided, she had to make assumptions about who the individuals may be.

4

The Payroll and Pensions Manager had provided a response to each which highlighted that in some cases XPS had been at fault, but in others they were not at fault, and it was the individual themselves or the specific circumstances of the case which led to the issue arising. Where XPS had been identified at fault, it had already been raised with them directly and through quarterly contract meetings, and the Service would work with them to ensure these issues are not repeated.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the update be noted.

9   **PENSION BOARD TRAINING UPDATE**

The Governance and Corporate Planning Manager advised that the LGA Firefighters' Pension Annual training session had been arranged to take place in November and had to be cancelled due to Board Member availability.

The LGA had advised that in 2024 they would be looking to change the approach to how they provided the Local Pension Board training, and this would not be individually to each Local Pension Board. The LGA were aiming to provide further details and hopefully dates within the December bulletin.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the update be noted.

5

This page is intentionally left blank

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MEMBER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on Tuesday, 12 December 2023 at Remote Meeting via Teams at 10.00 am

PRESENT: Councillors Kath Buckley and Karen Mundry

1   APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Peter Coan, Rob Moreton, Laura Smith (Chair) and independent (non-elected) member, Derek Barnett.

2   NOTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the notes from the previous meeting on Tuesday 4th July 2023 be approved as a correct record.

3   MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2022-24 - IMPLEMENTATION - QUARTERLY MONITORING

The Governance Officer presented the report on the Member Development Strategy 2022-24 Quarterly Monitoring, updating Members on progress made against the Implementation Plan for the quarter. She provided an update in each of the objectives included in the Strategy.

Objective 1 – Identify and prioritise Member training and development needs

She advised that all Member development interviews had taken place with the Leadership Development Advisor. Further discussion was held during Item 5 – Members' Personal Development Review Outcomes 2023-24.

Objective 2 – Review and refresh the Members' Personal Development Review process to ensure that it remains effectives for both experienced Members and new Members

Further discussion was held during Item 6 – Discussion Item – Review of the Personal Development Review Process.

Objective 3 – Provision of an Annual Member Development Programme

Further discussion was held during Item 4 – Member Development Programme 2023-24 – Quarterly Monitoring.

Objective 4 – Delivery of a comprehensive and effective Induction process for

new Members

It was reported that most Members had met with their officer buddy. Further discussion was held during Item 7 – Discussion Item – Review of the Member/ Officer Buddy System.

Objective 5 – Member Champion

It was reported that most Members had met with their lead officer and had revised their Member Champion role profiles.

The Governance Officer explained that following a meeting with the Director of Governance communications would be sent to all Members and officers to gather updates on the activities of the Member Champion. The updates would then be presented at a future Member Planning Day.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Member Development Strategy 2022-24 Implementation – Quarterly Monitoring be noted.

4   **MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2023-24 - QUARTERLY MONITORING**

The Governance Officer presented a quarterly update on the Member Development Programme 2023-24. She referred to the training sessions covered in Appendix 1 to the report. It was noted that the tour of Safety Centre and training session on "Day in the Life of a Firefighter" was postponed to the new year due to a lack of uptake from Members on the original scheduled dates.

She also explained that Democratic Service were in the process of arranging a training session on the fire risks associated with lithium batteries for January 2024. The Group advised they preferred that the training session took place on Teams as it would encourage more Members to attend as they would avoid travel time.

Members noted the importance of Member Planning Day and how valuable they were when updating local authorities on the activity of the Service. The Governance Officer advised that next municipal year, the Service were exploring hosting Member Planning Days on other sites such as Safety Central and North West Fire Control and organising tours on the rise of meetings. The Group welcomed the suggestion.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the progress on the delivery of the Member Development Programme 2023-24 be noted.

5   **MEMBERS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT REVIEW OUTCOMES 2023-24**

The Leadership Development Advisor introduced the report on the outcomes of the Members' Personal Development Reviews (PDR). She advised that the PDR

2

process was now complete, with all Members receiving a PDR. Most PDRs were conducted via Teams or telephone and only one took place in person.

New Members used the existing score matrix form and established Members reviewed their scores and actions from 2022-23. The Leadership Development Advisor found that most Members were prepared to be far more self-sufficient in organising their own learning activities and took advantage of the Officer Buddy relationship to enhance personal learning. It was also noted that there was a better understanding of the requirements of the Member Champion roles.

Members noted the positive feedback from the report and considered the feedback for improvement. The Leadership Development Advisor had met with the Democratic Services team to address the actions raised through the PDRs.

RESOLVED: That

[1]   the Member Personal Development Review Outcomes 2023-24 be noted.

6   **DISCUSSION ITEM - REVIEW OF THE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS**

The Governance Officer introduced the discussion item which enabled Members to provide feedback on the Personal Development Review (PDR) process and make recommendations for improvement. Members worked through the suggested question within the report to aid discussion.

All Members had chosen to conduct their PDRs via Teams. Although one Members noted that her previous PDR was conducted face to face, the consensus was that a virtual platform was more convenient.

It was noted that Members benefitted from their PDRs as they were able to recognise their progress and identify any areas for development. They found the process to be efficient and should be maintained for consistency.

A Member suggested that all new Members should be meet with the Democratic Services team approximately six months after joining the Fire Authority. Members recognised that joining the Fire Authority could initially feel overwhelming and an opportunity to meet with officers after six months would allow new Members to discuss any issues.

7   **DISCUSSION ITEM - REVIEW OF THE MEMBER/ OFFICER BUDDY SYSTEM**

The Governance Officer introduced the discussion item which enabled Members to review the existing arrangements for the Member/ Officer Buddy system and make recommendations for improvement. Members worked through the suggested questions listed in the report to aid discussion.

It was noted that Members met with their officer buddy regularly and noted that officers were useful in helping understand the organisation and technical jargon.

3

They also noted that Members felt comfortable providing officers with feedback.

When asked whether the Member/ Officer Buddy arrangements needed to be formalised, Members felt that it should not as the system needed to be flexible to suit everyone's schedules and preferred communication styles.

4

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 14 FEBRUARY 2024
REPORT OF: CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
AUTHOR: GRAEME WORRALL

SUBJECT: **COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-28**

Purpose of Report

1.   This report seeks approval of the Community Risk Management Plan 2024-28 (CRMP 2024-28). Members have been provided with a summary as well as full details of the feedback received through the consultation process.

Recommended: That Members

[1]   In considering whether to approve the CRMP 2024-28, take into account the feedback received through the consultation on the draft CRMP; and

[2]   Approve the CRMP 2024-28 (attached as Appendix 1); and

[3]   Authorise the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive to make any final drafting amendments to the CRMP prior to publication on 1 April 2024.

Background

2.   Under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, fire and rescue authorities are required to produce a CRMP (formerly an Integrated Risk Management Plan, or IRMP), outlining the key fire and rescue related risks and their plans to address and mitigate them through prevention, protection and emergency response.

3.   In advance of the expiry of the current 2020-2024 IRMP, officers began work to develop a new plan to cover the period 2024-2028, which would also include the outcomes of a review of the way in which emergency fire cover is provided.

Information

4.   There are several documents that are referenced throughout this report and are included as appendices. These are:

- **Appendix 1:** Community Risk Management Plan 2024-2028.
- **Appendix 2:** Draft CRMP Consultation Feedback Report. This provides analysis of the pre-consultation, development of options, consultation programme and feedback received through the process.
- **Appendix 3:** Draft CRMP Consultation Feedback (Additional Resources). This lists the free text comments received via the consultation survey and full copies of responses received from partners.
- **Appendix 4:** Fire Brigades Union response to CFRS Community Risk Management Plan 2024-2028

5. The following sections of the report summarise the pre-consultation activity; the consultation programme and outputs, as well as consideration of the feedback received.

Pre-consultation

6. The development of the draft CRMP, and the associated fire cover review, were informed by a comprehensive programme of public and staff pre-consultation, which took place in June and July 2023. This included an online survey, to which 185 members of the public and 226 members of staff responded, as well as other methods of engagement.

7. Details and outcomes of the pre-consultation and the fire cover review are contained within Appendix 2 (sections 3 and 4). Members were engaged in the pre-consultation and fire cover review process through a series of planning days during July and August 2023. Section 3.4 of Appendix 2 outlines how the feedback received through the pre-consultation influenced the development of the draft CRMP.

8. The draft CRMP was presented for Members' consideration at the Fire Authority meeting on 27 September 2023 and was approved for consultation.

Consultation programme

9. The consultation ran for 13 weeks, from 2 October 2023 to 2 January 2024. Section 4 of Appendix 2 provides detail of the activities included in the consultation programme. As with previous consultations, there were three main strands of activity focussing on the public, staff and partners, with different engagement methods used for each.

Public consultation

- 32 public roadshows across Cheshire, at which a total of 4,200 consultation packs were distributed.

- Detailed and summary consultation information and explanatory videos published on a dedicated page on cheshirefire.gov.uk
- News release to local and regional media about the consultation.
- Advertising on the Service's social media channels.
- An awareness campaign on local radio.
- Email newsletters to residents via the Service's Neighbourhood Alert System.
- Engagement with local authority citizen panels.
- Two public focus group sessions, including one organised through the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race Equality Centre.

Staff consultation

- 32 consultation events engaging with teams across the Service, facilitated by senior officers.
- Promotion through the intranet, internal newsletters and emails.
- A conference for Service managers.
- Staff focus groups.

Partner consultation

- Direct emails to local councils, Members of Parliament and statutory partners.
- Face to face briefings to MPs, unitary authorities, town and parish councils.

10. The primary source of feedback was via an online and paper survey, which received a total of 459 responses. Of these, 377 respondents identified as members of the public, 21 as members of staff and three as local partners (Knutsford Town Council, Chester Aid to the Homeless and a local Cheshire West and Cheshire councillor). Other respondents did not state whether they were public, staff or partners. In addition, there was one public response via email.

11. Formal responses were submitted via email by 10 partners and stakeholders:

- Fire Brigades Union (FBU)
- West Cheshire Trades Union Council
- Warrington and District Trades Union Council
- Chester Retired Firefighters
- Birchwood Town Council
- Bollington Town Council
- Holmes Chapel Parish Council
- Northwich Town Council
- Stockton Heath Parish Council
- Councillor Sam Naylor (Cheshire West and Chester councillor)

Consultation responses

12.   Sections 6-12 of Appendix 2 detail the feedback received during the consultation programme. A summary of this is provided in the paragraphs below. Free text comments and responses from consultees are provided separately and in full within Appendices 3 and 4.

Identification and management of risks

13.   Respondents were asked about the extent to which they agreed that the draft CRMP identifies key fire and rescue risks; whether the proposals within the CRMP address the risks identified; and if there are any additional risks which they feel should be considered in the development of the final CRMP. A summary is provided below, with further analysis in section 6 of Appendix 2.

14.   A total of 64.70% of respondents felt that the draft CRMP either completely or mostly identifies the key fire and rescue risks facing Cheshire, compared with 16.77% of respondents who felt it identified only few or no risks.

15.   In relation to the management of these risks, a total of 60.78% of respondents agreed that the draft CRMP either completely or mostly addresses the key fire and rescue risks that have been identified, compared with 19.17% of respondents who felt that the draft CRMP either did not address the risks or only addressed a few risks.

16.   The provision of fire cover is referred to in 36 narrative comments from the public, with 19 comments calling for increased levels of full-time fire cover across the county. Nine comments raised a concern over the fire cover proposals and the subsequent impact on overnight and weekend cover, and a further eight comments relate to the proposals regarding Northwich and Stockton Heath Fire Stations. Five comments call for a focus on increasing pay to improve the recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters, while 17 comments relate to community prevention activities and a preference for more education and awareness around both existing and emerging risks.

17.   Two staff comments also relate to the fire cover proposals, while one refers to the need to ensure adequate water supplies to non-domestic premises. Further staff feedback through focus groups suggest that domestic violence and risks to vulnerable families should be highlighted as risks within the CRMP and suggest ways in which the Service's risk based inspection programme could be improved.

18.   The consultation survey also asked respondents to state if they own lithium-ion battery products in the home and what related safety issues they would prefer to receive advice about; in order to help develop specific fire safety advice. Section 7 of Appendix 2 details the feedback received.

Changing how we measure and report our response times

19. Overall, 65.62% of survey respondents supported the proposed change, compared with 14.93% who opposed. Staff responses show 66.67% supported the proposal compared to 19.05% who oppose, while support from public respondents is 66.58%, against 14.86% who oppose the proposal.

20. Those who provided free text comments and support the change, saw measurement from time of call as positive and supported the use of a 10-minute response standard. Others acknowledged the benefit of being able to benchmark and compare performance more effectively, either with the Home Office data or with other fire and rescue services.

21. Some consultees questioned the proposed change from a percentage pass rate to the use of an average figure; suggesting that a move to an average figure could obscure instances where there are significantly longer response times.

22. Other respondents questioned whether measuring response times to primary fires instead of life-risk incidents meant the Service would no longer prioritise, or measure, performance against non-fire life risk incidents, such as road traffic collisions.

23. Staff comments largely reflected the feedback received from members of the public. The FBU and Chester Retired Firefighters offered support for the proposed change to measure response from the time of call. The FBU also suggested that all life risk incidents, not only primary fires, should be incorporated within the standard.

24. Further analysis is included in section 8 of Appendix 2.

Changing the provision of fire cover across Cheshire

25. The overall response showed that a majority of respondents broadly support the package of proposals. A total of 65.17% support the package compared with 22.52% who oppose it. Among public respondents, support is slightly higher at 66.31%, compared to 22.02% who oppose the proposals. Analysis shows that in many areas across Cheshire, most respondents outlined support for the proposals although there were higher levels of opposition locally in Northwich, Stockton Heath and Winsford.

26. Although staff responses to the survey were more limited, the majority (52.38%) were in support, compared with 33.34% who oppose them.

27. The survey asked respondents to identify the perceived benefits and potential drawbacks of the proposals. There were 233 comments related to the perceived positive impacts of the proposals and a further 232 comments regarding the perceived negative impacts of the proposals.

28. Section 9 of Appendix 2 provides a detailed analysis of consultation responses about these proposals, however feedback is summarised below.

Converting four on-call fire engines to wholetime weekday engines

29.   Where members of the public gave positive feedback, the most frequently made point was about the benefit of having improved fire cover across Cheshire as a result of the proposals. Respondents highlighted the reassurance that this would provide during weekdays; quicker response times; an increase in the number of areas that are afforded an element of guaranteed fire cover and a view that this is a more effective and efficient use of resources.

30.   Staff comments also reference the improved levels of guaranteed fire cover, particularly during periods of peak activity, as well as an increase in capacity to undertake community safety work to reduce risk and demand. Concerns about the proposals centred on the effect on overnight and weekend cover, as well as the impact on affected on-call staff.

31.   The FBU offered qualified support for the proposal. Holmes Chapel Parish Council and Bollington Town Council also expressed support, citing improved response times and additional benefit to the community arising from the changes.

32.   In their submissions, Northwich Town Council and Councillor Sam Naylor (Cheshire West and Chester) raised concerns over the proposed change to the on-call fire engine at Northwich Fire Station.

Introduction of day crewing at Knutsford Fire Station

33.   Three public respondents specifically referenced the proposed change at Knutsford, all of which considered it to be a positive move. Staff feedback was largely supportive of the proposal, acknowledging the rationale behind the proposal and the benefits to fire cover.

34.   Feedback from staff based at Knutsford focused on the issues around the allocation of housing and the transfer of staff to the new system. Specific queries were raised in relation to the transfer of the technical rescue unit from its current base at Lymm to Knutsford. These centred on staffing and training requirements.

35.   Knutsford Town Council confirmed their support for the draft CRMP and in particular the proposal for Knutsford Fire Station. The FBU response outlines support but raises an objection to the proposal to transfer the technical rescue unit, as referred above. This is echoed by the Chester Retired Firefighters.

Reorganisation of daytime fire cover in Warrington

36.   Ten public comments referred to the proposed changes in Warrington. Nine relate to the change in fire cover and raise concerns over what is perceived to be a reduced level of cover in certain areas, while a further comment

questioned how the impact on staff living in Authority housing in Stockton Heath would be managed.

37.   Operational staff working at Stockton Heath raised questions about the release of the housing associated with the station and the support that could be offered to help those affected.

38.   Responses were received from several partners. The FBU stated that the current on-call provision at Stockton Heath should be maintained; citing the risk profile in the area requires the maintenance of current arrangements. Warrington District Trades Union Council object for similar reasons.

39.   The response from Stockton Heath Parish Council outlined support for the overall plan and understanding of the rationale behind the proposal. Birchwood Town Council did not provide any further comment beyond seeking reassurance that additional prevention and protection work, which the proposals enable, will also be carried out in the Birchwood area

Improving the on-call duty system

40.   Respondents were asked to provide comments and suggestions to improve the on-call duty system. A total of 176 free text comments were received and of these, 153 were provided by public respondents and 14 from staff. Section 10 of Appendix 2 provides a detailed commentary of responses received.

41.   The most frequently raised issue, from public, staff and partners, is the need to ensure pay and recognition for on-call firefighters is improved; suggesting that improving this will in turn lead to increased recruitment and better retention.

42.   Public and staff feedback also suggests that the recruitment process for on-call firefighters should be more effective and efficient; highlights the need to raise awareness in the community and among employers of the on-call duty system (also featured in partner feedback) and suggests ways to improve flexibility, including widening the catchment area of an on-call station.

43.   While partners such as the FBU support strengthening the on-call system, suggestions were made about improving the system, including improving career development opportunities for staff. Both the FBU and Chester Retired Firefighters highlighted the impact of the Service's migration policy (on-call staff moving into full-time roles) on on-call availability.

Additional comments

44.   Respondents were asked if they had any other comments they wished to make. A total of 142 comments were provided. Analysis of these is provided in section 12 of Appendix 2.

45.   There were 30 public and staff comments which expressed support for the proposals within the draft CRMP. Consultees acknowledged the depth and

detail of the draft CRMP and proposals were viewed as a positive step forward for the Service and the community.

46.   There were 15 public and staff comments which expressed concern or opposition to the proposals within the draft CRMP. The majority of these centred around converting the on-call fire engine at Northwich to a weekday daytime fire engine and the perceived impact that this would have on the community. Four comments expressed concerns related to the proposed change at Stockton Heath and the removal of Authority housing, in particular citing the impact on staff.

Responding to consultation feedback

47.   A requirement of the consultation process is to consider the feedback received on the draft CRMP and taking this into account in the development of the final, published version.

Identification and management of risks

48.   The feedback regarding the use of lithium-ion battery products will be used by officers to inform the development of relevant and appropriate safety advice and interventions.

Changing how we measure and report our response times

49.   Given the feedback, and the reasoning, expressed by consultees; the proposed change to the measuring and reporting of response times remains unaltered. The outcomes of the pre-consultation should also be reflected, where respondents suggested that measuring an average response time was seen as easier to understand. A single, concise response standard would provide the public with a readily understood benchmark of performance.

50.   Regarding the concerns raised, the monitoring of performance against the response standard is monitored by the Authority's Performance and Overview Committee. This means Fire Authority Members will continue to have regular oversight of performance against the new standard. These reports are publicly available.

51.   It is also at the discretion of Members to scrutinise data against other types of incident, thereby providing accountability for performance of activity which would not be captured by the response standard.

Changes to the provision of fire cover

52.   Feedback received from the consultation was, overall, supportive of the proposed package of changes, with consultees who supported the proposals acknowledging the improvement to the level of guaranteed fire cover and viewing them as a more effective and efficient use of resources.

53. It is recognised that there are localised concerns regarding the change to the on-call fire engine at Northwich Fire Station and the changes at Stockton Heath Fire Station. However, these need to be offset by the wider improvements across Cheshire to emergency response provision, and increased capacity for community prevention and protection work.

54. Feedback from staff and trade unions, as well as some public comments, also highlighted the impact on staff affected by the proposals.

55. Therefore, while the proposal remains unchanged, officers are committed to engaging at an early stage with staff and trade unions to manage the implementation of the new duty system for weekday fire engines. There would be an agreed process for redeploying affected staff and efforts would be made to mitigate the impact of staff being required to vacate Authority housing.

Review of the on-call duty system

56. Given the weight of feedback from consultees regarding the importance of pay and recognition as a key part of improving the on-call duty system, this will form the first element of the review. Further feedback from the consultation will be considered by officers responsible for the review.

Financial Implications

57. Subject to the approval of Members, the fire cover proposals within the CRMP will lead to an additional cost of circa £57,000 per year. This is deemed to be affordable and can be met through delivering efficiencies elsewhere in the organisation.

58. The pre-consultation engagement and consultation programme were subject to advice and guidance and a formal quality assurance review from the Consultation Institute. The cost for these activities totalled £44,450. Other costs, including promotional materials and consultation activities were met from existing budgets.

Legal Implications

59. The publication of the CRMP by 1 April 2024 will fulfil the Authority's statutory obligations under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. The consultation process has been undertaken to comply with recognised standards of practice and legal requirements.

Equality and Diversity Implications

60. Equalities Impact Assessments (EIAs) have been created to support the proposals subject to consultation and consultees have been asked to provide feedback against the EIAs, which is documented in section 11 of Appendix 2. Feedback highlighted age and the ageing population of Cheshire, as well as the need to treat rural and urban areas equally.

61.   The feedback will be incorporated into revised EIAs and considered as part of the implementation of the plans, subject to Members' approval of the CRMP.

Environmental Implications

62.   There are no environmental implications. The published CRMP will primarily be an online document in order to reduce paper consumption.

CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING MANAGER
TEL [01606] 868804

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- **APPENDIX 1: COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2028**

- **APPENDIX 2: DRAFT COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2028 CONSULTATION FEEDBACK REPORT**

- **APPENDIX 3: DRAFT COMMUNITY RISK MANGEMENT PLAN 2024-2028 CONSULTATON FEEDBACK (ADDITIONAL RESOURCES)**

- **APPENDIX 4: FIRE BRIGADES UNION RESPONSE TO CFRS COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2028**

Cheshire
Fire Authority

Community Risk Management Plan
2024-2028

MORE **PREVENTION**

MORE **PROTECTION**

BETTER **RESPONSE**

> "
> ...we are pleased to be able to present a plan which addresses our challenges and delivers more risk-reducing prevention and protection activity, and better response, for no additional cost.

Contents

If you require this or any other document in a different format, please contact us by emailing **equalities.diversity@cheshirefire.gov.uk**, calling **01606 868700** or contacting us via our social media channels.

Foreword

Councillor Stef Nelson
Chair, Cheshire Fire Authority

Alex Waller
Chief Fire Officer
and Chief Executive,
Cheshire Fire and
Rescue Service

Fire and rescue authorities, the democratically accountable bodies that provide local fire and rescue services, must produce a Community Risk Management Plan, or CRMP.

In Cheshire we face a variety of different risks, from an ageing population to our extensive transport networks and industrial sites, to name but a few. We are also confronted with new risks, such as the growth of electric vehicles and battery technologies and impacts of climate change. Throughout this CRMP, we will explain our plans to continue addressing existing risks and deal with new ones, so we can move towards our vision of "a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires and other emergencies."

To mitigate risks and prevent fires and other emergencies, we carry out a range of fire prevention and protection activity, focusing on the people in local communities who are most at risk.

Of course, through our fire stations, fire engines and dedicated firefighters we also respond to emergencies, providing a high quality, timely, safe and effective response. Maintaining this response, or 'fire cover', requires a range of different staffing models or 'duty systems'. These are explained in more detail on page 10. The changing nature of society means it is becoming more difficult for us to operate particular duty systems effectively at certain times of the day. Therefore, we have carefully reviewed the way we provide fire cover, to improve our response capacity and capability during our busiest periods. These plans are outlined in detail on pages 28 to 43.

We know that many people are facing significant financial pressures and the country is facing considerable financial uncertainty. So, we are pleased to be able to present a CRMP which addresses our challenges and delivers more risk-reducing prevention and protection activity, and better response, for no additional cost.

Our future success depends primarily on our people and we will continue to support them to thrive and work hard to create a diverse and inclusive workplace, founded on our values and principles of dignity, respect and fairness.

Our plans very much reflect the future direction of the fire and rescue service nationally. The Home Office, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Local Government Association all expect us to deliver a modern, effective, efficient and inclusive service to the public. These expectations are set out in numerous inspection reports, Fit for the Future and in the white paper on reforming the fire and rescue sector.

Thank you to all our colleagues, stakeholders and members of the public who took the time during 2023 to share their views on the CRMP. This feedback has helped to shape an ambitious plan that will enable us to keep the people of Cheshire safe in the years to come.

What is a **CRMP?**

Under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, a CRMP should identify risks facing the community and describe how a fire and rescue authority will address those risks, and prevent and respond to fires and other emergencies. In short, it serves as our organisational plan for the future. A CRMP should have a lifespan of at least three years and be produced in consultation with the public, fire and rescue staff, local partners and representative bodies.

This CRMP will cover the four years between 2024 and 2028. We will produce annual action plans during this period to show the progress we are making.

The first sections of this document provide an overview of Cheshire and explain the way our fire and rescue service is organised to deliver prevention, protection and response activities.

Between pages 12 and 27 we describe the demands on our Service, and outline the key fire and rescue risks facing Cheshire and how we will address them over the next four years.

Between pages 28 and 41 we explain in more detail our plans to change and improve the way we respond to emergencies, following a comprehensive review of our fire cover.

The final sections outline further plans to improve other important aspects of our organisation and provide an overview of our funding arrangements. A summary of our proposals is then provided on pages 48 and 49.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Cheshire
Fire Authority

The county of **Cheshire**

Cheshire covers some 905 square miles and has a population of almost 1.1 million people. The county is largely rural, with urban populations and major industry concentrated mostly in its north west. Major conurbations include the city of Chester and the towns of Warrington, Crewe, Macclesfield, Ellesmere Port, Runcorn and Widnes.

○ Cheshire West and Chester as a unitary authority includes the historic city of Chester, the industrial towns of Ellesmere Port and Winsford, and market towns and villages. It is largely rural, with the main centres of population in the north and west of the borough. The area benefits from strong tourism and retail sectors, alongside established agricultural, automotive and manufacturing industries. There are nationally important petro-chemical and nuclear fuel industries in the north of the authority area and a historic link to salt mining. Cheshire West and Cheshire has pockets of affluence alongside communities that are relatively disadvantaged.

○ Cheshire East is a large unitary authority containing the principal towns of Crewe and Macclesfield, as well as market towns and the commuter belt south of Manchester. It is home to internationally renowned vehicle manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies, while rail, agriculture and financial services are also key industries. It is an area of contrasting features, combining urban centres with rural villages and containing areas of significant affluence but also pockets of social deprivation. The borough is served by the M6 motorway, a network of urban and rural 'A' roads and the west coast rail line, while Manchester Airport lies on its

northern border. It is home to several heritage buildings and the north east of the authority area sits at the gateway to the Peak District National Park.

○ <u>Halton</u> incorporates the industrial towns of Runcorn and Widnes, connected by two major bridges across the River Mersey. The area is home to various chemical and science industries, as well as distribution and logistics companies. Aside from the Mersey crossings, key infrastructure includes docks and ports and a gas-fired power station at Rocksavage, south of Runcorn. The Manchester Ship Canal also runs across the borough, while Liverpool John Lennon International Airport lies just over the border in Merseyside. Some of Halton's communities are among the most disadvantaged in the country.

Photo courtesy of Merseylink

○ <u>Warrington</u> is located in between Liverpool and Manchester and is the largest conurbation in Cheshire. Warrington is traversed by the River Mersey, Manchester Ship Canal, three motorways and the west coast rail line. Due to its location it has developed into an important transport and logistics hub. It also maintains strong retail, energy and night-time economies. There are several minority ethnic communities that call the borough home, making it one of the most diverse areas of Cheshire. Some areas, mostly in the centre of the town, fall within the 20% most deprived in the country, while other areas on the edge of the borough are within the 30% most affluent.

Cheshire is bordered by the Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester in the north, Derbyshire and Staffordshire to the east, Shropshire to the south and North Wales lies to the west of the county.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Your Fire and Rescue Service

Overview

Cheshire Fire Authority comprises 23 elected councillors or 'members' appointed by Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Halton Borough Council and Warrington Borough Council. The Authority oversees the fire and rescue service on behalf of the communities of Cheshire. You can find more information about the Authority and its members on our website.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service is led by a Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and a Service Leadership Team. This comprises senior officers who are responsible for departments looking after our Service's key operational and corporate functions.

Service Delivery

This department looks after our firefighters, fire engines and 28 fire stations, ensuring they respond 24/7 to emergencies. Details of how we provide this cover is set out on pages 10 to 11.

Operational Policy and Assurance

The department provides operational and incident command training to our firefighters from our state of the art training centre at Sadler Road, Winsford. It also develops operational policies, plans and procedures, manages and maintains our vehicles, tests and develops new equipment, and oversees health, safety and wellbeing. The department also works closely with North West Fire Control in Warrington, our 999 control room shared with Cumbria, Greater Manchester and Lancashire fire and rescue services.

Prevention

The department oversees much of our community work. This includes delivering fire safety and health and wellbeing advice to households, road and water safety education, reducing deliberate fires, engaging with schools and young people and managing our volunteers. The department also runs Safety Central, our interactive life skills education centre at Lymm.

Protection

This department ensures non-residential premises meet their obligations around fire safety. It engages with businesses and where necessary enforces compliance with legislation. Protection officers also work with local authorities and others regarding building regulations and the highest risk premises including industrial facilities, heritage sites and care settings.

Service Improvement

The department monitors our performance, and leads our corporate planning and our work with HMICFRS. The team also co-ordinates our work to modernise our facilities and manages our relationship with the joint corporate services we share with Cheshire Constabulary (see below).
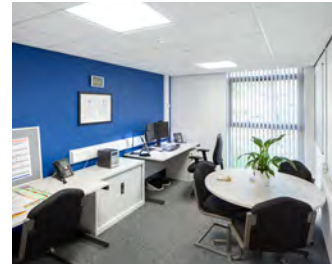
Communications and Engagement

The department leads all aspects of internal and external communications including media relations, our website and social media and our graphic design function. The team also coordinates consultation and engagement with staff and the community, our programme of events and our work to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

Finance

Our finance team ensures we operate under sound financial principles, within legislation, and achieves a balanced budget each year by supporting departments with their financial management and planning.

Governance

This small team looks after our corporate planning, the Fire Authority, executive support and information management.

People and Organisational Development

The department provides human resources services including payroll and pensions, recruitment, HR business partnership and the provision of leadership and development training.

Joint Corporate Services

Information Technology (IT), Facilities and Estates, Legal Services, Procurement and Stores functions are shared with Cheshire Constabulary through Blue Light Collaboration.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Cheshire
Fire Authority

Your Fire and Rescue Service

Our firefighters respond to fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies from 28 fire stations across Cheshire. These are shown on this map.

Some fire stations have one fire engine and some have two. Other stations have specialist vehicles like aerial ladder platforms, rapid response rescue units (RRRUs) or boats, depending on the risks in their areas.

In total we have 35 fire engines, but not all of these are available at the same time. This can be because of crews undertaking training, large incidents that require multiple fire engines or because on-call fire engines have insufficient crew. For that reason, we move our fire engines around the county to ensure that we can get to most incidents within 10 minutes regardless of where they happen. In the event of a significant or long-running incident we can also call on the support of neighbouring fire and rescue services.

At the time of this plan being published, we have four duty systems so we can crew our fire engines based on local risks and needs. From January 2025, we will be changing the way we operate some of our on-call fire engines and one of our nucleus fire engines. These changes are explained later in this document.

Ellesmere Port

Powey Lane

Chester

🔴 Wholetime fire engine

Eleven wholetime fire engines, available 24 hours a day, every day. These are crewed by full-time firefighters and crew turnout* is within a minute and a half.
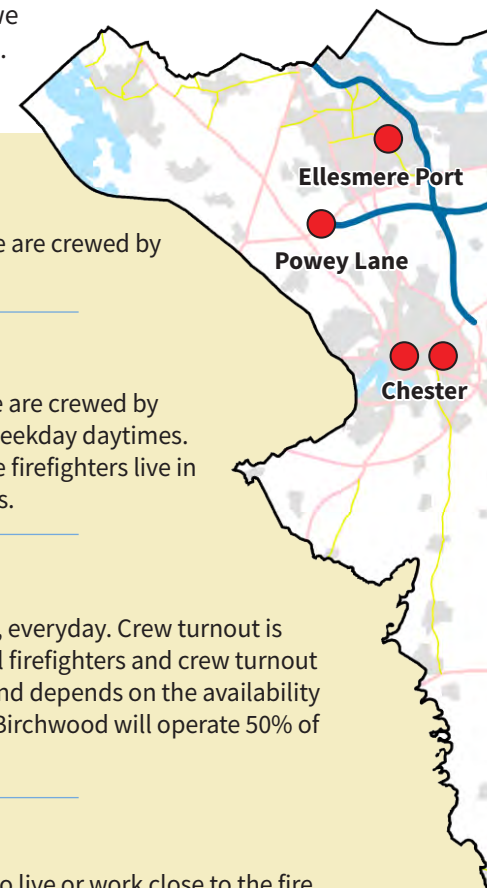
🟦 Day crewing fire engine

Four day crewing fire engines, available 24 hours a day, every day. These are crewed by full-time firefighters. Crew turnout is within a minute and a half during weekday daytimes. At nights and weekends crew turnout is within five minutes. The full-time firefighters live in our houses next to the fire station so they can turnout within five minutes.

🔶 Nucleus fire engine

Two nucleus fire engines, crewed by full-time firefighters, 12 hours a day, everyday. Crew turnout is within a minute and a half. Overnight the fire engine is crewed by on-call firefighters and crew turnout is within five minutes. The fire engine is not always available overnight and depends on the availability of sufficient on-call crew. From January 2025, the nucleus fire engine at Birchwood will operate 50% of daytimes.

🔺 On-call fire engine

Eighteen on-call fire engines. These are crewed by on-call firefighters who live or work close to the fire station. Crew turnout is within five minutes. The fire engine is not always available and depends on the availability of sufficient on-call crew. The fire engines at Knutsford, Macclesfield, Northwich, Runcorn, Stockton Heath and Winsford are subject to changes explained later in this plan.

* Crew turnout is the duration between the time at which the station is alerted and the time the first vehicle departs (in other words, the time it takes for firefighters to prepare to leave). For further details see page 32.

Page 54

Cheshire Fire Authority

Key

Symbol	Description
● (red circle)	Wholetime fire engine
■ (blue square)	Day crewing fire engine
◆ (orange diamond)	Nucleus fire engine
▲ (green triangle)	On-call fire engine
■ (yellow square)	Safety Central
★ (yellow star)	Headquarters
■ (orange square)	North West Fire Control

© Crown copyright and database rights 2019 Ordnance Survey 1000240064

Map locations: Birchwood, NWFC, Warrington, Penketh, Stockton Heath, Widnes, Safety Central, Lymm, Runcorn, Frodsham, Poynton, Wilmslow, Knutsford, Bollington, Macclesfield, Northwich, HQ, Winsford, Holmes Chapel, Middlewich, Tarporley, Congleton, Sandbach, Alsager, Crewe, Nantwich, Malpas, Audlem

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Community Risk Management Plan 2024 -2028

Our **operational demands**

Current Operational Demand *based on average yearly demand between 2020/21 and 2023/24	Predicted Future Operational Demand *based on average yearly demand between 2024/25 and 2027/28
8,274 — Incidents attended	8,289 — Incidents likely to be attended
2,432 — Fires	2,126 — Fires
3,198 — False alarms	2,989 — False alarms
2,031 — Other special service incidents	2,273 — Other special service incidents
372 — Road traffic collisions	353 — Road traffic collisions
318 — Accidental dwelling fires	296 — Accidental dwelling fires
917 — Deliberate fires	809 — Deliberate fires
139 — Fires in non domestic premises	124 — Fires in non domestic premises
65 — Injuries in accidental dwelling fires	50 — Injuries in accidental dwelling fires
19 — of these attended hospital	13 — of these who may attend hospital

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

How we assess and mitigate
risk and demand

We use our Community Risk Management (CRM) model to assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect our communities. We then put in place arrangements to mitigate these risks, by refining or changing the way we do things, investing in equipment or facilities, or developing our partnerships.

The first step in the CRM process is to look at information from a wide range of sources. This includes data about incidents, including who they affect, when and where they happen and how long it takes us to reach them. Risks in specific buildings or locations are considered, as well as the wider social needs of our local areas. We also consult with staff, partners and our communities.

After this information has been collated and analysed using sophisticated computer software, officers carefully examine the evidence and consider risks to people, places and firefighters before deciding on what activities need to be done to reduce or mitigate risks.

These activities are delivered through our prevention, protection and response teams against targets and standards agreed with members. Performance is regularly monitored and published.

Effective response to some of the risks means working in partnership with other emergency services, local authorities, health providers and partner agencies. These partners are brought together through the Cheshire Resilience Forum (CRF) to prepare and plan for a range of emergencies. We regularly test these plans in joint training exercises.

Local resilience forums such as the CRF have to produce a Community Risk Register (CRR), which highlights potential risks facing the area. The risks outlined in this draft CRMP include some of those identified in the CRR and the government's updated National Risk Register, as well as some more specific fire and rescue risks.

We undertake to analyse risks in Cheshire using many data sources and use our professional judgement

To determine the optimum provision of services to address risk across Cheshire, according to our resources available

This provision is outlined in the Service's plans, such as the CRMP. Changes to our service provision will also be informed by feedback from public consultation

RISK ANALYSIS

External statistics
Partner information
Service data
Computer modelling
Feedback

PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT

PREVENTION

PROTECTION

RESPONSE

PROVISION OF SERVICES

SERVICE STRATEGIES AND PLANS

MONITORING AND EVALUATION
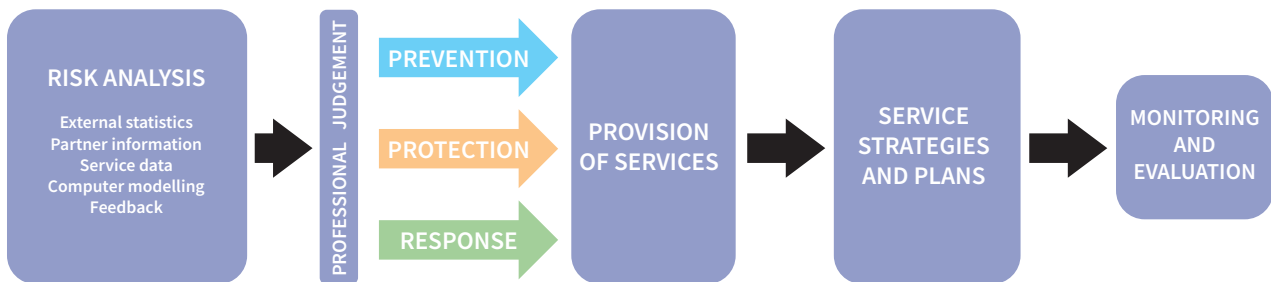
We monitor and evaluate our performance to inform any changes we may need to make to address and mitigate risks in the community

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Page 57

Cheshire
Fire Authority

Developing our **CRMP**

To help shape this CRMP, we undertook a comprehensive review of fire cover across Cheshire. We do this every few years to ensure the Authority continues to provide its emergency response in the most effective and efficient way. The review of fire cover is part of our CRM process, explained on the previous page.

In early summer 2023, members agreed some guiding principles for the way we should review fire cover and develop proposals for the future.

- Giving our colleagues and communities a genuine say in the development of our Service.
- Continuing to respond to incidents as quickly as we do now and where possible, even quicker in the future.
- Increasing the availability of fire engines, especially during daytime hours.
- Enabling our staff to be more productive and effective, keeping our communities safe.
- Strengthening our prevention and protection programmes to meet the needs of those most at risk.
- Providing high quality, sustainable workplaces for our colleagues by continuing to modernise our buildings and facilities.
- Continuing to promote our Service's safe, supportive and inclusive workplace culture.

This CRMP was also shaped by the views of the public, staff and partners. First, we carried out pre-consultation to seek feedback on our guiding principles, explore options for the future in more detail, understand impacts on minority groups and ask for views on new and emerging risks.

We then consulted formally on our proposals between October 2023 and January 2024. In our most ambitious consultation programme ever - supported and endorsed by the Consultation Institute - we engaged more than 5,000 members of the public, staff and partners over 13 weeks. The response to the draft CRMP was largely supportive, but we recognise there were some local concerns about the impact of changes to some fire engines. We will keep staff and communities engaged through the life of this plan.

The Consultation Institute

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Community Risk Management Plan 2024 -2028

Risks **Prevention**

Changing population

Fire and other accidents are more likely to affect the oldest and youngest people in our communities. Cheshire's population is getting older, meaning we could see more incidents unless we invest in our prevention work. At the same time, younger people continue to need our support to stay safe.

What are the risks?

National and local data consistently shows that the older you get, the more likely you are to suffer a serious injury or die if you have a fire in your home. This risk increases even more if you live alone or are over 65.

Older people are also more likely to live with conditions like dementia, have poor mobility or experience health problems which put them at risk of having a fire or accident.

We are becoming an older county, with our average age increasing faster than the national average. This increase is more pronounced in Cheshire East, and Cheshire West and Chester.

There are other risk factors that impact people under the age of 65 that put them at higher risk of injury or death, such as lifestyle and living conditions.

At the other end of the age spectrum, we are seeing an increase in the number of young people living with mental health issues. Young people are often responsible for deliberately setting fires, wasting firefighters' time and putting property and lives at risk. We are called to almost 1,000 incidents like this every year.

What do we currently do?

- Our prevention team and firefighters visit more than 20,000 households at most risk of fire each year to fit smoke alarms, offer safety advice and provide health information. These are known as 'Safe and Well' visits.
- Where we find people who are most at risk of fire and other harm, we work closely with our partners in health and social care to keep them safe.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Community Risk Management Plan 2024 -2028

Cheshire
Fire Authority

Risks **Prevention**

- Our Fire Cadet scheme, run at many of our fire stations, gives young people aged 12-17 a worthwhile pastime outside school and builds their confidence and skills.
- We engage children and young people at risk of being excluded from school through our RESPECT programme, which aims to instil positive behaviours and good citizenship.
- We deliver the Prince's Trust Team Programme on behalf of local colleges to help 16-25 year olds into education, training or employment.
- Our firefighters and prevention teams visit every primary school in Cheshire to deliver fire safety education, and thousands of children visit Safety Central each year to learn how to avoid a wide range of accidents.
- We deliver targeted advice and support on key safety themes throughout the year in collaboration with the NFCC.

What do we plan to do?

- Implement the recommendations from a review of our Prevention Department in 2023, ensuring all our community safety programmes continue to have the greatest possible impact in reducing harm, injuries and deaths.
- Continue to improve the way we target our Safe and Well visits, ensuring we see the people who are most at risk of fire.
- Gradually increase the number of Safe and Visits we carry out year on year during the lifespan of this CRMP, so that as many people as possible benefit from this life-saving scheme.
- Improve the way we work with our partners in health, social care, housing and the police so that people are safeguarded and get the support they need.
- Train our prevention teams and firefighters in motivational interviewing techniques, to increase the effectiveness of our Safe and Well visits.
- Include safety information about new and emerging technologies, such as lithium-ion batteries and domestic battery energy storage systems (BESS), in our Safe and Well visits.
- Reduce the occurence of deliberate fires in partnership with Cheshire Police.

Road and water safety

We attend more road traffic collisions than fires in the home and more people are killed or seriously injured each year on the roads than in fires.

In 2022, almost twice as many people drowned in the UK than died in fires.

#FATAL**5**

1 ❌ CARELESS DRIVING 2 ❌ DRINK /DRUG DRIVING 3 ❌ NOT WEARING A SEATBELT 4 ❌ DISTRACTED using a mobile phone whilst driving 5 ❌ SPEEDING

What are the risks?

Cheshire is served by an extensive network of roads and waterways. Alongside four busy motorways (M6, M62, M53 and M56), there are a series of trunk 'A' roads and smaller roads in urban and rural areas.
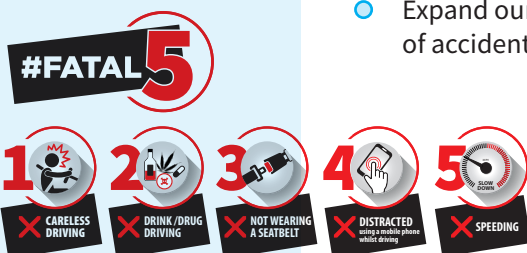
The rivers Mersey, Dee, Weaver and Bollin, a canal network and the Manchester Ship Canal run through areas of population. There are also many lakes and meres in more rural areas. These attract swimmers and bathers, particularly in warmer weather.

What are we currently doing?

- We have a dedicated Road Safety Team that runs a range of education programmes aimed at young people, drivers, cyclists and motorcyclists, and supports fire crews to engage with their communities on all aspects of road safety.
- We are one of only a few fire and rescue services in the country to be commissioned by a local authority to deliver road safety education. This sees us deliver sessions to thousands of children and young people in Cheshire East each year.
- We are an active partner in the Cheshire Road Safety Group, alongside Cheshire Constabulary and the four local authorities, which is currently developing a strategic plan to direct the work of all partners.
- We support campaigns led by the NFCC to promote staying safe in and around water and established the North West Water Safety Group.
- We are supporting fire stations to deliver proactive water safety activities in their areas.

What do we plan to do?

- ⚪ Implement the new Road Safety Strategic Plan with our partners and increase the number of road safety events we deliver.
- ⚪ Expand our water safety programme to reduce the occurrence of accidental drowning.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Community Risk Management Plan 2024 -2028

Risks **Protection**

Non-domestic premises

A fire in any type of business premises can have a devastating impact on lives and livelihoods. We have a duty to help those responsible for these premises to understand and comply with fire safety laws or potentially face criminal action.

What are the risks?

Cheshire's rich industrial and social heritage, and its unique geographical position, means it has vibrant and diverse economy. Across our county there are small, medium and large commercial premises used for retail, hospitality, healthcare, financial services, petrochemicals and nuclear processing, manufacturing, life science, agriculture and logistics.

Fire safety laws also apply to shared spaces, such as hallways and stairwells, in blocks of flats or housing complexes. The Grenfell Tower tragedy of 2017 and, more locally, the fire at the Beechmere retirement complex in Crewe in 2019, underline the importance of having strong relationships with housing providers.

What are we currently doing?

- When inspecting non-domestic premises, we prioritise those where a fire is more likely or would pose the greatest danger to life. This is called our Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) and it is carried out by highly-qualified staff, trained to enforce the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (2005).

- Firefighters are trained to carry out inspections in lower-risk premises, providing advice and identifying any areas of concern.

- We have a Business Safety Team that engages people responsible for premises, to provide advice, guidance and support.

- We have campaigned tirelessly for sprinkler systems to be designed into new buildings or fitted in existing ones. This includes part-funding sprinklers in most of Cheshire's high rise blocks of flats.

What do we plan to do?

- Review our Protection Department to ensure it remains efficient and effective.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of our RBIP to ensure we target inspection activity at the right premises.

- Provide accredited training for operational managers, to improve their knowledge and understanding when inspecting premises.

- Continue to campaign for the installation of sprinklers in new and existing commercial premises.

- Work with the NFCC to improve the planning process for BESS, to ensure planning authorities consider the implications of fire and firefighter safety when approving new installations. This will include training a specialist officer in Protection.

- Review how we undertake our primary authority responsibilities to ensure they are effective and self-funding.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Heritage

A fire in a heritage building not only poses a risk to occupiers, staff and visitors, but also threatens irreplaceable and priceless architecture and artefacts.

What are the risks?

The history of Britain is reflected in the wide range of historic buildings and sites across Cheshire. From the remains of a Roman fortress, medieval cathedral and the unique Victorian Rows in Chester, to Tudor, Jacobean and Edwardian country houses elsewhere, the county's heritage is a significant part of the local economy.

These sites were not built to modern standards, so fire safety legislation must be applied carefully and sensitively. Consideration must also be given to how a fire might be tackled safely in buildings where it might spread differently.

What are we currently doing?

- We employ a dedicated heritage officer to work with those responsible for heritage sites to promote and improve fire safety.
- We undertake fire safety audits at heritage sites and work with owners and occupiers to ensure they comply with fire safety regulations.
- We hold heritage impact days in areas with significant numbers of historic buildings.
- We develop operational plans and conduct operational training exercises specific to heritage sites, which include the salvage and recovery of historic items such as artwork.

What do we plan to do?

- Continue to develop our work with local partners and those responsible for heritage buildings to keep these premises safe from fire.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Community Risk Management Plan 2024 -2028

Cheshire
Fire Authority
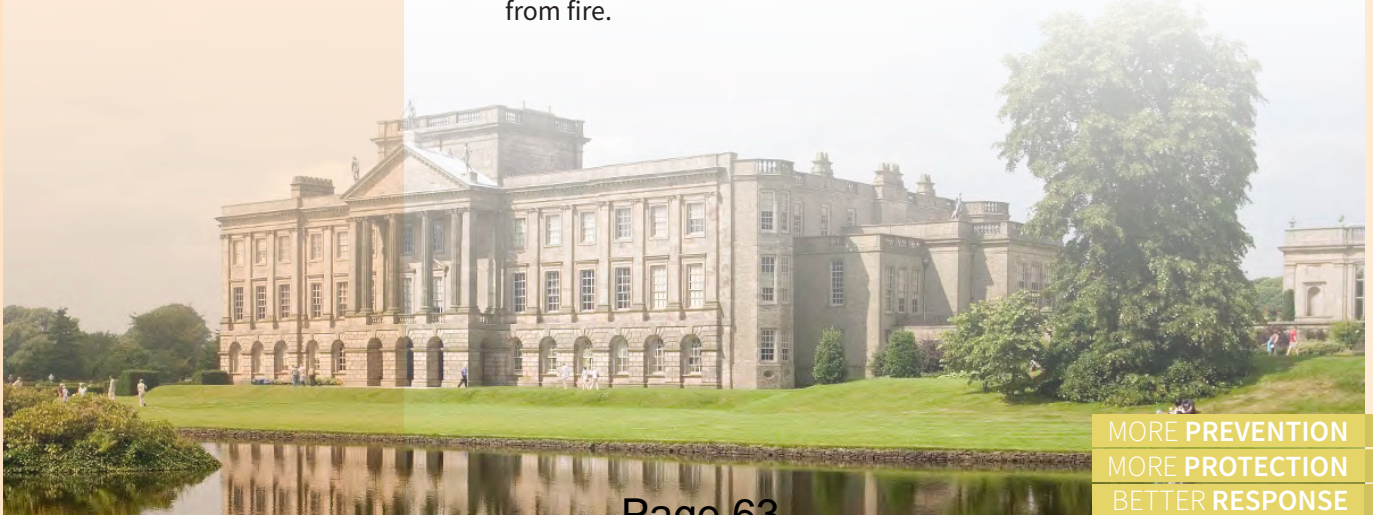
Risks **Protection**

Modern methods of construction

If built outside recognised standards, or subsequently modified after construction, timber framed buildings can suffer rapid and major failings of their protection measures in the event of a fire. This can present significant risk to occupants of the building as well as to firefighters.

What is the risk?

The construction of properties using timber frames rather than brick, block and steel is increasingly being seen as a preferred method by developers due to the potential savings in time, materials and labour. It is also regarded as a more sustainable method of construction.

What are we currently doing?

- Our inspection programme is focused on buildings where a fire would pose greatest risk to life. We pay particular attention to care homes, sheltered accommodation and extra care villages with timber framed construction.

- We advise all timber framed property owners to review their fire safety policies and procedures regularly.

- We advise residents to raise concerns about fire safety procedures with property owners.

- We recommend the fitting of sprinklers in domestic and commercial buildings.

- We are reviewing and learning from the outcomes of the Hackitt Review and Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

What do we plan to do?

- Ensure our protection activities align with the outcomes of the Building Safety Review and recent changes to the Building Safety Act 2022.

- Continue to campaign for the installation of sprinklers, especially in timber framed buildings.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**
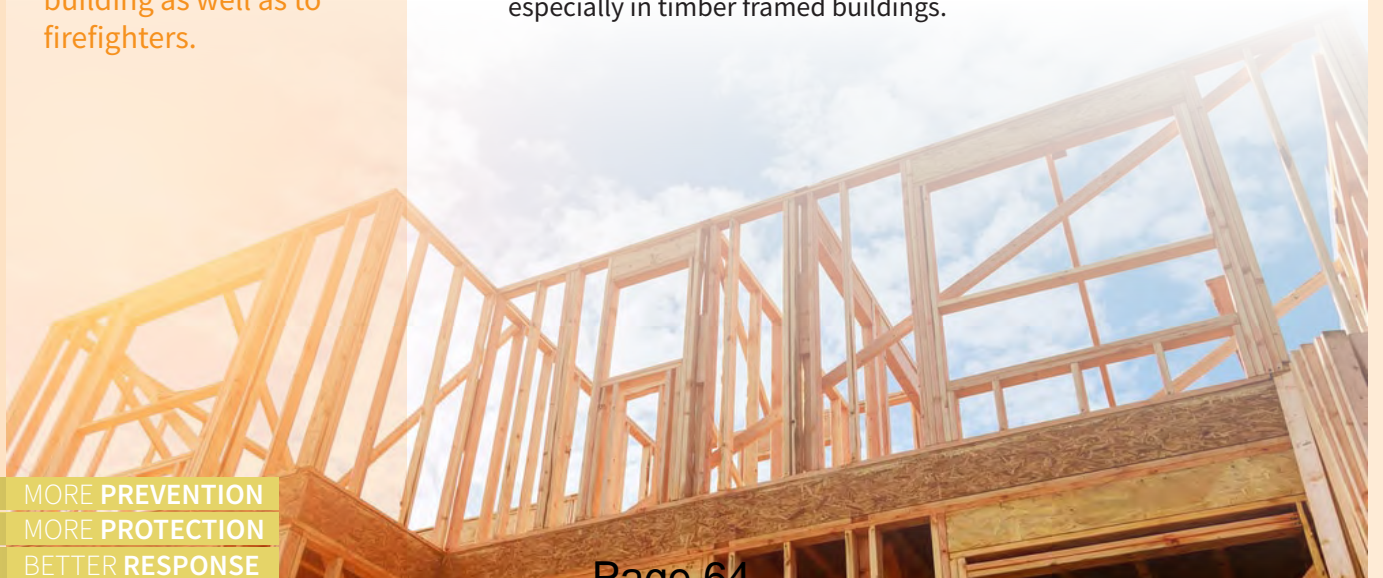
Risks **Response**

Climate change

Climate change is already causing severe weather events that require a fire and rescue response. Several services reported their busiest day since World War II during the record-breaking heatwave of 2022. The number of people living in areas at significant risk of flooding in the UK could double by the 2050s.

What are the risks?

Cheshire's blend of rural landscape and urban conurbation means that the principal risks to life and property relate to flooding and wildfires.

Parts of the county around the River Mersey in Warrington, River Dee in Chester and River Weaver in Northwich are at a higher risk of flooding. However, any built-up area may be at risk of surface flooding in the event of heavy rainfall.

Wildfires can happen in any open space, but firefighting in the forests of Delamere and Macclesfield, on the high ridges of the sandstone trail or the hills of Cheshire East would be particularly challenging.

What did our pre-consultation tell us?

Feedback received from our pre-consultation highlighted climate change as a key concern, particularly the impact of prolonged or extreme weather events.

What are we currently doing?

- All fire engines carry pumps of differing sizes which enables us to respond effectively to life-risk flooding events. Our high volume water pump provides firefighters with the capability to pump large amounts of flood water during these climate related emergencies.

- All our firefighters are trained to rescue people from flood water with support provided by our two rescue boats. We have reviewed our water capability and invested in additional training and kit to enable us to respond more effectively when rescuing people from water.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Cheshire
Fire Authority

Risks **Response**
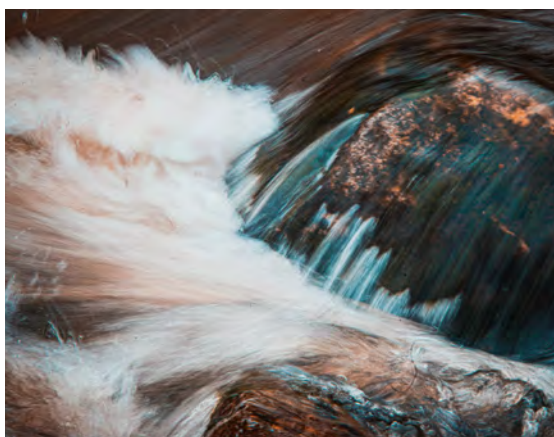
- We are a member of the Fire Operations Group, which brings together six fire and rescue services, the Peak District National Park, National Trust, water companies, landowners and gamekeepers to draw up fire plans, train and raise awareness of ways to prevent moorland fires.

- We have invested in an off-road all-terrain vehicle, specialist equipment and protective kit to enable firefighters to respond to wildfires more effectively. This project was led by firefighters.

What do we plan to do?

- Our emergency response proposals are outlined later in this CRMP. If implemented, these would help us provide a more resilient response in times of high demand, such as extreme weather events. We will continue to explore other options to scale up resources during peak demands

- Continue to review our flood and water response provision across Cheshire to ensure that it meets emerging needs.

- Support national and local campaigns to raise awareness of staying safe outdoors and during periods of extreme weather.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Emerging technologies

The number of fires in the caused by exploding lithium-ion batteries in e-scooters and e-bikes rose by 150% in 2021. As of 2022, there are more than a million solar panel installations in the UK.

What are the risks?

To date we have seen only a very small number of fires caused by lithium-ion batteries in Cheshire. However, when they do occur we have seen how they develop very rapidly and are challenging to extinguish. They also produce particularly harmful smoke.

As well as powering electric cars, bikes and scooters, smaller batteries are now used in an array of products like laptop computers, mobile phones and disposable vaping products. There is a particular risk of fire when these are charging or if they are disposed of incorrectly with normal household waste.

In addition to household batteries, grid scale battery energy storage systems (BESS) are being installed at an exponential rate across the UK. Fires at BESS sites can be extremely hazardous and could impact on the safety of the public and responders.

Fires involving solar panels need to be tackled carefully owing to the risk to firefighters from the electricity they generate.

What did our pre-consultation tell us?

Many people who responded to our pre-consultation said that our CRMP should take into account increasing levels of electric car ownership and the risk of fires caused by their batteries.

What are we currently doing?

- We have adapted our operational policies and procedures to include fighting fires involving solar panels, including investment in specialist equipment to render them electrically inactive when fighting a fire, reducing the risk to firefighters.
- Along with other fire and rescue services, we are conducting research into how we can most effectively fight fires in electric vehicles. This includes examining new equipment, policies and procedures to deal with these fires and keep our firefighters safe.

What do we plan to do?

- Continue to develop our understanding of the fire risks presented by lithium-ion batteries and working with others to research ways to effectively deal with such fires.
- Build links with partners and work closely with them to identify BESS sites, so we can reduce risks and prepare our site-specific emergency response plans.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Cheshire
Fire Authority

Risks **Response**

Firefighter safety

The nature of firefighting means there are risks and hazards that need to be carefully managed to avoid the risk of death, serious injury or illness in the longer-term.

What are the risks?

Firefighting is dangerous work and our firefighters face risks every day. For that reason, firefighter safety will always be a major priority within our CRMP.

What are we currently doing?

- We have invested almost £12m in an operational training centre, to enable our teams to practise the skills of safe and effective firefighting and rescue in the safest and most realistic environment possible.

- Learning from incidents is a key part of how we develop our procedures and keep our firefighters safe. We regularly hold structured debriefs and collate information from crews and share best practice both locally and nationally.

- Officers, members and representative bodies work together closely to monitor and review matters relating to the physical and mental health, safety and wellbeing of our staff.

- We constantly invest in new kit and technology to improve our operational effectiveness and to keep our firefighters safe. Over recent years this has seen the introduction of new road traffic collision cutting gear, wildfire equipment, new aerial appliances, a 'Scorpion' high reach extendable turret fire engine and new personal protective equipment.

- We are reviewing fireground welfare facilities for our firefighters, to improve privacy and provide a place to rest and remove contaminants.

What do we plan to do?

- Undertake a major programme to replace and upgrade breathing apparatus.

- Continue to review our operational kit and equipment to ensure our staff have the appropriate resources to carry out their roles safely and effectively.

- Review our procedures for learning from operational incidents and ensure that it maximises the safety of our firefighters.

- Continue to work with representative bodies, partners such as the NFCC and others on any developments affecting the health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Maintaining sufficient fire cover

In spite of significant investment in the on-call duty system, we have not been able to improve the availability of on-call fire engines.
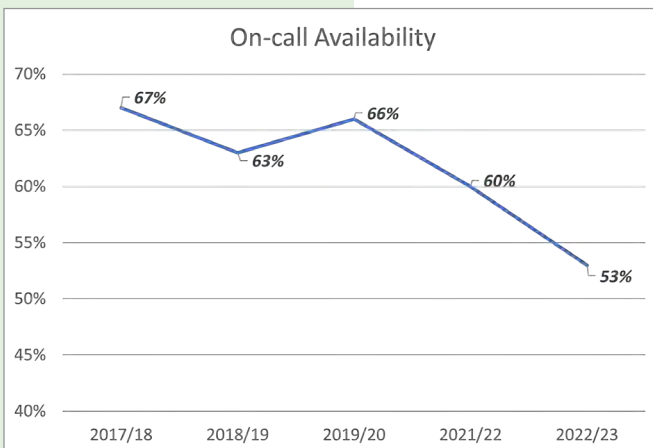
What is the risk?

Most incidents we attend (95%) require only one or two fire engines. However, larger incidents may require many more resources. Recent examples include the fire at Roberts Bakery in Northwich in June 2023 and at BIP Organics in Middlewich in July 2022. Some of our largest incidents, such as the fires at the Beechmere assisted living complex in Crewe in 2019 and Chester Zoo in 2018, needed more than 20 fire engines and specialist resources, which requires us to call on support from neighbouring fire and rescue services.

We have 35 fire engines and we constantly move these around to maintain the optimum response, aligned to risk and demand. At the time of this plan being published (April 2024), 18 of these fire engines were on-call and crewed by part-time firefighters. On-call fire engines are not always available and mainly operate in the more rural and less populated areas of Cheshire, with fewer incidents.

If an incident occurs when the local on-call fire engine is not available, we send the nearest available fire engine. This works satisfactorily most of the time but during larger incidents or busy periods it can be a challenge. The lack of on-call fire engine availability also means we have fewer fire engines to move around to maintain response provision across Cheshire.

The charts below show that on-call fire engines were available for 53% of the time on average ahead of this plan being produced and availability was on a downward trajectory despite increased financial investment.

On-call Availability

Year	Availability
2017/18	67%
2018/19	63%
2019/20	66%
2021/22	60%
2022/23	53%

On-Call Pay Costs

Year	Expenditure
2017/18	~£2,350,000
2018/19	~£2,370,000
2019/20	~£2,900,000
2021/22	~£3,270,000
2022/23	~£3,430,000

* Data from 2020/21 has been excluded owing to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on on-call availability and expenditure.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Page 69

Cheshire
Fire Authority

Risks **Response**

At the time of this plan being published, on-call availability was lowest during the daytime when we are usually busiest. The blue bars on the chart below show how many on-call fire engines are typically available during each hour of the day, while the red line shows the level of demand (i.e. the number of calls we receive). This shows that we frequently have fewer on-call fire engines available during our busiest daytime hours.

Average number of on-call fire engines available vs operational demand
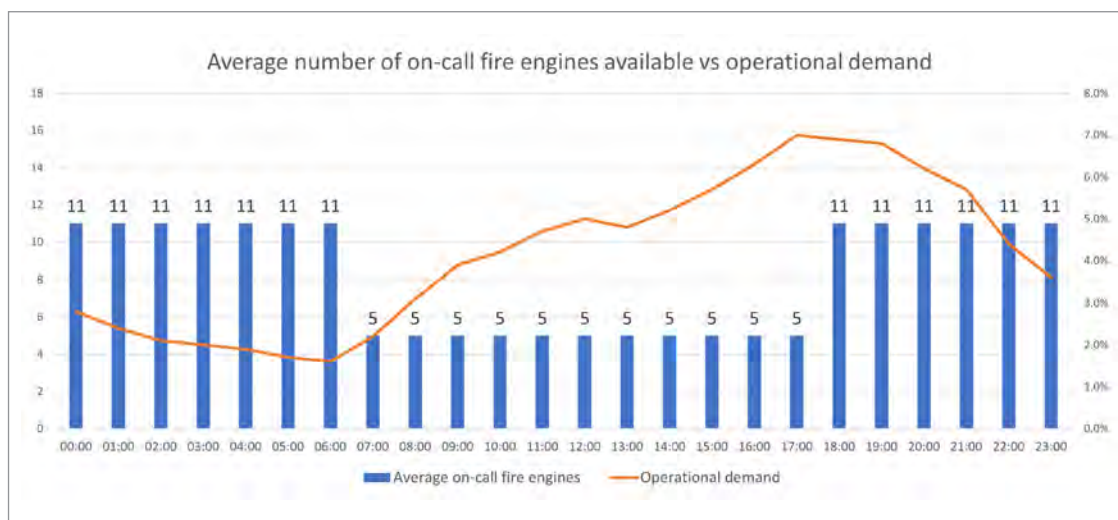
What have we already done?

• We have introduced bold changes to improve the spread of fire cover across Cheshire. This included increasing the number of fire stations from 24 to 28 by building new fire stations at Alsager, Lymm, Penketh and Powey Lane.

• We introduced a fleet of 13 rapid response rescue units (RRRUs), mainly in rural parts of Cheshire where response times tend to be slower. A RRRU can be crewed by two firefighters who will respond to road traffic collisions to provide lifesaving trauma care. The RRRU can also be used to transport more firefighters to incidents.

• We reviewed the on-call system and implemented an extensive programme focusing on issues such as improving recruitment, retention and rewards and increasing managerial support and capacity.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Malpas Fire Station

What do we plan to do?

- Response Projects 2, 3 and 4 (pages 34 to 41) set out what we intend to do. We will increase the number of fire engines guaranteed to be available during the weekday daytime by five, from 17 to 22. Like all our fire engines, these will move around to benefit the whole of Cheshire and will help improve response times.

- Response Project 1 changes the way we measure our performance so we can monitor the effectiveness of these proposals and our overall response model consistently.

- Response Project 5 aims to strengthen the on-call duty system to make it more effective, more rewarding for staff and more sustainable.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Response projects 2024-2028

Reviewing our fire cover arrangements

Fire cover review process

The following pages outline our plans to change to the way we provide fire cover in Cheshire. We have developed these by looking carefully at whether our firefighters, fire engines and fire stations operate in the right way, at the right time, in the right place. This process is called a fire cover review, which we carry out every time we produce a strategy like a CRMP.

To undertake a fire cover review, we carry out a range of activities including:

- analysing our historic incident data and performance against our targets
- carrying out a horizon scanning analysis to look for future risks and developments affecting fire and rescue service
- reviewing national reports and findings relating to the fire and rescue sector
- considering the response plans of our neighbouring fire and rescue services, and the plans of other agencies where appropriate
- using modelling software to predict the impact of any potential changes to the location or staffing of our resources on response times.

The fire cover review has considered things such as:

1. **Our emergency response standard.** Determining whether our target for the time it takes to get to incidents remains fit for purpose.
2. **Fire engine requirement and crewing models.** Determining the location and number of fire engines we need across Cheshire and the best way to crew these to meet risk, demand and targets.
3. **Special appliances.** Determining the type and capability requirements for specialist vehicles and resources, and the best location and crewing model for these.

Some of the outcomes from the fire cover review are now included in this CRMP. As these projects are taken forward, they may have implications for special appliances which might require further internal and/or external consultation.

Fire cover review guiding principles

In addition to a well-established process for reviewing our fire cover arrangements, we also adopted six guiding principles. These reflect our ambition to use the review as an opportunity to improve our service to the community and a clear view, expressed during pre-consultation, that there should be no reduction in the number of fire engines or fire stations.

- **Improving emergency response times by preventing any further increases and where possible making improvements.** This is because average fire and rescue response times have increased gradually over the last decade, nationally and locally.

- **Less reliance on the availability of on-call fire engines, particularly during the day, and;**

- **Increasing the number of wholetime fire engines in on-call station areas, resulting in increased capacity to deliver prevention and protection activity.** This is because we have challenges in maintaining the availability of many of our on-call fire engines during daytime hours.

- **Looking after our people and aiming to avoid compulsory redundancies.** This is because the changes will impact on part-time firefighters, those who have to relocate and those that rent houses from the Authority. We will offer other suitable employment, including full-time firefighter jobs.

- **No closures of fire stations or construction of additional fire stations.** This is because we believe Cheshire has the right number of fire stations.

- **Maintaining the same cost base, with better outputs and value for money.** This is because we wish to be clear our review is about improving our efficiency and effectiveness, not about cutting our service.

Cheshire
Fire Authority

Response projects 2024-2028

Options development

A suite of options was developed as part of the review, which involved a range of different crewing configurations and fire cover arrangements.

Both Authority members and officers were clear that any proposals which were to be put forward to full consultation should be in line with each of the guiding principles and other requirements outlined on the previous pages.

In addition, officers used their professional judgement to determine whether a particular package of options was operationally viable by being efficient, effective and sustainable to operate. They also considered whether an option provided appropriate levels of fire cover to meet the risks and demands of the specific locations concerned and ensured a balance of resources across the whole county of Cheshire.

The final package of proposals we consulted on met our guiding principles, were considered to be operationally viable and we believe are appropriate for the levels of risk and demand we face.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Our five response projects in detail

RESPONSE PROJECT 1: change the way we measure response times

We will improve the way we measure and report the time it takes our firefighters to get to incidents. This involves making some small but important changes that will enable us to better monitor the impact of the other response projects set out on the following pages, all of which aim to improve our response times.

There is no national target for the time it should take a fire engine to get to an incident. Different fire and rescue services measure and report these times in different ways. In Cheshire, at the time of this plan being produced, we were meeting our 'response standard', agreed through previous risk management plans, which was to:

> **Respond to life-risk incidents
> within 10 minutes on 80% of occasions.**

We will be changing this to a commitment that:

> **The average response time to primary fires in
> Cheshire will not exceed 10 minutes.**

Our aim will remain to respond to all incidents as quickly as possible, and where possible within 10 minutes. However, behind the scenes there will be three changes to the way we measure and report our performance:

1. We will start measuring our response time from the moment a 999 call is answered in our control room, not from the time the control operator alerts the fire station.

2. Instead of measuring the response times to life-risk incidents, we will measure the response times to fires involving homes, businesses and vehicles (known as 'primary fires').

3. We will report our average response time rather than the percentage of incidents we respond to in 10 minutes.

Rationale

The time it takes the fire and rescue service to get to incidents has gradually increased over the past 10 years in England. The reasons are varied and include things like increased traffic on the roads and the fact that staff who answer emergency calls ask more questions of the caller to understand the risk. Compared with the 16 other English fire and rescue services categorised as 'significantly rural', like Cheshire, we have limited the increase in our response times. We have achieved this by spreading the cover of our fire engines around the county.
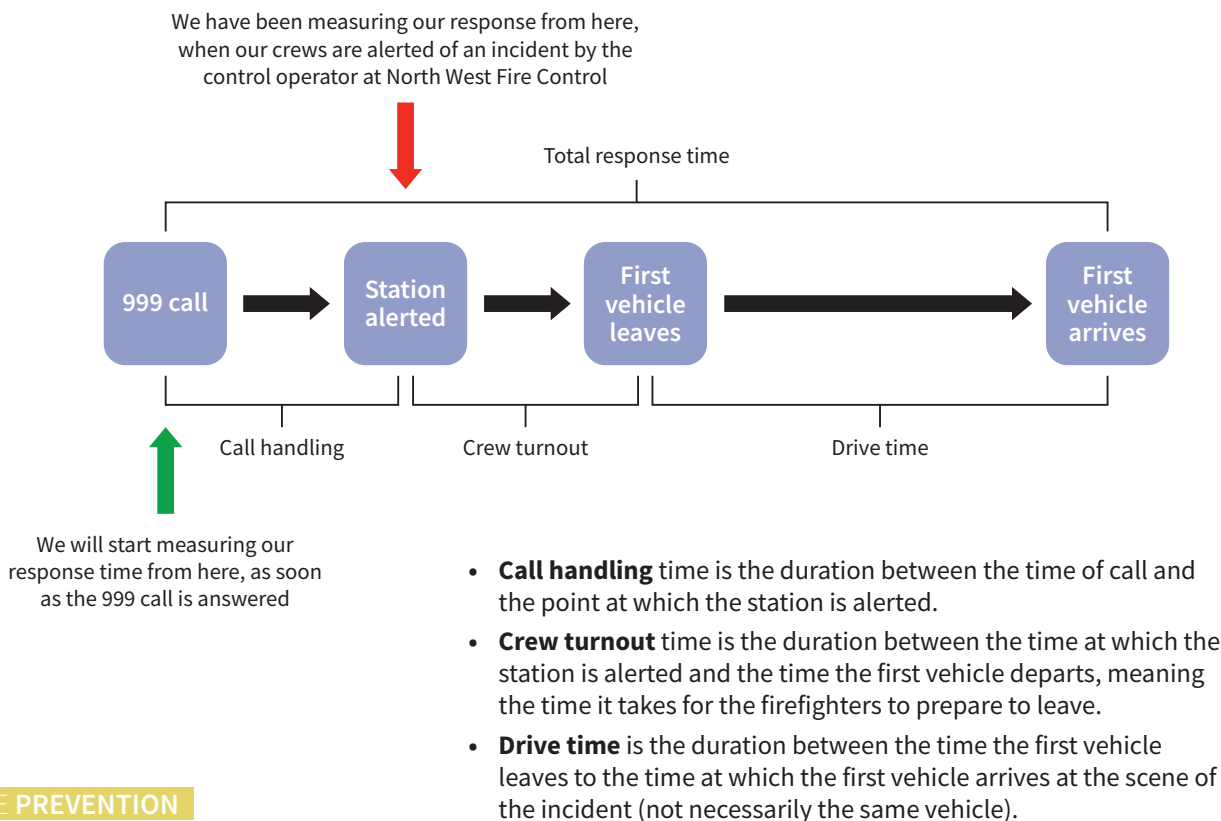
MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Response projects 2024-2028

Average response times to primary fires only

	2012/13	2022/23	Increase over decade
Significantly rural areas	8min 45sec	10min 29sec	1min 44sec
Cheshire (also significantly rural)	9min 12sec	10min 02sec	0min 50sec

Until now we have been measuring and reporting our response times differently to the way the Home Office collects and reports the performance of fire and rescue services. This actually masks the fact that our response times have increased. Our new approach will bring us in line with the Home Office's way of measuring response times, enabling us to benchmark our actual performance with similar-sized services, with similar risks. National performance data on response times is publicly available .

Starting the clock from the moment a 999 call is answered in our control room gives a truer picture of the caller's experience than measuring it from the time the fire station is alerted. This was confirmed in feedback to our pre-consultation. It will also enable us to look at ways of speeding up call handling if necessary and the other steps in the process of deploying a fire engine including crew turnout and drive time.

We have been measuring our response from here, when our crews are alerted of an incident by the control operator at North West Fire Control

Total response time

| 999 call | → | Station alerted | → | First vehicle leaves | → | First vehicle arrives |

Call handling   Crew turnout   Drive time

We will start measuring our response time from here, as soon as the 999 call is answered

- **Call handling** time is the duration between the time of call and the point at which the station is alerted.
- **Crew turnout** time is the duration between the time at which the station is alerted and the time the first vehicle departs, meaning the time it takes for the firefighters to prepare to leave.
- **Drive time** is the duration between the time the first vehicle leaves to the time at which the first vehicle arrives at the scene of the incident (not necessarily the same vehicle).

Measuring response times to primary fires instead of life-risk incidents will not change the way we respond to incidents. However, by measuring response times to primary fires – those involving homes, businesses and vehicles – rather than just life-risk incidents, we will get a broader picture of the speed of our response, which we can benchmark against other fire and rescue services.

Finally, during our consultation, the public and our staff told us that they would prefer us to report our response performance as an average time rather than percentage.

Impact

The changes to the way we measure and report response times will be easy to introduce by our Service Improvement Team. From April 2024 Fire Authority Members will scrutinise the new-look performance information, which we will continue to publish through our website.

We recognise that our crews have no control over the call handling phase of deploying a fire engine, which is managed by North West Fire Control. We will continue to work closely with our colleagues there to ensure that they contribute to the overall achievement of the 10 minute standard.

Response projects 2024-2028

RESPONSE PROJECT 2: convert four on-call fire engines to full-time crewing during weekdays

Runcorn, Winsford, Northwich and Macclesfield currently have two fire engines each. One is crewed by full-time firefighters and the other is crewed by on-call firefighters. We will convert these on-call fire engines, so they are crewed by full-time firefighters during the day, Monday to Friday. The full-time fire engines at these stations will continue to operate as they do now, 24/7.

Because these fire engines will be crewed full-time, they will be guaranteed to be available on weekday daytimes, when the availability of our on-call fire engines is often at its lowest. The on-call fire engines at these four fire stations have, on average, only been available for 18% of the time during the day.

The daytime weekday fire engines will be able to mobilise to incidents three and a half minutes faster than an on-call fire engine and help to reduce response times during the day. Importantly, the full-time crews will also deliver additional community work and prevention and protection activities, focusing on the people who are most at risk.

The four full-time weekday daytime fire engines will operate flexibly across our 11 on-call fire station areas and other areas, as needed, to benefit the whole of Cheshire. They will not replace on-call fire engines; they will operate in addition to them, adding greater resilience and capacity.

Rationale

On average the on-call fire engines at Runcorn, Winsford, Northwich and Macclesfield were available for less than 18% of the time during weekdays and 33% overall during 2022/23.

By converting these on-call fire engines to full-time crewing, they will be guaranteed to be available on all weekday daytimes and will be used in areas where they are needed most, helping improve resilience, response times and delivery of community work and prevention and protection activities.

Impact

a) Increase of 20 full-time firefighter posts.

b) Reduction of 55 on-call (part-time) firefighter posts at these four fire stations. At the time of this plan being published, 23 posts were vacant, 16 people were already full-time firefighters, leaving 16 people remaining. They will be supported and offered suitable employment with us. We will also work closely with our trade unions to minimise the impact of the changes on all staff affected.

c) No change to the number of fire engines across Cheshire, which will remain at 35.

d) More fire engines guaranteed to be available during the daytime on weekdays, increasing from 17 to 21, resulting in improved resilience and faster response.

e) Runcorn, Winsford, Northwich and Macclesfield will no longer have an on-call fire engine.

f) Possible reduction in callouts for on-call crews available in areas where the weekday daytime fire engines operate. If the on-call fire engines are available, we will aim to use the weekday daytime fire engines elsewhere to improve resilience and response. We will also invest in the on-call duty system to improve rewards, increase on-call availability and utilisation of all on-call fire engines – see Response Project 5.

g) Faster response times and increase in community work and risk-reducing prevention and protection activities, focused on the people most at risk.
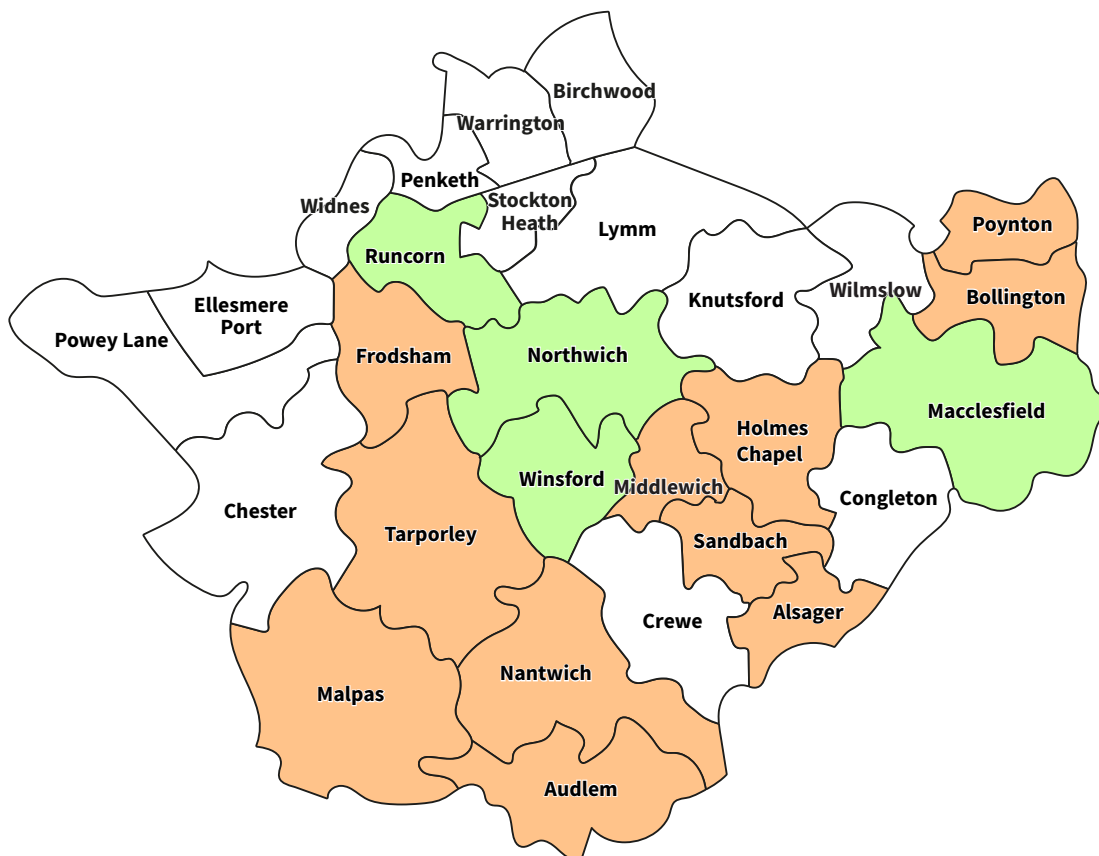
Current location of on-call fire engines to be converted to weekday daytime fire engines.

On-call fire station areas to be covered by new weekday daytime fire engines, which may also operate in other areas as required.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Response projects 2024-2028

RESPONSE PROJECT 3: convert Knutsford's fire engine from on-call to day crewing

We want to improve response times and carry out more community work in and around Knutsford by reintroducing the day crewing duty system at the town's fire station. This will provide guaranteed availability of the fire engine 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Full-time firefighters will crew the fire engine from 9am to 7pm on weekdays. At all other times the fire engine will be crewed as if it were still on-call. However, this on-call cover will be guaranteed because it will be provided by the full-time firefighters who do so as part of their contract. The full-time firefighters will live in the houses we own next to the fire station and receive an additional allowance for providing the guaranteed on-call cover.

Rationale

At the time of this plan being published, the fire engine at Knutsford is crewed on-call by part-time firefighters who live or work within five minutes of the fire station and respond by pager when on-call. The fire engine's availability varies throughout the week and in 2022/23 it was available during the daytime for 38% of the time and 49% overall.

Day crewing already operates successfully at four fire stations in Cheshire and operated at Knutsford until 2017. Until then the fire station was also the base for our technical rescue unit, specialising in rescues from height and confined space. We will be returning that capability to Knutsford through this change.

Once the fire engine is crewed full-time it will be on average three and a half minutes faster than an on-call fire engine, helping to improve response times during daytimes, Monday to Friday. Importantly, the full-time crew will also deliver additional prevention and protection activities focusing on the people in local communities who are most at risk.

Impact

a) No change to the number of fire engines across Cheshire, which will remain at 35.

b) More fire engines guaranteed to be available during weekday daytimes, from 17 to 22 resulting in improved resilience, when combined with Response Project 2.

c) Faster response times.

d) More community work and prevention and protection activities in Knutsford.

e) The technical rescue unit will move from Lymm to Knutsford.

f) Increase of nine full-time firefighter posts at Knutsford.

g) Reduction of eight full-time firefighter posts elsewhere in Cheshire.

h) Fifteen on-call (part-time) firefighter posts will be removed from Knutsford. At the time of this plan being published, only 12 of these posts were filled. Of these, nine were filled by people who are full-time firefighters. The remaining three on-call firefighters will be supported and offered suitable alternative employment with us. Firefighters currently renting the houses we own next to the fire station will move out if they are not appointed into the new roles. We will work closely with our trade unions to minimise the impact of the changes on all staff affected by this change.

Knutsford Fire Station

Response projects 2024-2028

RESPONSE PROJECT 4: reorganise daytime fire cover in Warrington

We want to improve the spread of daytime fire cover and prevention and protection activity across Birchwood and Stockton Heath, two of our five fire stations in the borough of Warrington. This will mean changes to the way we operate both these fire stations.

Birchwood

At the time of this plan being published, this was a nucleus fire station, which means it is crewed by full-time firefighters between 7am and 7pm every day and at night by on-call firefighters who live or work within five minutes of the fire station and respond by pager when on-call.

We will instead be crewing the Birchwood fire engine with full-time firefighters between 7am and 7pm on 50% of days (four days in eight), then by on-call firefighters on the other 50% of days. There will be no change to the on-call cover overnight between 7pm and 7am.

Stockton Heath

At the time of this plan being published, this was an on-call fire station, which means the fire engine is crewed solely by on-call firefighters who live or work within five minutes of the fire station and respond by pager when on-call.

We will instead be crewing the Stockton Heath fire engine with full-time firefighters between 7am and 7pm on 50% of days (four days in eight). Outside of these times there will be no on-call cover in Stockton Heath. Instead, neighbouring fire stations such as Warrington and Lymm will respond to incidents within 10 minutes. This has been the case for some time, when Stockton Heath's on-call fire engine is not available.

Rationale

This change will balance fire cover and ensure that response times in Stockton Heath and Birchwood are still within 10 minutes on average.

The level of community work and risk-reducing prevention and protection activities will remain the same in Warrington borough but will be shared more evenly across Stockton Heath and Birchwood.

During 2022/23, Stockton Heath's on-call fire engine was available only 10% in the day and 67% at night. This worsened to 4% in the day and 62% at night in the first five months of 2023/24. Replacing this on-call cover with full-time cover on 50% of days will be, on balance, more effective.

Ending the on-call cover at Stockton Heath means that we can sell the nine houses we own near to the fire station and use the proceeds to fund our capital programme, including replacing the fire station in Warrington town centre.

Impact

a) No change to the number of full-time fire engines during the day in Warrington borough, which will remain at four.

b) Average response times in Stockton Heath may be up to one minute faster. Average response times in Birchwood may be up to one minute slower. Average response times in both areas will still be within 10 minutes.

c) No change to community work and prevention and protection activities in Warrington borough, but activity will be spread more evenly across Birchwood and Stockton Heath.

d) Six of the 12 full-time firefighter posts at Birchwood will move to Stockton Heath.

e) No change to the number of on-call firefighter posts at Birchwood and the on-call crew will be able to cover on 50% of days instead of nights only.

f) Fifteen on-call firefighter posts will be removed from Stockton Heath. At the time of this plan being published, only 10 of these posts were filled. Of these, five were people who are full-time firefighters. The remaining five on-call firefighters will be offered suitable alternative employment with us. In addition, those on-call firefighters currently renting the houses we own near to the fire station will move out. We will work closely with our trade unions to support staff and minimise the impact of the changes.

g) When the full-time fire engine is not available at Stockton Heath there will be no on-call cover. Cover will be provided by Warrington and Lymm usually within 10 minutes.

h) We will sell Authority houses at Stockton Heath to help fund our capital programme.

Birchwood Fire Station

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Cheshire
Fire Authority

Response projects 2024-2028

RESPONSE PROJECT 5: strengthen the on-call system

Fire engines that operate in the more rural and less populated areas of Cheshire are usually crewed by on-call firefighters. On-call firefighters live or work within five minutes of the fire station and are alerted by pager to respond to incidents. They have fewer incidents to deal with compared with full-time firefighters; fire engines operated by full-time firefighters are available 24/7.

Our on-call firefighters undertake their role as a part-time job, often in addition to demanding full-time employment and busy lives outside work. They are highly committed and work extremely hard to maintain the availability of the fire engine so they can respond to emergency incidents and support their communities.

Unfortunately, in recent years, the overall availability of on-call fire engines has declined; in some areas, quite significantly, especially during the day when we tend to be busiest. Despite the best efforts of our on-call firefighters and some initiatives that have been trialled, it has not been possible to reverse this decline.

If the on-call fire engine is not available, we send the nearest available fire engine to the incident. However, this may take longer to arrive than the on-call fire engine would have done. Response Project 2 will increase the number of fire engines guaranteed to be available on a weekday across Cheshire, but it will not provide additional fire engines overnight or at the weekend.

The decline in on-call availability is a major challenge across the country, not just in Cheshire. Some of the issues are explained on page 25.

Implementing this CRMP will reduce the number of fire engines crewed by on-call firefighters by converting them to full-time crewing. Full-time crewing is expensive and cannot be justified for fire engines that respond to low numbers of incidents, so we need to get the balance right. In the future, we will still depend heavily on on-call firefighters, who will continue to crew 12 of our 35 fire engines.

Therefore, through this CRMP, we reaffirm our commitment to the on-call duty system and our on-call firefighters. As a priority, in the first year of the CRMP, we will undertake a review with the intention of taking forward some of the learning from previous initiatives. Our aim is to improve the pay and reward for on-call firefighters. We will also seek to strengthen the on-call duty system to make it more effective, more rewarding for staff and more sustainable. On-call staff and the trade unions that represent them will help to shape our efforts and be involved at every stage.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Tarporley Fire Station

Page 84

Community Risk Management Plan 2024 -2028

Impact of response projects at a glance

The two maps below show the impact of the response projects on guaranteed cover during weekday daytimes. The first map shows the guaranteed weekday daytime provision at the time of this plan being published, while the second shows the provision after the implementation of the projects. The a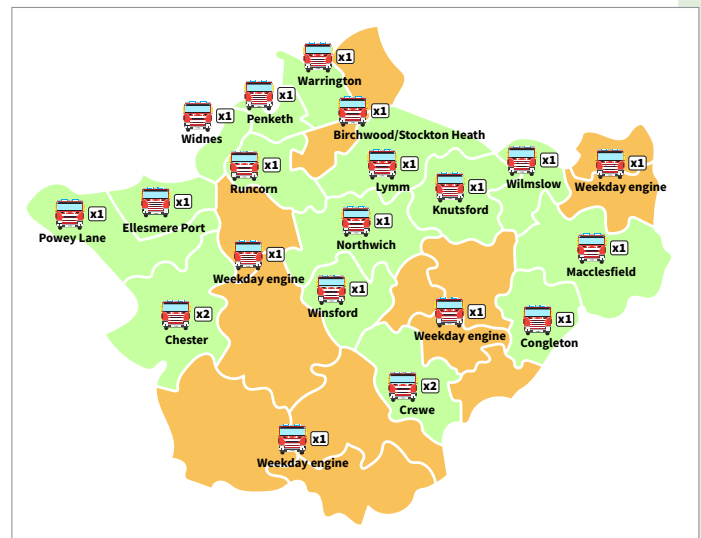reas in green indicate guaranteed weekday daytime provision, while those in amber show the areas to be covered flexibly by the new daytime fire engines and the fire engines at Birchwood and Stockton Heath.
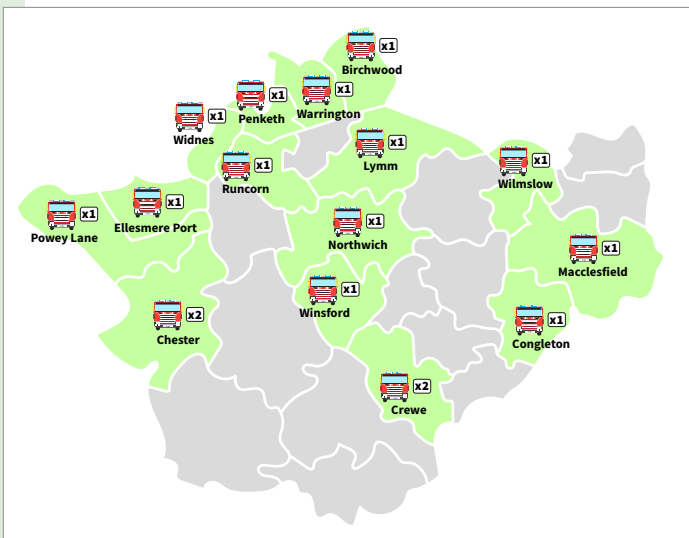
Guaranteed weekday daytime provision before CRMP implementation

Future guaranteed weekday daytime provision
(this will also include guaranteed overnight cover in Knutsford)

The table below shows how the proposals will guarantee additional fire cover and enable us to carry out more prevention and protection work, while retaining exactly the same number of fire engines and fire stations.

	Current arrangements	Future arrangements	Change
Fire stations	28	28	No change
Fire engines	35	35	No change
Guaranteed weekday daytime fire engines	17	22	+5
Guaranteed weekend daytime fire engines	17	18	+1
Guaranteed overnight fire engines	15	16	+1
Safe and Well visits to homes *	21,580	24,310	+2,730
Business safety inspections by firefighters *	6,896	7,156	+260
Assessment of premises presenting highest operational risks *	1,193	1,676	+483

* Minimum number of visits, inspections and assessments

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Developing our **organisation**

Promoting a positive and inclusive culture

The fire and rescue service nationally has been under scrutiny following the publication of an independent report into the culture of London Fire Brigade (LFB) and allegations of inappropriate conduct at several other services. This led to HMICFRS publishing in March 2023 a spotlight report on values and culture in the sector, and a series of far-reaching recommendations.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has been working hard for many years to create a workplace founded on the principles of dignity, respect and fairness. This is reflected in the results of our biannual staff surveys and the latest HMICFRS inspection, which concluded we are "good at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity", have "well-defined values, which staff understand" and "a positive working culture" with "staff feeling empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours".

However, we are not complacent and recognise there are lessons to be learned from LFB, and that the HMICFRS's important spotlight report recommendations will take some time to implement. During the lifespan of this CRMP, these culture-related actions will serve to strengthen our People Strategy, which is due to be refreshed in 2025.

In addition, we will:

- continue to emphasise the importance of our Core Values and the national Core Code of Ethics for the Fire and Rescue Service

- establish our new People Board as a strategic focal point for co-ordinating and monitoring our efforts to remain a safe and positive place to work, and an employer of choice

- develop and publish an updated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy, when the current three-year strategy ends in March 2024. Its implementation will be overseen by our well-established EDI Steering Group

- produce a new internal Communications and Engagement Strategy, setting out a clear framework for the way in which we talk and listen to colleagues across the Service

- continue to work hard to attract, recruit and retain a diverse and empowered workforce that at all levels truly represents the communities we serve

- continue to play a role in regional and national networks for sharing and learning from good practice when it comes to workplace culture.

Meeting the challenges of the future

Our firefighters, fire officers and fire staff are our greatest asset and we will continue to invest in their development so that they can reach their full potential and keep providing a first-class service to the community.

Our priorities for the next four years include:

- aligning our learning and development activities to the NFCC Leadership Framework, enabling individuals to effectively lead the Service, their function, their team or themselves depending on their role

- being innovative in the way we develop staff by offering accelerated progression, access to apprenticeships and degree programmes

- carefully forecasting our workforce needs into the medium term, so that attraction, recruitment and training activity can be planned accordingly

- strengthening the way we support the health and wellbeing of our staff through occupational health, our mental health and fitness advisors, sports and social groups, and staff inclusion networks

- helping colleagues plan for full or flexible retirement and supporting them through this transition in their lives.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Community Risk Management Plan 2024 -2028
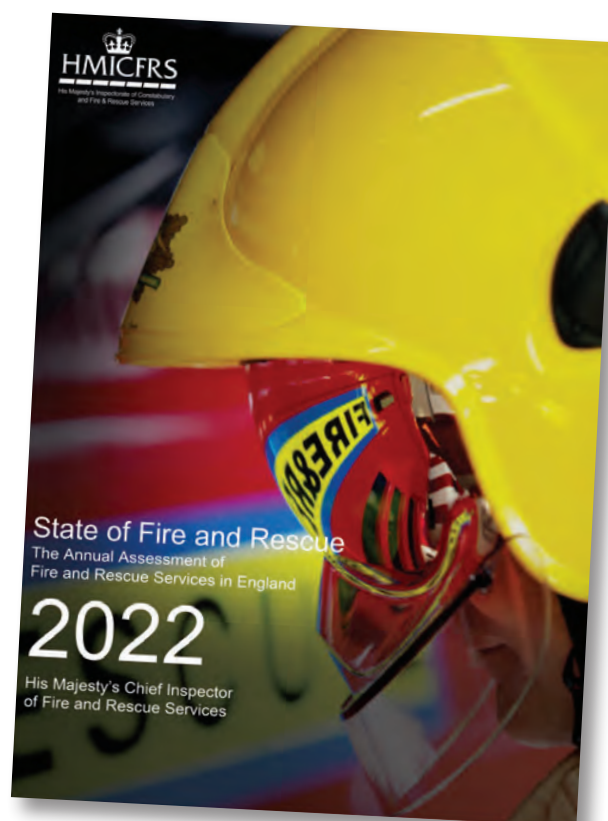
Developing our **organisation**

HMICFRS

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) is the independent inspectorate of fire and rescue services within England.

HMICFRS uses a similar grading model to that which is used by OFSTED for school inspections with the following gradings: Outstanding, Good, Adequate, Requires Improvement or Inadequate.

The outcome of the most recent inspection of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, which took place in February 2023, was published in August 2023 and can be read here.

Against 11 key metrics which assess our efficiency, effectiveness and how we look after our people; we were graded as "good" in six thematic areas and "adequate" in the remaining five. Encouragingly, we were rated "good" across all areas relating to our workplace culture and looking after our people; and we were highlighted for our innovative practice in relation to our leadership development – an area which required improvement in our previous inspection in 2021.

We have developed an action plan to address the findings of our latest inspection and continue to drive improvements across the organisation.

Continuous improvement

Over the next four years we will continue to develop the organisation so that it is able to deliver frontline services to the community as efficiently and effectively as possible.

This means refining our corporate structure to ensure it meets our business needs, keeping our collaborations under review, having in place robust systems for managing performance and moving towards digital solutions wherever possible.

We will also continue to strive to be sustainable, ensuring our buildings and our fleet have minimal adverse impact on the environment.

Our plans include:

- re-establishing our own dedicated headquarters at Sadler Road in Winsford, bringing together most departments and the leadership team under one roof

- continuing to review the efficiency and effectiveness of our remaining shared corporate services at Cheshire Police and to develop our resilience and community safety partnerships

- completing the modernisation of our fire stations and setting out proposals to replace Ellesmere Port and Warrington fire stations, both of which are no longer fit for purpose

- investing in a state-of-the-art system at North West Fire Control for mobilising fire engines to incidents

- getting the most out of our investment in Microsoft 365 by using it to drive the way we store and review management information and bring teams together to collaborate

- continuing our investment in electric vehicles and charging infrastructure.

Page 89
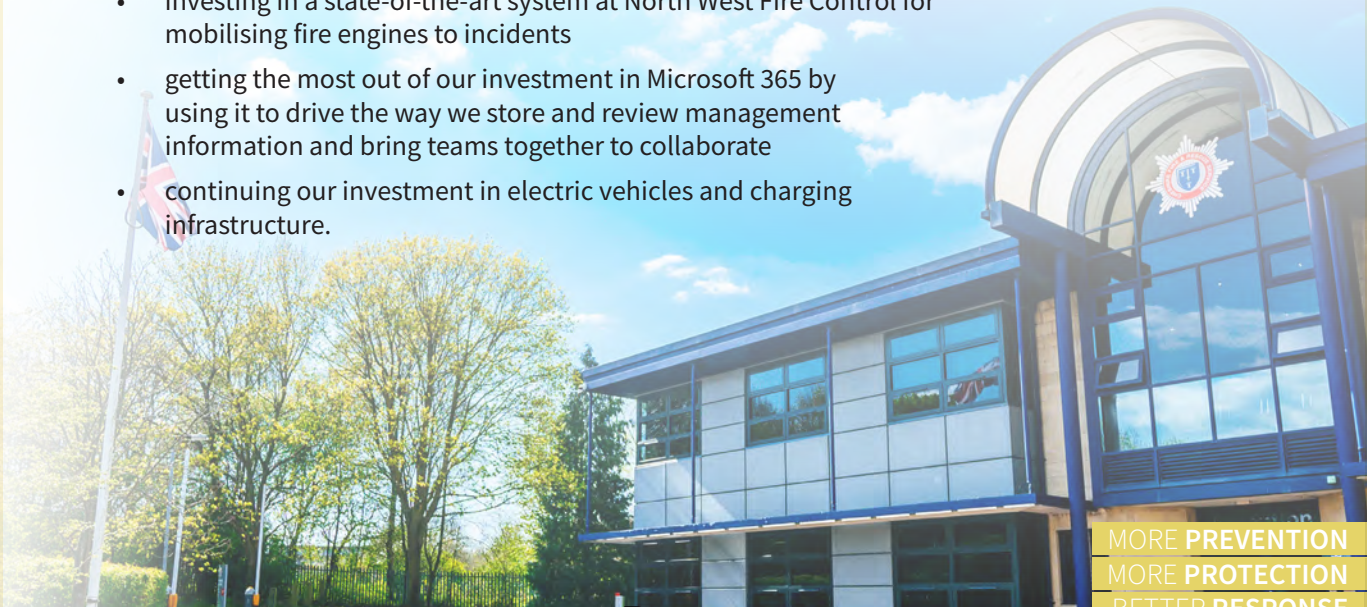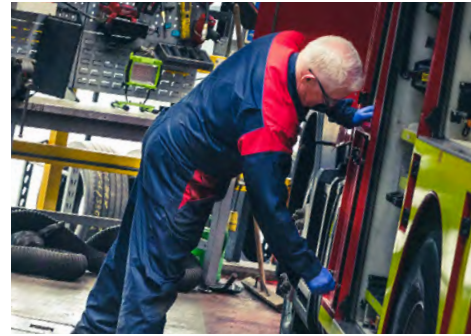
Cheshire
Fire Authority

Our finances

How we are funded

Cheshire Fire Authority receives funding from two main sources: from central government and from its share of council tax, called its precept. Council tax makes up around 68% of the Authority's funding with government grants and its share of business rates comprising the other 32%.

For the last full financial year, 2022/23, the Authority had a revenue budget of £46.9m and a capital budget of £7.8m. The graphic to the right outlines what it actually spent in the year. Further details can be found in the Authority's Statement of Accounts at www.cheshirefire.gov.uk
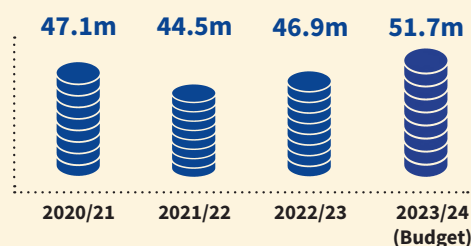
As part of its budget management process, the Authority produces a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), covering a five year period. The MTFP is updated regularly to reflect emerging local, regional and national issues and makes informed assumptions about issues such as future pay, inflation, government funding and council tax levels. The latest MTFP can be viewed on www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

As with other public sector organisations, the Authority is impacted by spending decisions taken by government. The government outlines its key spending priorities through its annual budget announcement and, longer-term, through Comprehensive Spending Reviews.

The Authority is legally required to set a balanced budget, against a backdrop of considerable uncertainty with regards to public spending decisions. The Authority is mindful of the need to ensure efficient use of public funds and has an annually updated efficiency plan to help it achieve this.

The Authority undertakes an annual priority based budgeting exercise to ensure that it effectively aligns resources to deliver its key aims and objectives. This ensures that its funding is allocated towards priority areas aimed at making the community safer.

Our funding

47.1m	44.5m	46.9m	51.7m
2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 (Budget)

What we spend it on

2022/23 actual spend:

People	Premises	Transport
£35.8m	£2.7m	£1.2m

Supplies & Services	Contracted Services	Other spending and income
£3.9m	£4.6m	£1.3m

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Community Risk Management Plan 2024 -2028
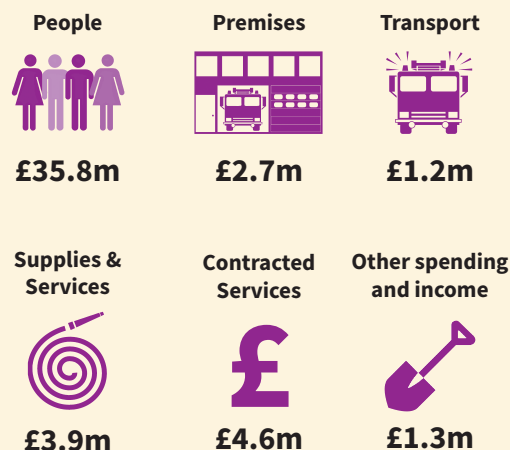
The Authority's biggest outlay is on its staff, which accounts for about 76% of its revenue spending. Other significant costs include supplies and services such as utilities and equipment.

Since 2014 the Authority has received no capital funding. This has meant that capital spending, such as replacement fire engines, new fire kit and equipment and building refurbishment and replacement, has been completely funded by the Authority either through reserves or by setting aside money from its revenue budget (which is the amount of money the Authority requires to provide its services during the year).

In addition to regular capital spending on items such as those described above, the Authority has a significant capital programme of building replacement and modernisation underway. The programme, which is anticipated to cost in excess of £15m over the four years of the CRMP, will use up a significant proportion of the Authority's reserves and includes building a new fire station at Crewe and completing the modernisation of fire stations and Authority housing. The Authority also plans to replace dated fire stations at Warrington and Ellesmere Port and is including outline funding proposals in its latest Capital Strategy and MTFP (2024-29).

Affordability of our proposals

Based on current assumptions, the package of plans set out in this CRMP will have a near neutral impact on the annual budget (an increase of around £57,000). However, this must be seen within the context of an anticipated total budget of £55.6m in 2024/25. We believe it will be possible to find efficiency savings elsewhere in the organisation to offset this small incremental cost.

There remains some uncertainty on future Government funding settlements and national pay awards that could affect the MTFP in future years.

Prevention, Protection and other organisational projects described earlier in this document will be funded through existing departmental budgets, refined on an ongoing basis through the priority-based budgeting process.

The Authority continues to face a significant challenge to fund capital expenditure, which not only affects the replacement of vehicles and equipment, but also the updating and maintenance of its existing buildings and, in particular, as mentioned above, replacing its fire stations at Warrington and Ellesmere Port. One of the proposals is intended to provide a significant capital receipt that will be used to part-fund these fire stations.

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Summary of our plans

Prevention

- Implement the recommendations of a review into our Prevention Department (p16).
- Continue to improve the way we target our Safe and Well visits, ensuring we see the people who are most at risk of fire (p16).
- Gradually increase the number of Safe and Well visits we carry out year on year during the lifespan of this CRMP (p16).
- Improve the way we work with our in health, social care, housing and Police so that people are safeguarded and get the support they need (p16).
- Train our Prevention teams and firefighters in motivational interviewing techniques, to increase the effectiveness of our Safe and Well visits (p16).
- Include safety information about new and emerging technologies, such as lithium-ion batteries and domestic battery energy storage systems (BESS), in our Safe and Well visits (p16).
- Reduce the occurrence of deliberate fires in partnership with Cheshire Police (p16).
- Implement the new Road Safety Strategic Plan with our partners and increase the number of road safety events we deliver (p17).
- Expand our water safety programme, to reduce the occurence of accidental drowning (p17).

Protection

- Review our Protection Department to ensure it remains efficient and effective (p18).
- Evaluate the effectiveness of our risk based inspection programme to ensure we target inspection activity at the right premises (p18).
- Provide accredited training for operational managers, to improve their knowledge and understanding when inspecting premises (p18).
- Continue to campaign for the installation of sprinklers in new and existing commercial premises, including timber framed buildings (p18 and p20).
- Work with the NFCC to improve the planning process for BESS, to ensure planning authorities consider the implications of fire and firefighter safety when approving new installations. This will include training a specialist officer in Protection (p18).
- Review how we undertake our primary authority responsibilities to ensure they are effective and self-funding (p18).
- Continue to develop our work with local partners and those responsible for heritage buildings to keep these premises safe from fire (p19).
- Ensure our Protection activities align with the outcomes of the Building Safety Review and recent changes to the Building Safety Act 2022 (p19).

Response

- Continue to review our flood and water response provision across Cheshire to ensure that it meets emerging needs (p22).

- Support national and local campaigns to raise awareness of staying safe outdoors and during periods of extreme weather (p22).

- Continue to develop our understanding of the fire risks presented by lithium-ion batteries and working with others to research ways to effectively deal with such fires (p23).

- Build links with partners and work closely with them to identify BESS sites, so we can reduce risks and prepare our site-specific emergency response plans (p23).

- Undertake a major programme to replace and upgrade breathing apparatus (p24).

- Continue to review our operational kit and equipment to ensure our staff have the appropriate resources to carry out their roles safely and effectively (p24).

- Review our procedures for learning from operational incidents and ensure that it maximises the safety of our firefighters (p24).

- Continue to work with representative bodies, partners such as the NFCC and others on any developments affecting the health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce (p24).

- Project 1: Change the way we measure response times (p31).

- Project 2: Convert four on-call fire engines to fulltime crewing during weekdays (p34).

- Project 3: Convert Knutsford's fire engine from on-call to day crewing (p36).

- Project 4: Reorganise daytime fire cover in Warrington (p38).

- Project 5: Strengthen the on-call system (p40).

Objectives carried forward from the 2023/24 risk management plan include: implementing the outcomes from our review of specialist vehicles and resources; implementing an emergency cardiac response capability; and implementing outcomes from our review of the wholetime duty system at fire stations that operate 24/7.

ENERGY
STORAGE

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Cheshire
Fire & Rescue Service

Our Vision is a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires and other emergencies.

Our Mission is to help create safer communities, to rescue people and protect economic, environmental and community interests.

We will deliver this through our
Core Values

Recognising the Fire and Rescue Service's
Code of Ethics

Being Inclusive
By acting fairly, with integrity, respect and without prejudice.

Doing the Right Thing
By holding each other to account for ensuring high standards of professionalism in everything we do.

Acting with Compassion
By being understanding and offering help to each other and to our communities with warmth, patience and kindness.

Making a Difference
By making an impact in our organisation and in our communities in whatever ways we can, for as many people as we can.

PUTTING OUR COMMUNITIES FIRST

INTEGRITY

DIGNITY AND RESPECT

LEADERSHIP

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

OUR ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

NFCC
National Fire Chiefs Council

MORE **PREVENTION**
MORE **PROTECTION**
BETTER **RESPONSE**

Community Risk Management Plan 2024 -2028

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service
Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2FQ
T: 01606 868700

www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

Follow us on

@CheshireFRS   **@CheshireFire**   **@CheshireFRS**

APPENDIX 2

Cheshire
Fire Authority

Draft 2024-2028 Community Risk Management Plan

Consultation Feedback Report

www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

Contents

1. Introduction

The National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services in England require all fire authorities, such as Cheshire Fire Authority, to produce a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). Each CRMP must assess fire and rescue risks and demonstrate how prevention, protection and response activities will best be used to prevent fires and other incidents and to mitigate the impact of identified risks on its communities.

Within the Framework, each Authority is required to ensure that the CRMP reflects "effective consultation throughout its development and at all review stages with the community, its workforce and representative bodies and partners"[1].

The current Integrated Risk Management Plan runs until 31 March 2024 and the Authority began work to develop a new CRMP in the Summer of 2023. The CRMP will cover the next four years to 2028 and set out the Authority's key priorities to keep the communities of Cheshire safe from fire and other emergencies.

This report details the consultation processes undertaken by the Authority in the development of the draft CRMP and is intended to be considered by Members of Cheshire Fire Authority as they decide on the plans and priorities for the final CRMP.

This report provides an executive summary before describing the process of pre-consultation, which the Authority undertook before developing options to put forward for full consultation.

The Authority has a well-established methodology for consultation with the public, staff, and stakeholders, which has been tried and tested through several consultation programmes. This methodology is explained and a summary of the consultation feedback from public, staff and partners is provided, as well as a demographic profile of consultees.

While the report is not an exhaustive summary, full copies of verbatim responses are provided as separate appendices to this report. This includes verbatim comments received through consultation surveys as well as partner responses.

Report prepared by

Graeme Worrall
Engagement and Public Affairs Manager
Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service

February 2024

---

[1] Home Office, Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018, p.14
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5aec5974ed915d42f7c6bf18/National_Framework_-_final_for_web.pdf

2. Executive Summary

This summary provides an overview of the engagement and consultation process to develop the Authority's draft 2024-2028 CRMP.

Pre-consultation

The Authority undertook a programme of pre-consultation to help develop the draft CRMP. It was undertaken to seek feedback on the guiding principles which officers had adopted to develop the draft CRMP and to gauge broad opinion on a range of themes to help inform the development of options for full consultation.

The programme of pre-consultation took place between July and September 2023.

Section 3.1 outlines the range of engagement methods used to seek views and feedback. Key amongst these was an online survey, which ran between June and July 2023 and gathered 185 responses from the public and 226 members of staff.

Feedback from the pre-consultation process is provided within Section 3.2 and is summarised below.

Guiding Principles

Survey respondents were asked to what extent they supported the guiding principles to develop the CRMP. 81.5% of the public and 84.9% of staff either approved or strongly approved of the principles. Comments from the public were largely concerned with the need to ensure sufficient availability of fire engines and provision of fire cover – which are referenced within the guiding principles. Staff comments centred around several themes:

- Staff wellbeing and firefighter safety.

- Career progression and development, and organisational culture.

- Improving fire cover.

Response times and standards

Most of both public (69.4%) and staff (52.2%) respondents supported measuring from the time of call. Public comments reference the view that this was a more accurate reflection of their physical experience should they need to call 999. Staff comments were more nuanced, with some questioning how much control the Authority would have over improving response times given that call handling is undertaken by a third party (North West Fire Control).

In relation to how the response time is reported, a majority of respondents (59.31% of public and 61.08% of staff) stated a preference for an average response time and preferred the use of a single response standard rather than a standard which is variable dependent on factors such as local risks; with 56.94% of public and 64.48% of staff respondents preferring a single standard.

Respondents were also asked to state how long they would consider it acceptable to wait for a fire engine to arrive in a range of different emergency scenarios. Public and staff responses were broadly similar in these areas, with the expected response times to potential life risk incidents (house and commercial fires, road traffic collisions, water rescues) lower – under ten minutes – than other incidents such as grass fires or animal rescues.

Review of the on-call duty system

Respondents were asked to what extent they would support the Authority reviewing the on-call duty system with the aim of making it more effective and sustainable. Most public and staff respondents (both over 90%) supported such a review. Suggested key priorities were contractual arrangements, followed by the pathway to achieving operational competence and then training commitments.

Review of Duty Systems

Operational staff were asked to what extent a daytime only shift system would appeal. 81.8% of solely on-call staff, 35.7% of wholetime staff and 36.4% of dual-role staff said such a system would appeal at least a moderate amount.13.6% of on-call staff, 54.8% of wholetime staff and 51.2% of dual-role staff said such a system would not appeal at all.

Comments from those who said a system would appeal said that it would enable them to dedicate their weekends as family time and that it would be a route into a fulltime position from an on-call role. Staff who said the system would not appeal highlighted the balance that the current 2-2-4 system provides them and how shift work fits in with their individual circumstances.

Importance of the local fire engine

The public were asked how important it was that the local fire engine responds to an emergency and was designed to test perceptions around the response from the town or village's local fire engine. In reality, the quickest available fire engine is mobilised to respond; but it has been suggested that there is an attachment to having a local fire engine available within a community. 44.9% of respondents stated that it was extremely or very important that the local fire engine responds.

Overall number and availability of fire engines

This question was asked to gauge views on preferences over having a smaller overall number of fire engines but having better availability, or having the same number of fire engines but understanding that there are issues at times with availability.

54.6% of public and 47.2% of staff respondents preferred to maintain the current fleet size of fire engines, while 26.9% of public and 37.5% of staff respondents preferred to have fewer overall fire engines, but with better availability. Comments alluded to the view that although engines may not always be available, the perception is that more engines equal more resilience. In essence, having them available some of the time is better than not having them at all.

Major incidents were one scenario where it was considered important to retain the current fleet size, for the ability to scale up resources and for resilience.

Some staff comments suggest that duty systems in some areas could be changed to increase cover, with others questioning the availability of on-call second fire engines.

Prioritisation of activities

The survey asked respondents to rank how important they perceive each of the Authority's functions (both statutory requirements and non-statutory activities) to be.

An overwhelming majority of both staff and public respondents viewed the Authority's statutory functions as important (responding to fires and road traffic collisions, major incident

response) Results and free text comments show a clear link and rationale for the Authority carrying out its statutory duties and operational activity.

Value for money and precept

While not directly related to the development of the CRMP, the pre-consultation survey also asked the public their views on whether the Authority provided value for money based on its current precept, and opinion on future increases or decreases to the precept.

A total of 66.9% of respondents agreed that the Authority provided value for money, against 6.2% of respondents who disagreed.

Regarding a future precept, 63.4% of respondents said they would pay a higher precept to improve or maintain services, compared with 16% who disagreed. Respondents who would pay a higher precept were asked to provide a monetary figure against an acceptable annual increase. The average figure provided was an increase of £6.90 on a Band D property.

Conversely, 5.3% of respondents agreed that they would be willing to pay a lower precept, understanding services would be reduced as a result. The average reduction suggested by respondents who wanted a decrease was £9.50 on a Band D property.

Fire Cover Review and Options Development

Section 4 provides a description of the fire cover review process and development of consultation options.

The Authority undertakes a fire cover review periodically to ensure that it has the most effective configuration of emergency response resources in the right place to meet risks and demands. These reviews are tied into the development of a CRMP given the lifespan of the respective plan. To inform the latest CRMP, officers carried out a fire cover review, using a range of data and intelligence sources and tools, as well as the feedback from the pre-consultation activities.

The review was carried out using a set of guiding principles, which are explained in section 4.2. These principles inform the development of various options for the configuration of fire cover across Cheshire. Only options which meet these principles in full would be subject to consultation. The final option is outlined in section 4.3

Consultation Programme

The consultation programme is described in Section 5. It ran for a total of 13 weeks from Monday 2 October 2023 to Tuesday 2 January 2024.

As per previous consultation programmes undertaken by the Authority, the programme was split into three main strands of public consultation, staff consultation and partner consultation. Different consultation methods were used for each strand of consultation to raise awareness of the consultation and encourage participation. The methodologies are explained in Section 5.2.

Consultation response

A total of 459 survey responses were received, of which 377 respondents identified themselves as members of the public and 21 identified as members of staff; as well as two business owners and three local partners (Knutsford Town Council, Chester Aid to the Homeless and an unnamed Cheshire West and Chester councillor). Other respondents declined to state which category they belonged to. In addition to the survey responses, there was one email response from a member of the public.

In addition to the survey, a total of ten partners and local stakeholders provided a consultation response on behalf of their organisation or membership. These were:

- Fire Brigades Union (FBU)
- West Cheshire Trades Union Council
- Warrington and District Trades Union Council
- Chester Retired Firefighters
- Birchwood Town Council
- Bollington Town Council
- Holmes Chapel Parish Council
- Northwich Town Council
- Stockton Heath Parish Council

All of these responses were received electronically.

Identification of Risk

Section 6 of the report concerns the identification of risks, which is a requirement of a CRMP.

Respondents were asked to what extent they considered that the draft CRMP identifies key fire and rescue risks; whether the proposals within the CRMP address the risks identified; and if there are any additional risks which respondents feel should be considered in the development of the final CRMP.

Overall, 64.70% of respondents felt that the draft CRMP either completely or mostly identifies the key fire and rescue risks facing Cheshire, compared to 16.77% of respondents who felt it identified only few or no risks.

Amongst public survey responses, those who felt the CRMP either completely or mostly identified key risks was slightly higher at 68.70%, with 14.58% who felt the draft CRMP identified few or no risks.

Amongst staff survey responses, 61.91% of respondents felt that the draft CRMP either completely or mostly identified key fire and rescue risks; compared to 19.05% who felt the draft CRMP identified few or no key risks.

Respondents were also able to highlight any additional risks which they felt should be considered. Risks identified by the public and staff included the impacts of climate change, road safety and an ageing population, which were already referenced within the draft CRMP.

There were no significant comments received from partners regarding this question.

Management of Risk

This section also asks for views on the management of risks which have been identified, again a requirement of a CRMP. Overall, 60.78% of respondents felt the proposals within the draft CRMP either completely or mostly addressed the key risks, against 19.17% who considered the draft CRMP to address little or none of the key risks identified.

Public feedback through the survey was slightly more favourable than the overall results, with 64.46% stating the draft CRMP either completely or mostly addresses identified risks and 16.97% believing the draft plan either addresses little or none of the identified risks.

Staff feedback was more in line with the overall results, with 61.91% of respondents stating that the draft CRMP either completely or mostly addressed key fire and rescue risks; compared to 19.05% who felt it addressed few or none of the risks.

Free text comments

Of 126 additional comments from members of the public, 36 reference the fire cover proposals. Of these, there are 19 which state a preference for increased fire cover in Cheshire, calling for more full-time resources. Nine comments raised concerns over the impact on overnight and weekend cover from the fire cover proposals, while eight comments relate to the specific proposed changes at Northwich and Stockton Heath.

Five public comments suggest that increasing pay for on-call firefighters can help to improve recruitment and retention of on-call staff and there are 17 comments referencing community prevention work, including a preference for more education and awareness of existing and emerging risks.

Of the four staff comments, two relate to the fire cover proposals and a further comment highlights the need to ensure adequate water supplies to non-domestic premises. Feedback from staff focus groups identify risks such as domestic violence and vulnerable families, as well as suggesting improvements to the Authority's risk based inspection programme.

There were no significant comments received from partners regarding this question.

Safe use of Lithium-ion Battery Products

The consultation sought feedback from respondents on what type of lithium-ion products they own in the home, as well as any key safety considerations they have regarding these products. This feedback is intended to help shape the development of fire prevention advice regarding the use of lithium-ion battery products.

Section 7 details the feedback received through the consultation regarding lithium-ion battery products. Amongst both public and staff respondents, the vast majority owned a small lithium-ion appliance such as a mobile phone, laptop, digital camera or toy, while over two thirds of respondents owned a product such as a rechargeable toothbrush or other hygiene product. Fewer respondents stated that they owned a vaping device, or a larger item such as electric bike or vehicle.

Overall survey responses indicate a broad spread in preferences regarding safety advice, albeit most respondents would prioritise information regarding the safe charging of devices (57.96% of public response, 46.67% of staff response) and the safe disposal of products (64.08% of public response, 73.33% of staff response).

There were no significant comments from partners on this issue.

Changing how we Measure and Report our Response Times

The draft CRMP proposes to change our response standard from a response standard of ten minutes to life-risk incidents, with a target of meeting this on 80% of occasions, to an average response time to all primary fires within ten minutes. Instead of reporting this time from time of alerting the fire station, reporting is proposed to begin from when the 999 call is answered, before the control operator alerts the station.

Feedback received on this issue is provided within Section 8.

Overall, 65.62% of survey respondents outlined support for the proposed change, compared to 14.93% who opposed.

From public respondents, 66.58% express support for changing the measuring and reporting of response times, compared to 14.86% who oppose the change. Staff responses show

66.67% of respondents in support of the proposed change to the measuring and reporting of the response time, with 19.05% opposed.

Free text comments

Thirteen free text comments expressed support for the proposed change, with reasons for this including the proposed measurement from time of call and the use of a ten-minute response standard. Other comments acknowledged the benefit of being able to benchmark and compare response times more effectively, either with the Home Office figures or other fire and rescue services, under the proposed standard.

Twelve comments were received regarding the proposed change in response standard from a percentage pass rate to the use of an average figure; suggesting that a move to an average figure could mask instances where there are significantly longer response times.

Some respondents queried whether the change to measuring primary fires as opposed to life-risk incidents meant that the Service was either not prioritising or measuring performance against non-fire life risk incidents, such as road traffic collisions.

Staff comments largely reflected the feedback received from comments from members of the public.

Partner feedback

Feedback from partners included a response from the FBU, Chester Retired Firefighters and West Cheshire Trades Union Council. The FBU and Chester Retired Firefighters offered support for the proposed change to measure response from the time of call. The FBU also suggested that all life risk incidents, not only primary fires, should be incorporated within the standard.

Proposals to Change the Provision of Fire Cover Across Cheshire

The proposals to improve fire cover across Cheshire consist of a package of proposed changes which, cumulatively, is predicted to lead to an improved provision of guaranteed fire cover across the county and provide capacity to undertake more fire safety work in the community. Together, these proposals would enable the Service to meet its current and new proposed response standard while working within its current budget. Section 9.1 outlines these proposals in more detail; however they are summarised below.

- Converting four on-call fire engines at Runcorn, Macclesfield, Northwich and Winsford into full-time fire engines which would operate during weekday daytime hours.
- Changing the duty system at Knutsford Fire Station from On-Call to Day Crewing.
- Reorganising the provision of full-time fire cover in the daytime in Warrington.
- Reviewing the On-Call Duty System

Survey responses

Section 9.2 provides an analysis of survey responses on this issue. The overall response shows that most respondents support the overall package of proposals. A total of 65.17% support the package compared to 22.52% who oppose them.

Amongst responses from members of the public, 66.31% support the introduction of the package of proposals, compared to 22.02% who oppose them. Analysis shows that in many areas across Cheshire, most respondents outlined support for the proposals.

However, there are localities where there is more opposition to the proposals, namely Northwich, Stockton Heath and Winsford. Reasons for the opposition from respondents include a view that the proposals mean a loss of services locally and this is perceived to lead to greater risk during night-time and weekends.

While staff responses to the survey were more limited, this also shows most respondents (52.38%) in support against 33.34% of staff respondents who oppose the proposals.

Public comments

The survey also asked for respondents to identify the benefits and potential drawbacks of the proposals. 204 comments were provided from the public which identified what they considered to be a benefit of the proposals, while 205 public comments were provided which outlined a perceived negative of the proposals. Section 9.4 provides an analysis of free text comments received from public respondents.

Of the 204 public comments regarding the positive aspects of the package, the most frequently raised feedback was the benefit of having improved fire cover across Cheshire because of the proposals, which featured in 73 comments. Responses highlighted the reassurance that this proposal would provide during weekdays, quicker response times and the increase in areas that are afforded with an element of guaranteed fire cover.

Associated positive impacts from the proposed conversion of four on-call fire engines to weekday fire engines include a wider area of Cheshire having guaranteed cover; more reassurance for more residents and more availability to meet periods of higher demand. Nine respondents stated that they considered a benefit of the proposals to be a more effective and efficient use of existing resources.

Three comments made specific reference to the proposed change at Knutsford, all of which considered the proposal to be a positive move.

There were ten comments which referred to the proposed changes in Warrington. Nine of these relate to the change in fire cover and raise some concerns over what is felt to be a reduced level of cover in certain areas, while a further comment queried how the impact on staff would be managed with regards to the disposal of housing stock at Stockton Heath.

Staff comments

Section 9.5 contains the comments received from staff of which 16 identify a benefit of the proposals and 15 highlight a drawback. Comments received shows a majority of respondents agree that the proposals to convert the four on-call fire engines would lead to improved levels of guaranteed fire cover, particularly during periods of peak activity. Coupled with this is the increased capacity to undertake community safety work to reduce risk and demand.

Staff concerns with the proposals centred on the effect on overnight and weekend cover, as well as the impact on affected staff.

Comments received from staff were largely supportive of the proposed introduction of day crewing at Knutsford, indicating that there was an understanding of the rationale behind the proposal and that it would enable better fire cover. However, specific queries were raised in relation to the element around the transfer of the technical rescue unit from its current base at Lymm to Knutsford. These centred on the staffing numbers of the unit and the compatibility of training requirements with a day crewing duty system. An alternative

suggested was to use Knutsford as a specialist animal rescue capability and maintain technical rescue at Lymm.

Feedback from those based at Knutsford station focused on the issues around allocation of day crewing housing and transfer of staff on and off station. Feedback from operational staff working at Stockton Heath raised questions around the release of the housing associated with the station and the support that could be offered to help those affected to navigate their change in circumstances.

Partner feedback
Feedback from partners is detailed in Section 9.6.

Conversion of four on-call fire engines into weekday fire engines
In its response to the consultation, the FBU offered its qualified support for the proposal to convert four on-call fire engines into full-time weekday engines; while Holmes Chapel Parish Council and Bollington Town Council expressed support for the proposals, citing improved response times and additional benefit to the community arising from the changes.

The submissions from Northwich Town Council and unitary councillor Sam Naylor raised concerns over the element of the proposal to change the second fire engine at Northwich Fire Station from on-call to a full-time weekday fire engine.

Introduction of Day Crewing in Knutsford
Councillors in Knutsford Town Council confirmed their support for the draft CRMP and the proposal for Knutsford Fire Station, via a response to the survey.

The consultation response of the FBU outlines its support for this proposal but does raise an objection to the intention of transferring the technical rescue unit from its current base in Lymm to Knutsford This objection is echoed by the Chester Retired Firefighters.

Reorganisation of fire cover in Warrington
Responses were received from several stakeholders regarding the proposal to reorganise fire cover in Warrington. The FBU state that the current on-call provision at Stockton Heath should be maintained; citing that the risk profile in the area requires the maintenance of current arrangements. Warrington District Trades Union Council outline their objection to the proposal for similar reasons.

The response from Stockton Heath Parish Council outlines the Council's support for the plan and understanding of the rationale behind the proposed change. The response from Birchwood Town Council did not provide any further comment beyond seeking reassurance that additional prevention and protection work, which the proposals enable, will be carried out in the Birchwood area.

Reviewing Our On-Call Duty System
The consultation asked for views on the on-call duty system, in relation to areas of focus to be considered when conducting a review of the system to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. A total of 153 public and 14 staff comments were provided, these were categorised by theme and subject matter. Analysis of these is contained within Section 10.

Public comments

The most frequently raised feedback, present in 18 public comments (11.76% of public total) and five staff comments (35.71% of staff total) is the need to ensure pay and recognition for

on-call firefighters is improved, which is felt in turn will improve both recruitment and retention.

In 12 comments, residents called for a further increase in full-time resources and reduction in the number of on-call resources across the county; citing the changes to work practices and the challenges around availability.

Other themes from public commentary include suggestions to make the recruitment processes more effective/efficient; raise awareness amongst the community and employers of the on-call duty system and consider ways to improve flexibility (including widening the catchment area).

Staff feedback

Five comments from staff also referenced the need to improve pay and recognition for on-call firefighters. Other comments called for an improvement in the speed of the recruitment process and reducing the length of time it takes for on-call firefighters to gain operational competency.

Partner feedback

Feedback from partners was provided by the FBU, Chester Retired Firefighters and the West Cheshire Trades Union Council. Pay and recognition was again highlighted as an area which required consideration. The FBU also outlined a range of other issues to consider including increasing awareness of the duty systems amongst employers and improving career development opportunities for on-call staff. Both the FBU and Chester Retired Firefighters highlighted the impact of the Service's migration policy on on-call availability.

Equality Impact Assessments
Section 11 explains the production of a suite of Equality Impact Assessments to support the consultation process. As part of the consultation, consultees were asked to provide views on equalities considerations which they consider to be relevant.

Section 11.1 provides a commentary of equalities feedback received. A total of 124 comments were submitted. While the majority (82 comments) stated that the respondent had no further comment to make, feedback was received which suggested that age should be a key consideration within the proposals and the service which is provided to the community. One comment suggested that urban and rural geography should be a consideration in the proposals.

Three comments referenced the recent news regarding cultural issues within the fire and rescue sector, while there were 14 comments made that were general in nature and not necessarily linked to equalities matters.

Additional Comments
Section 12 of the report provides an analysis of additional comments provided by respondents to the survey. As with other free text comments received, these were categorised by theme and subject matter.

A total of 142 comments were provided. Of these, 48 (33.8%) were the consultee stating they had no further comment to make. This left 87 public comments and 7 staff comments of substance.

There were 29 public comments which expressed support for the proposals within the draft CRMP. Consultees acknowledged the depth and detail of the draft CRMP, and the proposals

were viewed as a positive step forward for the Service and community. There were 14 comments which expressed concern or opposition to the proposals within the draft CRMP. The majority of these centred around the proposed removal of the second fire engine in Northwich and the perceived impact that this would have on the community.

Two staff comments referred to the draft CRMP, with one comment highlighting a concern regarding the proposed change to fire cover in Warrington, while another outlined the perceived overall benefit from the fire cover proposals. There were also comments which called for better facilities for women across the Service.

Appendix: Additional Resources

An appendix to this report, *Cheshire Fire Authority Draft 2024-2028 Community Risk Management Plan Consultation Feedback: Additional Resources*, provides an analysis of public and staff survey respondents by a range of demographic characteristics. The document also contains a copy of the consultation survey, full copies of free text comments received, non-survey responses received and partner responses. Please note the Fire Brigades Union response is provided as its own appendix due to the size and formatting of the response.

3. Summary of Pre-Consultation

The CRMP has been developed in line with some guiding principles to improve the service provided to the community and to improve the organisation for those who work within it. The principles are:

- Giving our colleagues and communities a genuine say in the development of our Service.

- Continuing to respond to incidents as quickly as we do now and where possible, even quicker in the future.

- Increasing the availability of fire engines, especially during daytime hours.

- Enabling our staff to be more productive and effective, keeping our communities safe.

- Strengthening our prevention and protection programmes to meet the needs of those most at risk.

- Providing high quality, sustainable workplaces for our colleagues by continuing to modernise our buildings and facilities.

- Continuing to promote our Service's safe, supportive, and inclusive workplace culture.

Pre-consultation can be understood as a process to obtain feedback to help turn the guiding principles into a suite of firm proposals. It was undertaken to gauge broad opinion on a range of themes to help inform the development of options for full consultation.

The pre-consultation activity took place between June and September 2023. Results were presented to Members of Cheshire Fire Authority on 29 September 2023 for consideration as part of the approval for launching the consultation on the draft CRMP.

While pre-consultation feedback is summarised in this report, a full copy of the report can be accessed by this link:
https://authority.cheshirefire.gov.uk/documents/s13578/Item%203%20-%20Appendix%202%20Draft%202024-2028%20CRMP%20Pre-Consultation%20Summary.pdf

3.1 Methodology

The pre-consultation included the following activities:

Online survey for public and staff

An online survey was developed and hosted on the platform SurveyMonkey. This was accessible via the Service website and homepage of the intranet. The next section provides more detail on the questions asked within the survey.

Visioning workshop sessions with Fire Authority Members

Officers engaged Fire Authority Members at an early stage of the development process. Visioning sessions were provided at two Member Planning Days on 7 July and 11 August 2023.

Here, officers provided an overview of data and information on several topics:

- Horizon scanning analysis to highlight new and emerging risks.
- Performance data to show levels of risk, demand, and fire cover/availability.

Members were then provided with the guiding principles for their agreement and approval and asked if there were any other principles which officers should consider as part of the CRMP development. Key feedback included the desire to maintain the current fleet of 35 frontline fire engines.

Members were also asked to outline what they saw as key risks which should be accounted for within the CRMP. The growth of lithium-ion battery products and electric vehicles were seen as a key risk, as was the impact of climate change.

Risk identification workshop with Year 10 work experience students

Officers carried out a workshop on 7 July 2023 with eight Year 10 high school students who were in Service on a work placement. Students were asked to identify the key fire and rescue risks they considered to be facing the community. Again, lithium-ion battery products (e-scooters and bikes) and the impact of climate change were highlighted, alongside more traditional fire and rescue risks such as road safety, deliberate fires, and home fire safety.

Fire cover review workshops with staff

Two workshops were held with groups of staff: at the Staff Engagement Forum meeting on 14 July and a separate session on 26 July. Participants at both sessions encompassed staff from a range of roles and duty systems. At the workshops, attendees were provided with the following information:

- An update on the progress of the fire cover review.
- Information regarding the availability of on-call fire engines.
- Demand data for each fire engine in Cheshire.
- Overall costs for a fire engine on each duty system within Cheshire.
- The overall budget for service delivery in Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Participants were then split into two groups and each group were asked to design their own model to provide fire cover using the data above, and as far as possible within the same cost base as the current budget.

The crewing configurations devised by each of the groups were then analysed and compared to configurations being developed by the fire cover review team. These helped to inform the development of options for fire cover within the CRMP, which is outlined in more detail in Section 4 of this report.

Trade union briefing

A dedicated briefing took place to update trade union representatives on the purpose of the pre-consultation activity and share a summary of the findings of pre-consultation.

3.2 Response Rate

The survey ran between 16 June and 17 July 2023 and gathered 185 responses from the public and 226 from members of staff.

The survey asked questions on several issues, which are outlined below:

- Views on the guiding principles
- Expected response times for various incidents.
- Response standards and associated measuring/reporting
- Number of fire engines and availability
- Crewing arrangements (for staff only)
- On-call duty system
- Risk identification
- Perceptions on value for money and increasing/decreasing the precept (public only)

3.3 Summary of Feedback
The following section provides a summary of the pre-consultation feedback received.

Guiding principles
Survey respondents were asked to what extent they supported the guiding principles to develop the CRMP. 81.5% of the public and 84.9% of staff either approved or strongly approved of the principles as set out, compared to 4.9% of public and 1.8% of staff respondents who disapproved.
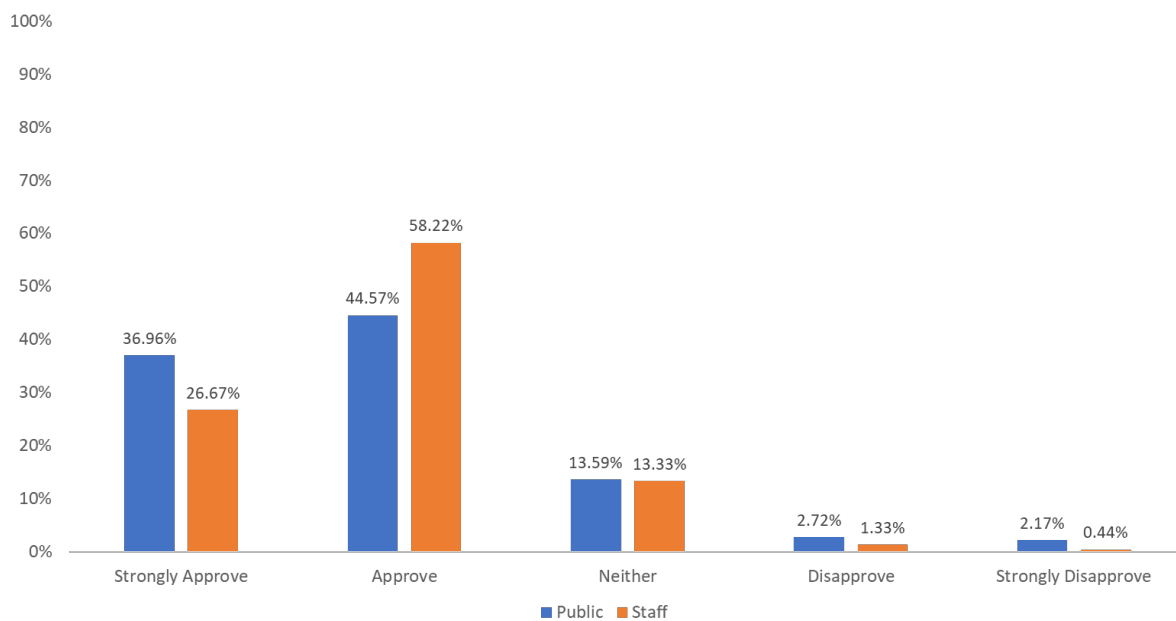
Narrative comments

Respondents were asked if there were any other issues that they felt should be included within the guiding principles. Comments from the public were largely concerned with the need to ensure sufficient availability of fire engines and provision of fire cover – which are referenced within the guiding principles. Staff comments centred around several themes:

- Staff wellbeing and firefighter safety.
- Career progression and development, and organisational culture.
- Improving fire cover.

Response standard
The next section of the survey asked for views to help to develop a proposal around the future response standard i.e. our target for responding to incidents.

Measuring response times

Respondents were asked to what extent they would support the Service measuring its response times from the time the 999 call is received, rather than the current measurement from when the fire station is alerted. 69.4% of public and 52.2% of staff respondents supported measuring from the time of call compared to 17.4% of the public and 23.4% of staff who opposed this.
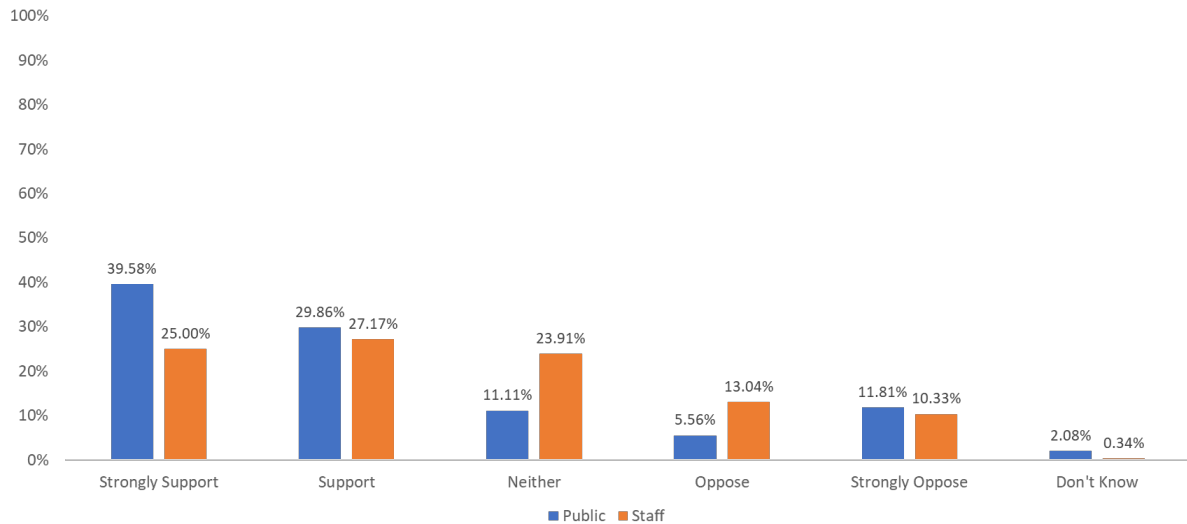
Narrative comments

Regarding the measuring of response from time of call, public comments reference the view that this was a more accurate reflection of their physical experience should they need to call 999. Staff comments were more nuanced, with some questioning how much control the Authority would have over improving response times given that call handling is undertaken by a third party (North West Fire Control). Other staff comments raised a concern that measuring response time from time of call could increase pressure on crews to ensure they meet the response time, particularly on-call firefighters (who once alerted have five minutes to arrive at the station to then respond).

Response standard reporting

Respondents were then asked if they would prefer to see the Service's response standard reported as a percentage pass rate (current method) or as an average response time. 59.3% of public and 61.1% of staff respondents stated a preference for an average response time compared to 32.4% public and 33.5% of staff respondents who preferred performance to be reported as a percentage pass rate.

Average response or percentage
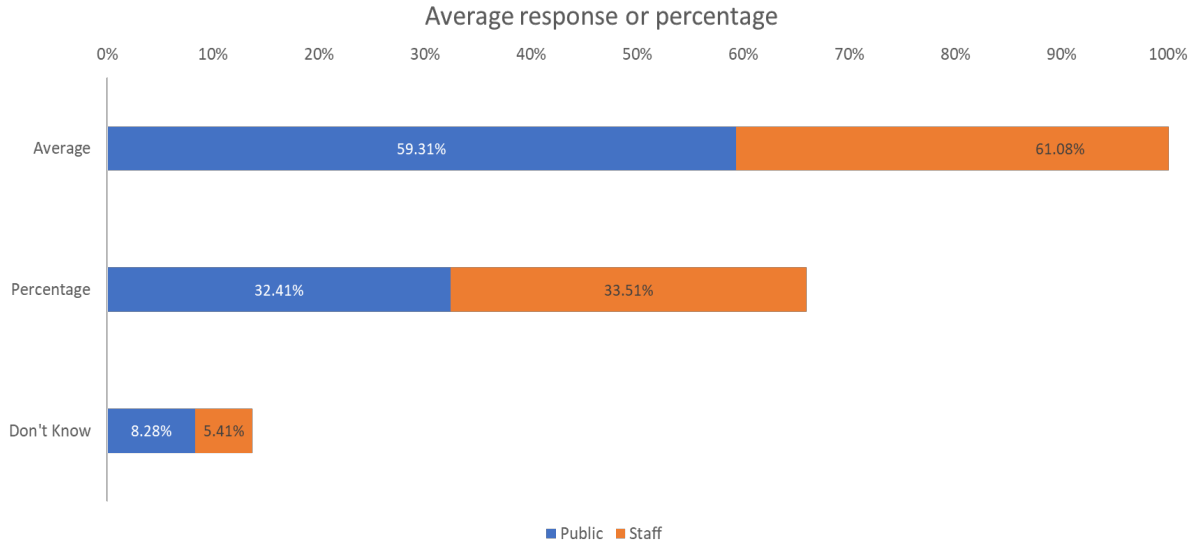
Single or variable response standard

The next question in this section asked for preferences over a single response standard for the whole county, or replacing this with a variable response standard which would lead to different response standards in different areas according to local risk factors. 56.9% of public and 64.5% of staff respondents stated a preference for a single response standard compared to 37.5% of public and 29.5% of staff who preferred a variable standard.
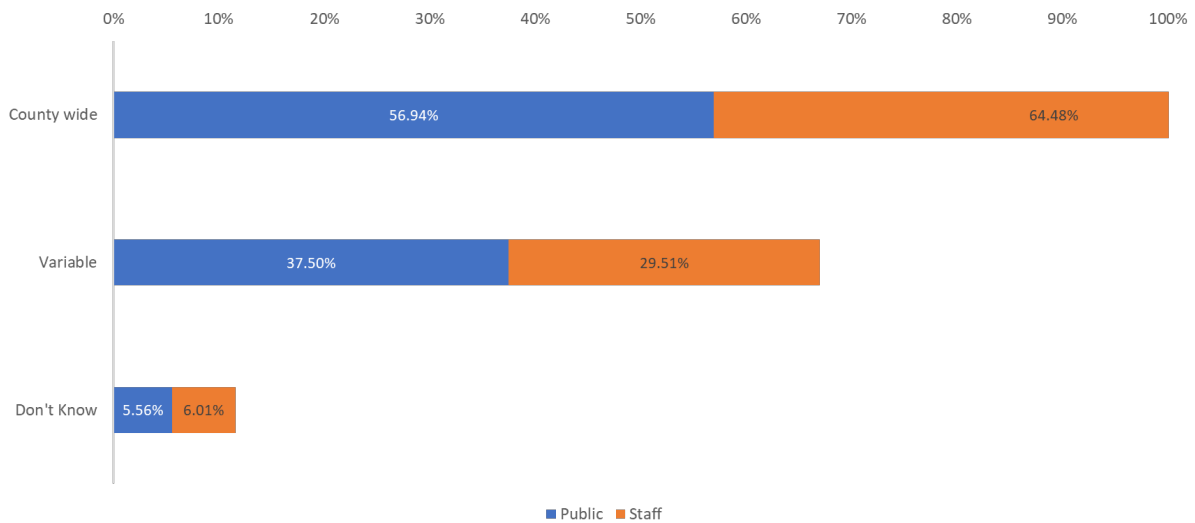
Narrative comments

Public and staff comments referred to the preference for using the same standard for all. Recurring themes highlighted include that a fire is a fire regardless of rural or urban areas, and that taxpayers in different areas still pay their precept so should be offered same level of service.

Some public and staff comments highlighted that increasing on-call availability will improve response times in rural areas.

A minority of staff comments supported the use of a different standard, as it was felt that this would better match resources to differing risks, as per rationale for CRMP. However, even where a variable standard was supported, there was an acknowledgement that public expectation would favour a single standard.

There was a general understanding within staff comments that in rural areas it can be challenging to meet the current standard, both because of geography and issues around the availability of fire engines at certain times.

Expected response times.

The final part of this section asked respondents to state how long they would consider it acceptable to wait for a fire engine to arrive in a range of different emergency scenarios.

Public and staff responses were broadly similar in these areas, with the expected response times to potential life risk incidents (house and commercial fires, road traffic collisions, water rescues) lower – under ten minutes – than other incidents such as grass fires or animal rescues.

Scenario	Public average (mins)	Staff average (mins)
House fire	9	8
Fire in a commercial premises	10	9
Small fire	14	12
Road traffic collision	9	9
Rescuing someone from water	8	8
To help paramedics gain entry to a property where someone needs medical attention	10	10
To rescue an animal	15	14

Review of the on-call system
Respondents were asked to what extent they would support the Authority reviewing the on-call duty system with the aim of making it more effective and sustainable. 90.9% of staff supported this, along with 91.3% of public respondents.
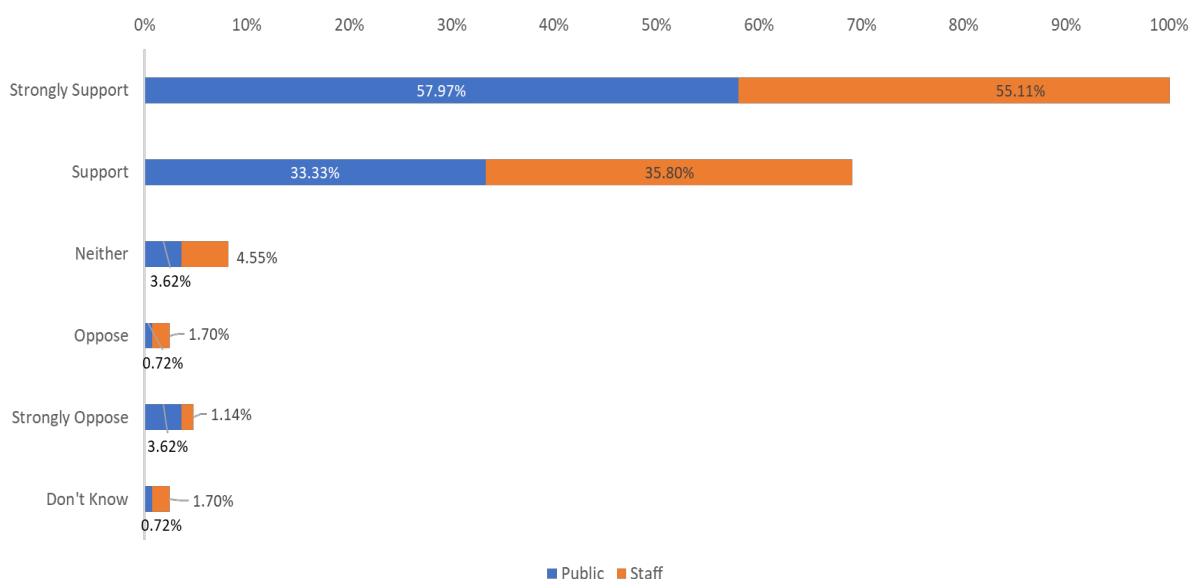
Staff were asked in more detail which areas should be the focus of any review. Key areas of focus were contractual arrangements (highlighted as important by 93.6% of dual-role staff and 77.3% of solely on-call staff), followed by the pathway to achieving operational competence (marked as a suggested area of focus by 40.9% of on-call staff and 32.3% of dual role staff) and then training commitments (22.6% of dual role staff and 40.9% of on-call staff suggested this as an area of focus).
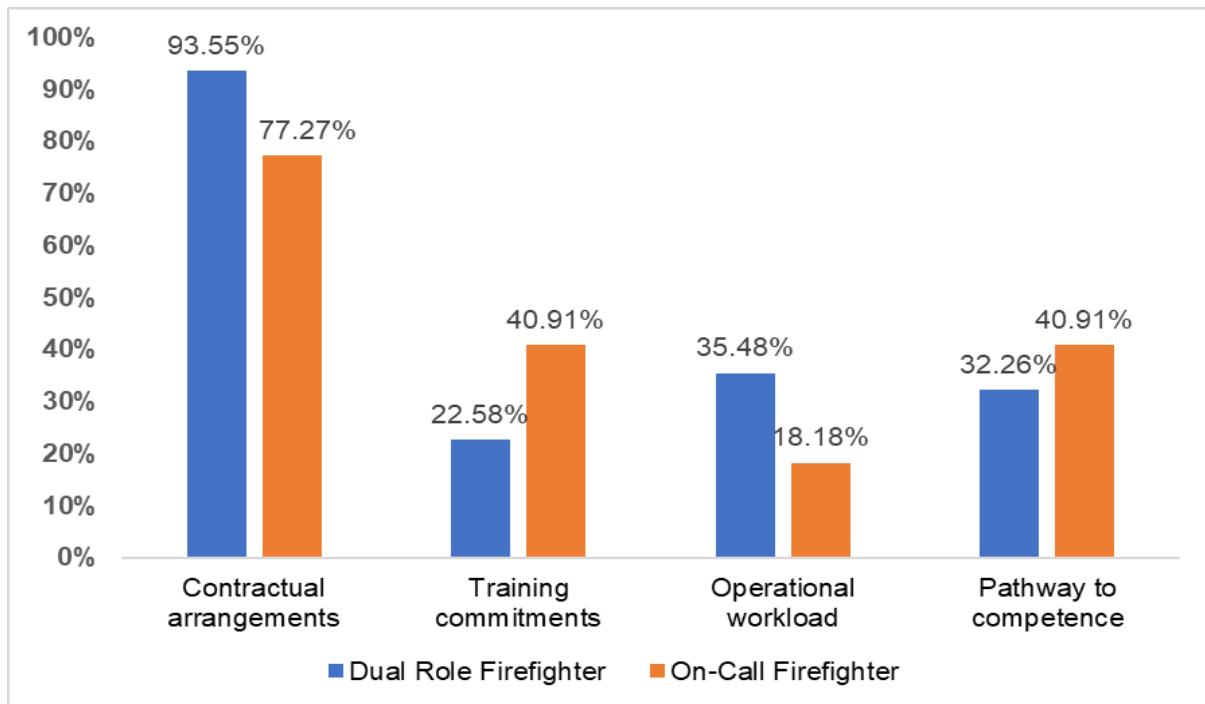
Regarding weekend cover, staff were asked to what extent a package of greater remuneration, coupled with a more structured approach to planning availability, would encourage them to provide more cover. 62.5% of solely on-call staff and 80.65% of dual-role staff said such a package either probably or definitely would encourage them to provide more cover.
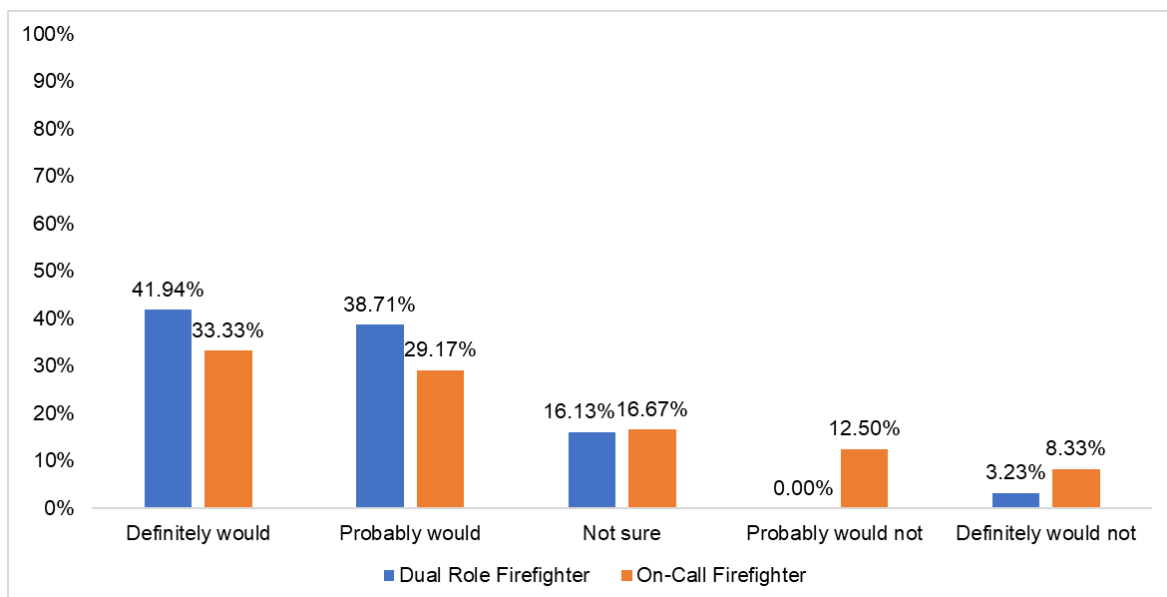
Duty systems

Operational staff were asked to what extent a daytime only shift system would appeal. 81.8% of solely on-call staff, 35.7% of wholetime staff and 38.7% of dual-role staff said such a system would appeal at least a moderate amount.13.6% of on-call staff, 54.8% of wholetime staff and 51.6% of dual-role staff said such a system would not appeal at all. Comments from those who said a system would appeal said that it would enable them to dedicate their weekends as family time and that it would be a route in to a fulltime position from an on-call role.

Staff who said the system would not appeal highlighted the balance that the current 2-2-4 system provides them and how shift work fits in with their individual circumstances.
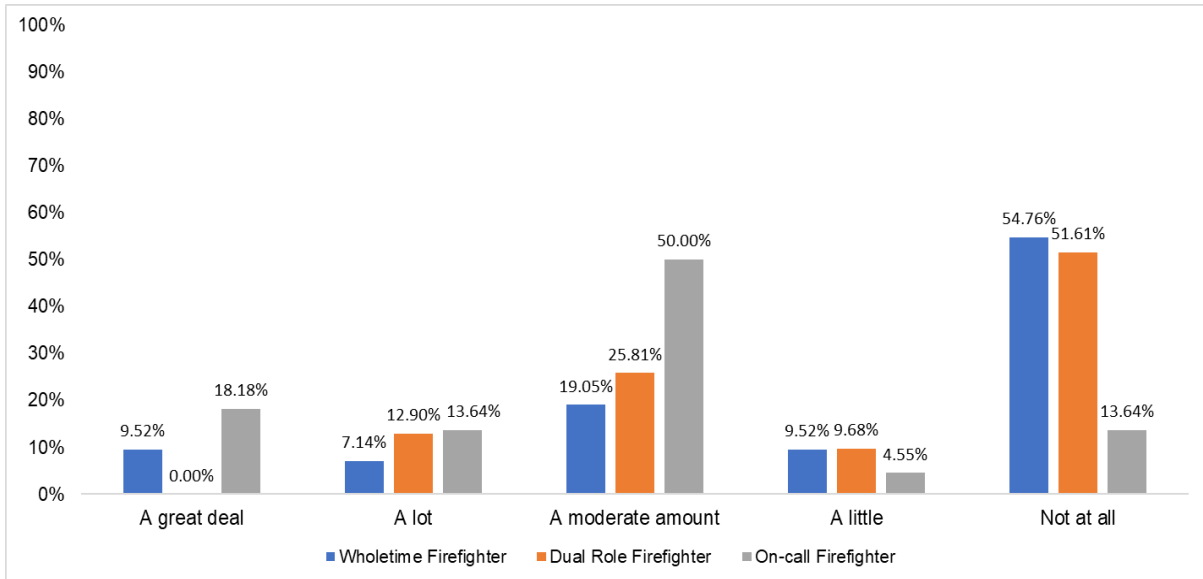
Wholetime staff were then asked whether they would prefer a more routine shift pattern or a shift pattern that was more flexibly determined on a monthly basis. 92.7% of wholetime and 68.8% of dual role respondents said they would either probably or definitely prefer a more routine shift pattern. Narrative comments provided indicate that a more rigid routine enables those who work it to plan their commitments in advance and the certainty provides a work-life balance though being able to forecast childcare and other needs.
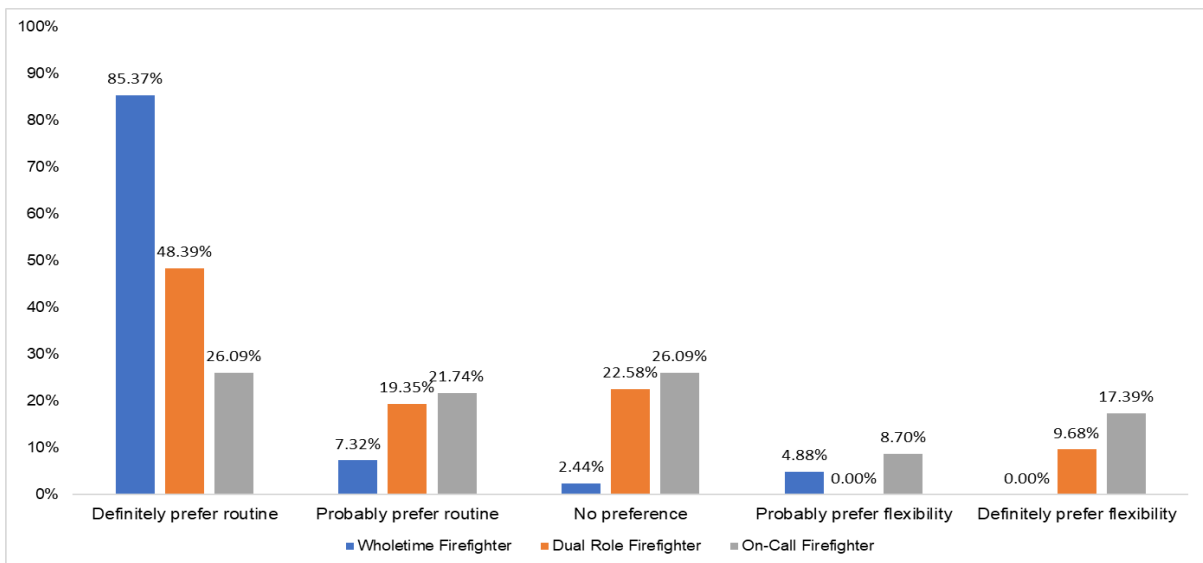
The importance of the 'local' fire engine

The question on the public survey regarding how important it was that the respondents local fire engine responds was designed to test perceptions around the response from the town or villages local fire engine. In reality, the quickest available fire engine is mobilised to respond; but it has been suggested that there is an attachment to having a local fire engine available within a community.

44.9% of respondents stated that it was extremely or very important that the local fire engine responds. 19.6% said it was somewhat important while 31.2% said it was either not very important or not important at all.
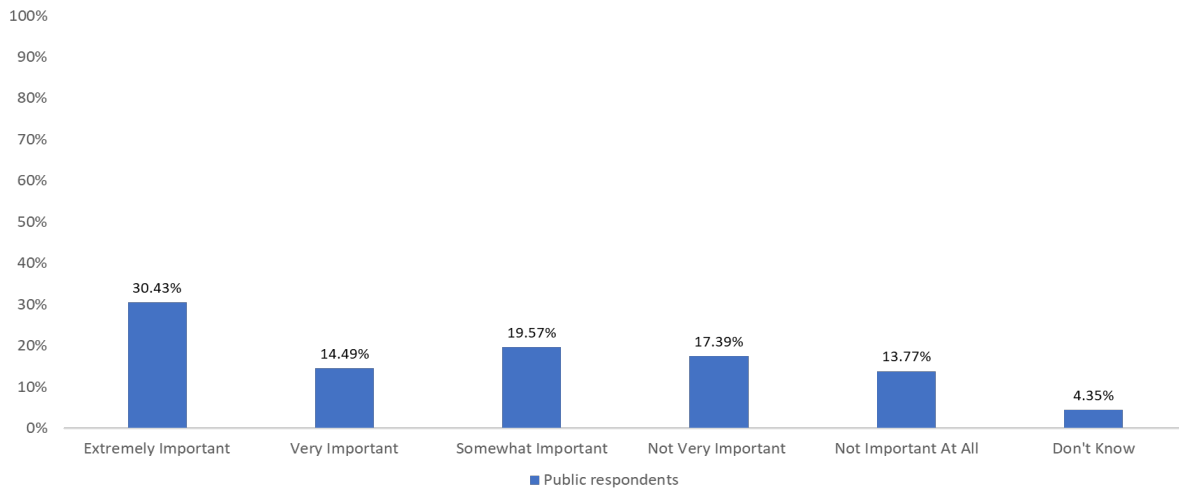
Narrative comments

Most comments in relation to the importance of the local fire engine suggest the main concern is the response time, with whichever location the fire engine is coming from being a secondary concern.

However, some comments reveal several potential reasons for preferring a local engine:

- Local knowledge (road network etc)

- Travel time from other locations

- Quicker response (suggesting a limited awareness of the 5 min delay with on-call)

- Reduces the need for a responding engine from outside area to be backfilled.

Additional comments also highlighted the need to strengthen the on-call duty system to improve the availability of fire engines; in particular the need to make the duty system more attractive to existing and prospective staff, and to promote it more and engage with local employers.

Overall number and availability of fire engines

This question was asked to gauge views on preferences over having a smaller overall number of fire engines but having better availability, or having the same number of fire engines but understanding that there are issues at times with availability.

54.6% of public and 47.2% of staff respondents preferred to maintain the current fleet size of fire engines, while 26.9% of public and 37.5% of staff respondents preferred to have fewer overall fire engines, but with better availability.
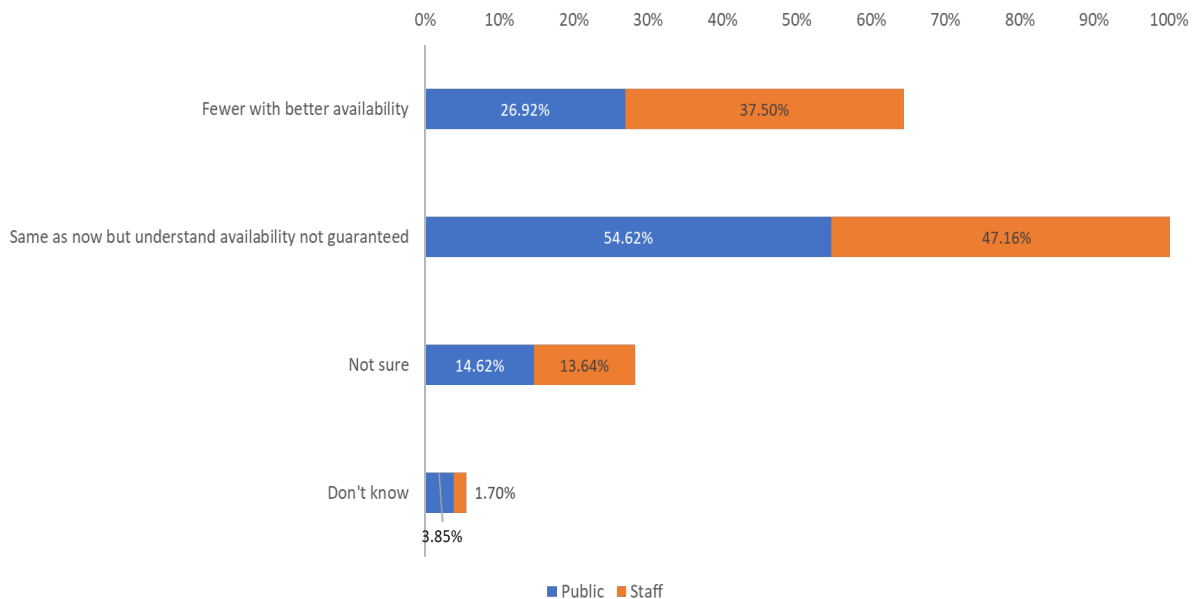
Narrative comments

Some comments from both staff and public respondents reference the wish for more resources and higher availability. Ultimately, this would require more financial resources than is currently available. More generally, a reduction in the number of fire engines was viewed as a reduction in overall resources.

Comments also alluded to the view that although engines may not always be available, the perception is that more engines equal more resilience. In essence, having them available some of the time is better than not having them at all.

Major incidents were one particular scenario where it was considered important to retain the current fleet size, for the ability to scale up resources and for resilience.

Some staff comments suggest that duty systems in some areas could be changed to increase cover, with others questioning the availability of on-call second fire engines.

- Some comments suggest the number of engines is not the material issue but the ability to meet response times/standards.

- Acknowledgement that on-call system needs to be reviewed made more attractive/sustainable to improve cover and availability.

  - Better pay

  - More flexibility around contracts

  - More utilisation

  - Impact of on-call migration and dual-role staff

Prioritising activities

Respondents (both public and staff) were asked to identify which of the Authority's functions they deemed as most important.

Public responses

Activity	Extremely Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not At All Important	Don't Know
Responding to fires	96.2%	3.0%		0.8%		
Responding to RTCs	90.2%	9.9%				
Rescuing people from water	76.7%	18.8%	4.5%			
Rescuing trapped animals	21.8%	23.3%	37.6%	11.3%	6.0%	
Responding to some medical emergencies in certain locations	27.1%	35.3%	26.3%	4.5%	5.3%	1.5%
Major incident response	80.5%	13.5%	4.5%	0.8%		0.8%
Providing fire safety and health advice and fitting smoke alarms in the local community	22.0%	31.1%	33.3%	9.9%	3.8%	
Educating people on road safety	14.3%	23.3%	39.1%	15.8%	7.5%	
Running fire cadet units on fire stations for 11–17-year-olds	13.5%	25.6%	37.6%	18.1%	4.5%	0.8%
Working with the Prince's Trust to deliver its Team Programme for 16–24-year-olds	9.0%	24.1%	36.1%	21.1%	5.3%	4.5%
Working with young people to prevent fires and anti-social behaviour	26.3%	34.6%	25.6%	7.5%	4.5%	1.5%
Engaging schools through visits, our safety education centre, and tailored programmes for pupils at risk of exclusion	22.6%	37.6%	23.3%	13.5%	3.0%	
Providing volunteering opportunities	8.3%	29.3%	39.1%	12.0%	10.5%	0.8%
Delivering station open days within the community	10.6%	18.9%	48.5%	12.9%	8.3%	0.8%
Attending community events to engage people about safety	11.3%	27.1%	48.1%	9.8%	3.8%	
Providing fire safety advice to local businesses	17.3%	42.1%	30.8%	5.3%	3.8%	0.8%
Prosecuting businesses who don't comply with fire safety regulations	57.9%	29.3%	10.5%	0.8%		1.5%

Staff responses

Activity	Extremely Important	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not At All Important	Don't Know
Responding to fires	99.39%		0.61%			
Responding to RTCs	98.78%	0.61%	0.61%			
Rescuing people from water	90.24%	6.71%	3.05%			
Rescuing trapped animals	38.41%	26.22%	29.27%	4.88%	1.22%	
Responding to some medical emergencies in certain locations	38.41%	28.66%	20.73%	6.71%	3.66%	1.83%
Major incident response	82.32%	13.41%	3.66%	0.61%		
Providing fire safety and health advice and fitting smoke alarms in the local community	32.32%	38.41%	23.17%	4.27%	1.83%	
Educating people on road safety	24.54%	40.49%	28.22%	6.75%		
Running fire cadet units on fire stations for 11–17-year-olds	10.98%	28.66%	37.80%	17.07%	3.66%	1.83%
Working with the Prince's Trust to deliver its Team Programme for 16–24-year-olds	8.59%	28.83%	37.42%	17.18%	5.52%	2.45%
Working with young people to prevent fires and anti-social behaviour	21.95%	46.95%	27.44%	2.44%	0.61%	0.61%
Engaging schools through visits, our safety education centre, and tailored programmes for pupils at risk of exclusion	21.34%	51.22%	21.34%	4.88%		1.22%
Providing volunteering opportunities	7.93%	28.66%	42.07%	14.63%	5.49%	1.22%
Delivering station open days within the community	19.75%	35.80%	27.16%	11.73%	4.94%	0.62%
Attending community events to engage people about safety	20.12%	40.24%	32.32%	6.71%	0.61%	
Providing fire safety advice to local businesses	25.00%	48.17%	23.17%	2.44%	1.22%	
Prosecuting businesses who don't comply with fire safety regulations	54.88%	35.98%	8.54%	0.61%		

An overwhelming majority of both staff and public respondents viewed the Authority's statutory functions as important (responding to fires and road traffic collisions, major incident response). Results and free text comments show a clear link and rationale for the Authority carrying out its statutory duties and most operational activity.

The carrying out of animal rescue is one area of operational activity which is viewed as having lower importance (45.1% of the public view it as very/extremely important compared to over 90% for other operational activity), along with responding to some medical emergencies in certain locations. This is reflected in some free text comments; suggesting the need to focus on the Authority's core role, highlighting cardiac response and medical

assistance (in particular the training and skills to perform the role versus paramedics/medical staff).

Amongst public respondents, the Authority's prevention work was, on average, viewed as extremely/very important by fewer people (between 33% and 60% of respondents viewing activity as extremely/very important depending on the specific activity). In contrast, views from staff on these issues were comparatively higher (in many cases over 10% higher). This suggests that the increased knowledge and awareness of these activities within the workforce has provided a higher awareness of the benefits they can bring.

Value for money and precept

Finally, public respondents were asked whether they considered that the authority provided value for money based on its current precept and for their views on increases/decreases to the precept in future.

A total of 66.9% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed the Authority provided value for money, against 6.2% who disagreed or strongly disagreed.
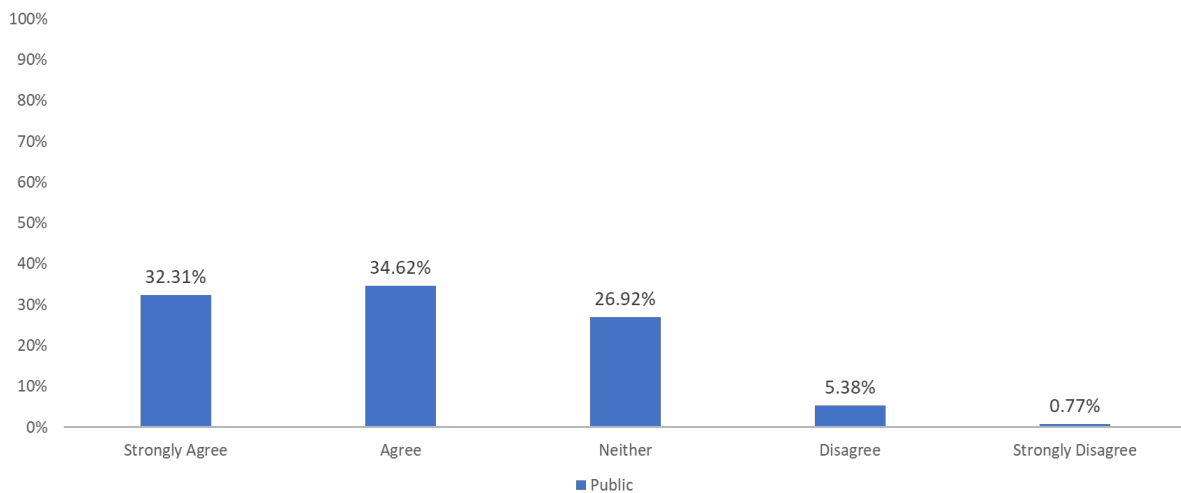
Future precept

Regarding any future precept, 63.4% of respondents said they would be willing to pay a higher precept to improve or maintain services compared to 16% who disagreed. Of those who were willing to pay a higher precept, the average annual increase they would increase the precept by was £6.90 on a Band D property.
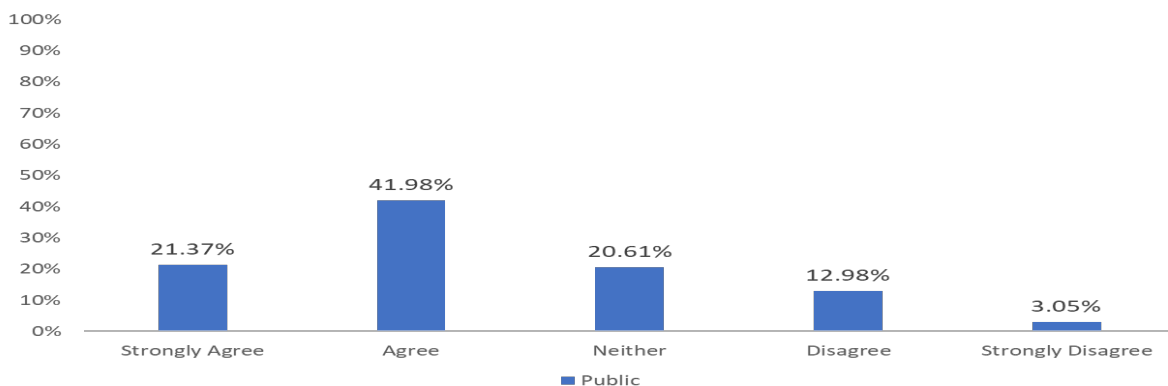
Conversely, 5.3% of respondents agreed that they would be willing to pay a lower precept on the understanding services would be reduced as a result. 75.6% of respondents disagreed to this. Of those who wanted the precept to reduce, the average amount that they would reduce it by would be £9.50 per year for a Band D property.
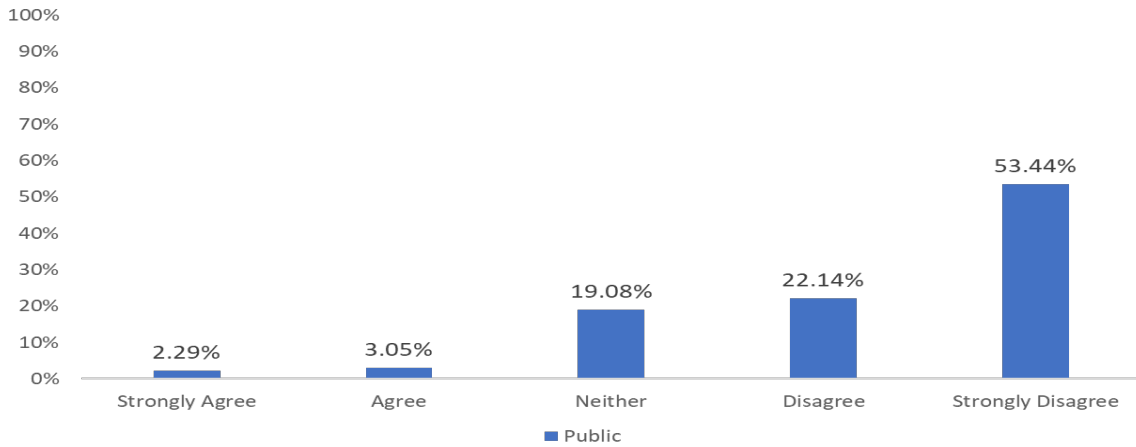
3.4 Influencing the Draft Community Risk Management Plan

The outcomes of the pre-consultation activity influenced the development of the draft CRMP in several areas. These are highlighted and summarised below:

Guiding principles

Although there was broad support for the guiding principles concerning the development of the CRMP and the fire cover review, feedback from the pre-consultation survey suggested that there was a preference to maintain the current operational fleet of 35 fire engines. This was further reinforced during the workshop sessions at Member Planning Days, where feedback from Fire Authority Members indicated a preference to maintain 35 fire engines and our current fire station footprint (28 fire stations).

This feedback was then used to develop and refine the options for the provision of fire cover, including in the development of the proposal within the draft CRMP. This is explained in more detail in the following section.

Wider feedback from staff centred on staff wellbeing and firefighter safety, as well as career progression, development, and culture. As a result, these issues have been addressed within the draft CRMP; firefighter safety is referenced as a specific risk to be addressed, while a section of the CRMP is dedicated to the organisation's cultural improvements.

Response standard

The feedback from the pre-consultation survey suggested that there was a preference to measure our response time from the time of call rather than the existing measure of from time of alert. The pre-consultation activity also highlighted a preference amongst respondents to have a single response standard for Cheshire, rather than a variable standard which would change according to local risks; as well as reporting this standard as an average response time.

In addition, the pre-consultation survey asked respondents to highlight how long they would expect a fire and rescue response to take in a variety of scenarios. The scenarios where human life was at risk all saw an expected response time of under ten minutes.

This feedback helped to influence the final proposal within the draft CRMP regarding the change to our response standard.

Fire and rescue risks

Several engagement mechanisms, including the survey and in staff, public and Member workshop sessions, asked participants to identify key fire and rescue related risks. It was notable that highlighted amongst emerging risks were the impact of climate change and the use of lithium-ion battery products such as electric vehicles and e-scooters/bikes.

This has then been referenced in the draft CRMP under the narrative for the respective risks and has influenced the development of the Authority's proposals to develop prevention advice relating to lithium-ion batteries.

Configuration of duty systems

Officers held workshop session with staff which considered the challenges facing the Authority regarding the provision of fire cover. During these sessions, staff were provided with information on the availability and demand of fire engines, as well as some overall costings. They were then asked to design their own duty systems using the same parameters as the fire cover review.

While each session resulted in different final outcomes, there was a general acknowledgement of the need to amend the existing configuration of fire cover arrangements if the desired improvement in daytime cover is to be achieved. Each workshop was also given the option to change the crewing at locations to a hypothetical new duty system if they so wished. This option was taken up by each group within the workshops and helped to inform the development of a new duty system through the fire cover review which could help to improve the availability of some fire engines in the weekday daytime.

4. Fire Cover Review and Options Development

The Authority undertakes a fire cover review periodically to ensure that it has the most effective configuration of emergency response resources in the right place to meet risks and demands.

These reviews are tied into the development of a CRMP given the lifespan of the respective plan. To inform the latest CRMP, officers carried out a fire cover review, using a range of data and intelligence sources and tools, as well as the feedback from the pre-consultation activities. More information on the work undertaken to carry out the fire cover review and develop and assess response options can be found via the following link:

https://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/downloads/documents/news_and_events/crmp_2024-28/draft_2024-2028_community_risk_management_plan_options_assessment_-_final.pdf

The outcomes of the review would then form the emergency response element of the CRMP and outline how these proposals would help to achieve the overarching guiding principles within the CRMP.

4.1 Fire Cover Review

The primary objective of the fire cover review was to assess whether our firefighters and fire engines operate in the right way, at the right time, in the right place. This helps us ensure that our resource provision is aligned most effectively to risks and demands in different parts of Cheshire, whilst providing value for money for the taxpayer.
The fire cover review includes a range of activities, such as:

- Analysing our historic incident data and performance against our targets.
- Carrying out a horizon scanning analysis to look for future risks and developments affecting fire and rescue services.
- Reviewing national reports and findings relating to the fire and rescue sector.
- Considering the response plans of our neighbouring fire and rescue services, and the plans of other agencies where appropriate.
- Using modelling software to predict the impact of any potential changes to the location or staffing of our resources on response times.

The fire cover review has also considered:

- Our emergency response standard. Determining whether our target for the time it takes to get to incidents remains fit for purpose.
- Fire engine requirement and crewing models. Determining the location and number of fire engines we need across Cheshire and the best way to crew these to meet risk, demand, and targets.
- Special appliances. Determining the type and capability requirements for specialist vehicles and resources, and the best location and crewing model for these.

4.2 Guiding Principles

To shape the review, a series of guiding principles to undertake the fire cover review were developed. These are slightly different to the principles used to develop the CRMP (referenced earlier in the document) but they do contribute towards their achievement.

Fire Authority Members agreed that any proposed changes to the fire cover model should:

- Improve response times.
- Reduce our reliance on On-Call fire engines, particularly during the day.

- Introduce more Wholetime fire engines in On-Call Station areas, resulting in increased capacity to deliver prevention and protection activity.
- Result in no fire station closures or building of new stations.
- Maintain the same cost base, whilst improving service, outputs, and value for money.

These principles were broadly supported through the pre-consultation engagement however during pre-consultation, it became apparent from Members, public and staff that there was a preference to maintain the current fleet of 35 frontline fire engines. Therefore, this criterion was included within the assessment.

As part of our Community Risk Management Model, officers also applied their professional judgement to reduce and mitigate risk. Officers also considered if the packages would provide viable and sustainable crewing arrangements.

Therefore, the criteria which packages were assessed against was extended to include:

- Satisfy the guiding principles of the fire cover review.
- Maintain 35 frontline fire engines.
- Be an appropriate level of fire cover to meet risks and demands; and
- Be viable and sustainable to operate.

For the package to be included within the draft CRMP 2024-28 for consultation it had to meet all the above assessment criteria.

4.3 Options Assessment

Through data analysis, officers developed a wide range of possible options. These were analysed using our Phoenix software to understand the impact they would have on our service provision. This allowed officers to discount a range of initial proposals based on them clearly not achieving improvements to response times or being cost prohibitive.

Four final options were developed for detailed consideration, with the option below being the only package meeting each of the respective guiding principles.

Package D		
Summary		
- Change Knutsford to Day Crewing - Convert four On-Call fire engines to full time crewing during weekdays (and remove On-Call cover outside these times); these would be the existing on-call fire engines at Runcorn, Macclesfield, Northwich and Winsford. - Reorganise the provision of full-time daytime cover within Warrington, sharing the wholetime fire engine cover between Birchwood and Stockton Heath (and remove the On-Call cover at Stockton Heath).		
Guiding Principle	**Meets / Achieves**	**Commentary**
Improve response times.	Yes	The overall package of proposals in this option would reduce our response time to primary fires.
Reduce our reliance on On-Call fire engines, particularly during the day	Yes	This option would reduce the number of on-call fire engines by 5, by changing

		them to wholetime weekday engines or day crewing.
More Wholetime fire engines in On Call Station areas, resulting in increased capacity to deliver prevention and protection activity	Yes	This option would provide flexible wholetime day cover across on-call areas throughout Cheshire.
No fire station closures or building of new stations.	Yes	Maintains existing station footprint.
Maintain the same cost base, whilst improving service, outputs, and value for money	Yes	This option is estimated to operate within a small increase (+£54k per year) to the current budget, this is achievable from within existing budgets. It is also predicted to increase capacity for firefighters to undertake community work and outputs. The introduction of a day crewing system at Knutsford is achievable as the Authority already owns housing adjacent to the station, removing the need to fund a capital spend on new housing.
Maintains frontline fleet of 35 fire engines	Yes	35 frontline fire engines are maintained.
Appropriate model to meet risks and demands	Yes	This option provides wholetime day cover across all on-call station areas and increases the capacity to meet risks and demands.
Operationally viable and sustainable	Yes	This option is deemed to be operationally viable and sustainable.

4.4 Preparing the Consultation Programme

As the above package of measures satisfied each of the guiding principles it was then presented to Members at a series of planning days in July 2023 for their consideration and feedback.

This then began a process of developing the draft Community Risk Management Plan and associated materials ready for the launch of a consultation process later in the year, subject to the formal approval by the Fire Authority in September 2023.

4.5 Consultation Governance

To provide assurance that the consultation process was carried out in accordance with established legislation and standard practices, the Authority contracted The Consultation Institute to provide a Quality Assurance (QA) assessment against the consultation programme.

The Consultation Institute is a leading not-for-profit best practice institute and membership body, promoting high-quality cross sector public and stakeholder consultation standards, workplace training and thought leadership.

Assessment against the Institute's QA criteria was carried out through the course of the consultation programme.

5. Summary of Consultation Programme

5.1 Overview of Consultation Programme

The consultation programme ran for 13 weeks between Monday 2 October 2023 and Tuesday 2 January 2024.

Consultation activity was split into three main strands to target distinct audiences, i.e. public consultation, staff consultation and consultation with partner agencies and other stakeholders.

5.2 Methodology

A range of methods were used to carry out the consultation programme. These were tailored to each strand of consultation and are listed below.

Public consultation

Website content

A dedicated microsite was created on the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service website www.cheshirefire.gov.uk, which could be accessed via the homepage of the website.

The microsite contained a range of information on the draft CRMP and the consultation programme, including:

- The draft CRMP and a summary.
- Equalities impact assessments.
- A summary of pre-consultation activity and feedback report.
- An assessment of options developed prior to consultation.

N.B. The options assessment was published after the launch of consultation and was placed on the website on 11 October. There was a total of 23 responses submitted prior to this date. Following publication, a prominent notice was placed on the website detailing that these respondents could submit a further response if required.

- Online animated videos, for each of the five emergency response proposals being consulted on.
- Contact details for consultees to respond to the consultation, including via the online survey, a dedicated consultation email address and by post. There were also details provided for anyone who required additional support or requests such as large print documents or alternative languages.
- A link to the online survey, hosted on the SurveyMonkey platform.

Consultation roadshows

A total of 32 roadshows were undertaken through the consultation period. These encompassed locations across the four unitary areas of Cheshire to ensure a wide range of residents could take part.

Each roadshow lasted for approximately two hours and was staffed by members of the consultation team, who engaged with members of the public and handed out paper copies of the CRMP Summary, survey, freepost return envelope and pen so that respondents could submit their surveys after considering the information.

Across the programme of roadshows, a total of 4,200 surveys were distributed.

A list of the roadshow events by date and location are provided below.

Date	Location	Unitary authority area
09/10/2023	Forge Shopping Centre, Stockton Heath	Warrington
10/10/2023	Sainsburys, Nantwich	Cheshire East
11/10/2023	ASDA, Birchwood	Warrington
17/10/2023	Booths, Knutsford	Cheshire East
18/10/2023	ASDA, Runcorn	Halton
23/10/2023	Tesco, Warrington	Warrington
24/10/2023	Tesco, Congleton	Cheshire East
25/10/2023	Tesco, Macclesfield	Cheshire East
30/10/2023	Halton Lea Library	Halton
30/10/2023	Knutsford Library	Cheshire East
31/10/2023	Frodsham Library	Cheshire West and Chester
01/11/2023	Nantwich Library	Cheshire East
01/11/2023	Winsford Library	Cheshire West and Chester
02/11/2023	Middlewich Library	Cheshire East
03/11/2023	Holmes Chapel Library	Cheshire East
06/11/2023	Winsford Library	Cheshire West and Chester
06/11/2023	Tarporley Library	Cheshire West and Chester
07/11/2023	Sainsburys, Chester	Cheshire West and Chester
08/11/2023	Bollington Library	Cheshire East
09/11/2023	Macclesfield Library	Cheshire East
14/11/2023	Audlem Village Hall	Cheshire East
21/11/2023	ASDA, Winsford	Cheshire West and Chester
21/11/2023	Sandbach Library	Cheshire East
22/11/2023	Tesco, Northwich	Cheshire West and Chester
23/11/2023	Poynton Library	Cheshire East
28/11/2023	Stockton Heath Library	Warrington
28/11/2023	Tesco, Helsby	Cheshire West and Chester
04/12/2023	ASDA, Crewe	Cheshire East
06/12/2023	ASDA, Widnes	Halton
11/12/2023	ASDA, Ellesmere Port	Cheshire West and Chester
11/12/2023	Birchwood Library	Warrington
13/12/2023	Alsager Library	Cheshire East

Social media channels

The Service utilised its own social media and online channels to promote the consultation and encourage those engaged with to have their say.

The primary channels used were the Service's Facebook account (41,000 followers) and X account (formerly Twitter, 51,000 followers). In addition to general posts encouraging people to have their say or promoting one of the public roadshows, a series of posts were issued which explained each of the five proposals in more detail and included the animated video for each respective proposal. As well as Facebook and Twitter, these posts were also published on the Service's LinkedIn account which has 6,450 followers.

Radio advertisement

For the first time during a consultation exercise, the Service made use of radio advertisement to raise awareness of the consultation programme and encourage participation. An advertising campaign was played on local Cheshire radio stations Silk FM and Dee FM, which has a combined audience of 37,000 listeners[2]. The campaign ran for two weeks from 13 – 27 November 2023. It featured regular advertisements across the broadcast programmes on each station (148 advertisements in total), as well as a link on the website of the stations themselves.

Press release

The Service issued a press release to mark the launch of the consultation programme on 2 October. The release provided some headline information on the consultation and encouraged readers to visit www.cheshirefire.gov.uk for more information and to respond.

The press release was issued to all mainstream print, online, radio and television outlets covering Cheshire using the Service's third-party media management platform PRInclusive.

Deliberative workshops

Two deliberative workshops were held with members of the public during the consultation period. The first was an online session on 14 December 2023 facilitated by CFRS officers and held via the Microsoft Teams platform.

The second was a physical workshop involving members of the Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race and Equality Centre (CHAWREC) on 21 December 2023 at the offices of the Centre in Cuppin Street, Chester.

For both sessions, a standardised presentation was delivered which explained the proposals which were being consulted on and then sought views on each of the proposals.

CHAWREC BME Consultation Panel

CHAWREC maintains a 276-member consultation panel, consisting of minority ethnic individuals from across the four unitary authority areas in Cheshire. CHAWREC were contracted to provide their panel members with copies of the consultation material and a survey to complete and provide a response.

Neighbourhood Alert emails

The Service is a member of the Neighbourhood Alert email system, whereby interested parties can subscribe to receive emails about Service activities, campaigns, operational incidents etc. This system was also used to send information about the consultation and to encourage the 19,687 subscribers to respond.

---

[2] www.media-info, Cheshire's Silk Radio - listening figures https://media.info/radio/stations/silk-1069/listening-figures, accessed 9 January 2024. Chester's Dee Radio - listening figures https://media.info/radio/stations/dee-radio/listening-figures, accessed 9 January 2024.

Staff consultation

Intranet content

A feature banner was created for the home page of the Service's intranet. The feature included details of the consultation process and proposals, as well as providing a link to the main page of the website where staff could read more information if required.

Management conference

A conference was held for managers across the Service on 12 October 2023. This was attended by 56 managers across a range of departments in the Service. The conference provided them with an opportunity to hear direct about the proposals, view the consultation presentation and materials and take part in providing their feedback.

Team and watch visits.

A total of 32 visits were carried out by senior officers to individual teams and watches across the organisation. Each visit involved a presentation which gave an overview of the consultation proposals, followed by a face-to-face discussion to seek feedback.

Staff focus group.

A staff focus group session was held on 18 December 2023. Participants were provided with a presentation explaining the proposals within the draft CRMP and their feedback against each of the proposals was sought. Attendees were representative of a range of departments and roles in the Service.

Internal newsletters

Articles were placed in The Green, the internal staff newsletter, throughout the period of consultation. The articles raised awareness of the consultation, provided details of the consultation proposals, and directed readers to the website to read more information and submit a response.

Email

All-user emails were issued to launch the consultation and as a final reminder before the close of consultation. The emails contained details of the proposals being consulted upon and directed readers to the website where they could read more information and submit a response via the online survey.

Partner consultation
Direct email

Partner organisations were sent a direct email to inform them of the content of the draft CRMP, raise awareness of the consultation and encourage a response.

- All Cheshire Members of Parliament.
- All unitary authorities and unitary councillors in Cheshire.
- All town and parish councils.

- Partners within the Cheshire Resilience Forum (this includes statutory partners such as Cheshire Constabulary, North West Ambulance Service and others such as the Environment Agency and Highways England).
- Cheshire and Warrington sub-regional partners
- Neighbouring fire and rescue services.

Face to face briefings

Face to face meetings and briefings were held with several partner agencies and stakeholders, concentrated on those who represented areas directly impacted by changes. These meetings were held throughout the course of the consultation programme and covered the following partners:

Members of Parliament

- Mike Amesbury MP
- Andy Carter MP
- Rt Hon Esther McVey MP
- Edward Timpson CBE MP
- David Rutley MP

Unitary authorities

- Cheshire East Health and Communities Committee
- Cheshire West and Chester Scrutiny Committee
- Halton Safer Policy and Performance Board
- Warrington Stronger Communities Committee

Town and Parish Councils

- Birchwood Town Council
- Bollington Town Council
- Frodsham Town Council
- Holmes Chapel Parish Council
- Knutsford Town Council
- Macclesfield Town Council
- Nantwich Town Council
- Northwich Town Council
- Poynton Town Council
- Stockton Heath Parish Council
- Winsford Town Council

5.3 Survey Response Rates

A total of 459 survey responses were received. Of these, 377 respondents identified as members of the public: 21 as members of staff and three as stakeholders:

- Knutsford Town Council,
- Chester Aid to the Homeless
- Cheshire West and Chester councillor (unnamed)

In addition to this, there was one email response from a member of the public. Four respondents stated they were 'none of the above' while 52 respondents chose not to answer the question.

Ten submissions from partners were received via email:

- Fire Brigades Union
- West Cheshire Trades Union Council
- Warrington and District Trades Union Council
- Chester Retired Firefighters
- Birchwood Town Council
- Bollington Town Council
- Holmes Chapel Parish Council
- Northwich Town Council
- Stockton Heath Parish Council
- Councillor Sam Naylor (Cheshire West and Chester councillor)

5.4 Analysis and Reporting

All survey responses were input into the online survey platform SurveyMonkey.

The consultation survey asked participants several open, free-text questions. Responses to each of these questions were coded into themes using tags based on the content of the specific comment.

All data analysis work has been conducted "in-house" by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service officers.

6. Identification and Management of Risk

6.1 Background and Proposals

As per the Fire and Rescue National Framework, the purpose of a Community Risk Management Plan is to identify and address fire and rescue related risks for the Authority.

The draft CRMP outlines several key risks facing Cheshire and a range of plans and/or proposals to address and mitigate them. These risks are also referred to in the summary CRMP document.

Therefore as part of the consultation, respondents were asked to what extent they considered that the draft CRMP identifies key fire and rescue risks; whether the proposals within the CRMP address the risks identified; and if there are any additional risks which respondents feel should be considered in the development of the final CRMP.

6.2 Identification of Risk

Summary of Survey Responses

Q1 To what extent do you think that our draft 2024-2028 CRMP sufficiently identifies the key fire and rescue risks facing Cheshire?
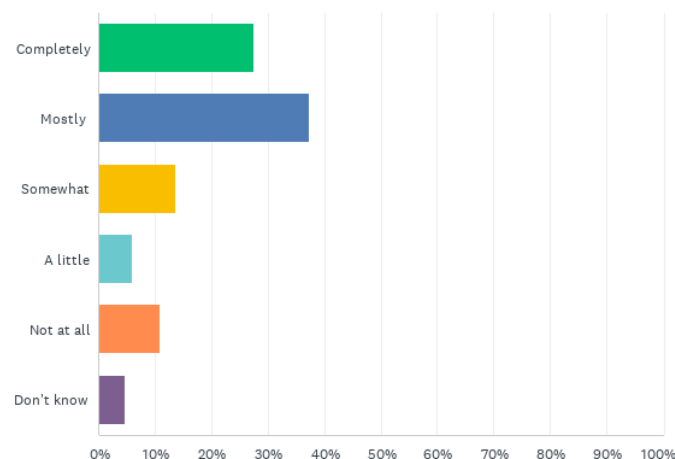
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Completely	27.45%	126
Mostly	37.25%	171
Somewhat	13.73%	63
A little	5.88%	27
Not at all	10.89%	50
Don't Know	4.79%	22
Total	**100.00%**	**459**

The chart above shows that 64.70% of respondents felt that the draft CRMP either completely or mostly identifies the key fire and rescue risks facing Cheshire, compared to 16.77% of respondents who felt it identified only few or no risks.

Public responses
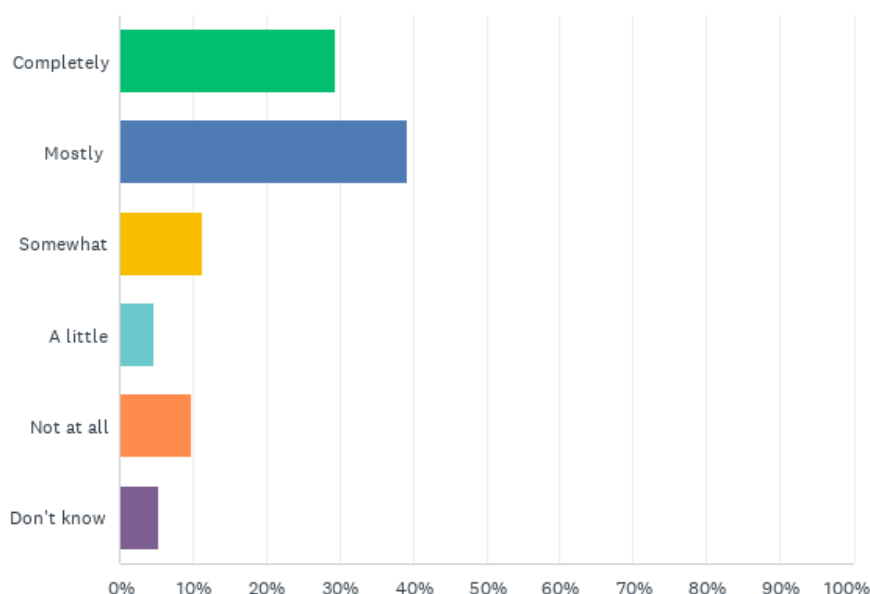
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Completely	29.44%	111
Mostly	39.26%	148
Somewhat	11.41%	43
A little	4.77%	18
Not at all	9.81%	37
Don't Know	5.31%	20
Total	100.00%	377

Of the 377 respondents who declared that they were a member of the public, a total of 68.70% considered that the draft CRMP either completely or mostly identified the key fire and rescue risks facing Cheshire, compared to 14.58% who felt the draft CRMP identified either few risks or none at all. A further 11.41% of respondents stated they felt the draft CRMP somewhat identified the key fire and rescue risks, while 5.31% said they did not know.

Geographic analysis

The tables below provide an analysis of response by the specific locality in which the respondent lives. The analysis covers the unitary authority area of the respondent, their postcode/post-town (using the first part of a full postcode), and the nearest fire station to the respondent. It is important to note that not all respondents will have answered each of the questions in the survey, therefore totals for each category will vary.

The degree to which respondents feel the draft CRMP identifies key fire and rescue risks (from completely to not at all) are provided in each table.

Where levels of respondents in a specific locality are above the average overall figure (either completely or mostly agree the draft CRMP identifies key fire and rescue risks in the above chart, a combined 68.70%) they are colour coded green. Where levels of response in a specific locality are below the average overall figure (the draft CRMP either identifies a little or no risks in the above chart, a combined 14.58%) they are colour coded red.

This can help to highlight any localised issues regarding whether consultees consider the draft CRMP to have identified key fire and rescue risks, however caution should be used given low levels of response in some areas and it should not be treated as a definitive opinion.

Please note that respondents can answer individual questions regarding their unitary area, home postcode or nearest fire station therefore individual totals by each criterion may differ.

Response by unitary authority area

Total responses (inc. other and Prefer Not to Say (PNTS)): 376

Geography	No. of responses	Completely	Mostly	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
Cheshire East	154	26.62%	53.25%	11.69%	1.30%	1.30%	5.84%
Cheshire West and Chester	120	20.00%	28.33%	12.50%	10.00%	22.50%	6.67%
Halton	32	59.38%	34.38%	6.25%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Warrington	62	38.71%	30.65%	9.68%	4.84%	11.29%	4.84%

Response by Post Town/Postcode

Total responses: 383

Geography	No. of responses	Completely	Mostly	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
Cheshire East							
Alsager (ST7)	8	12.50%	87.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Audlem (CW3)	2	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Crewe (CW1, CW2)	60	25.00%	50.00%	16.67%	0.00%	3.33%	5.00%
Congleton (CW12)	18	27.78%	55.56%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Holmes Chapel (CW4)	7	28.57%	57.14%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	14.29%
Knutsford (WA16)	21	23.81%	57.14%	4.76%	0.00%	0.00%	14.29%
Macclesfield (SK10, SK11)	28	28.57%	53.57%	14.29%	3.57%	0.00%	0.00%
Middlewich (CW10)	4	0.00%	75.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Nantwich (CW5)	8	37.50%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%
Poynton (SK12)	4	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Sandbach (CW11)	11	27.27%	54.55%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	9.09%
Wilmslow (SK9)	4	25.00%	75.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Cheshire West and Chester							
Chester (CH1, CH2, CH3, CH4)	12	25.00%	66.67%	8.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Ellesmere Port (CH65, CH66)	4	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Frodsham (WA6)	20	35.00%	45.00%	5.00%	0.00%	0.00%	15.00%
Malpas (SY14)	1	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Neston (CH64)	0	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Northwich (CW8, CW9)	52	11.54%	13.46%	19.23%	17.31%	30.77%	7.69%
Tarporley (CW6)	4	0.00%	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Winsford (CW7)	12	33.33%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	16.77%	0.00%
Halton							
Runcorn (WA7)	14	50.00%	35.71%	14.29%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Widnes (WA8, L24)	11	63.64%	36.36%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Warrington							
Birchwood (WA3)	8	75.00%	12.50%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Lymm (WA13)	1	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Geography	No. responses	Completely	Mostly	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
Penketh (WA5)	6	33.33%	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%
Stockton Heath (WA4)	25	28.00%	36.00%	12.00%	4.00%	20.00%	0.00%
Warrington (WA1, WA2)	38	39.47%	47.37%	2.63%	0.00%	0.00%	10.53%

Response by Nearest Fire Station

Total responses: 286

Geography	No. of responses	Completely	Mostly	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
Nearest Fire Station							
Alsager	9	22.22%	77.78%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Audlem	2	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Birchwood	8	50.00%	12.50%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%
Bollington	5	80.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Chester	9	22.22%	66.67%	11.11%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Congleton	16	25.00%	62.50%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Crewe	21	19.05%	47.62%	19.05%	0.00%	4.76%	9.52%
Ellesmere Port	4	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Frodsham	17	29.41%	52.94%	5.88%	0.00%	0.00%	11.76%
Holmes Chapel	6	33.33%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%
Knutsford	15	13.33%	73.33%	6.67%	0.00%	0.00%	6.67%
Lymm	4	75.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Macclesfield	16	18.75%	56.25%	18.75%	6.25%	0.00%	0.00%
Malpas	1	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Middlewich	4	0.00%	75.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Nantwich	5	40.00%	40.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%
Northwich	55	10.91%	14.55%	16.36%	14.55%	38.18%	5.45%
Penketh	5	40.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Powey Lane	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Poynton	4	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Runcorn	14	57.14%	35.71%	7.14%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Sandbach	8	37.50%	50.00%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Stockton Heath	17	29.41%	17.65%	17.65%	0.00%	35.29%	0.00%
Tarporley	4	0.00%	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Warrington	13	30.77%	46.15%	0.00%	7.69%	7.69%	7.69%
Widnes	5	60.00%	40.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Wilmslow	6	16.67%	83.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Winsford	13	15.38%	38.46%	7.69%	15.38%	15.38%	7.69%

Commentary

The analysis shows that across three of four unitary areas most respondents consider the draft CRMP to identify at least most key fire and rescue risks (with the exception of Cheshire West and Chester with 48.33% of respondents). Analysis at a more granular local level reveals that there are some localities where thought is more pronounced, in particular around Northwich. Analysing the additional comments provided by these residents reveals that the fire cover proposal at Northwich has been a factor in response, mentioned in over one third of additional comments from Northwich residents.

While fewer additional comments have been provided by Stockton Heath residents, over 40% of these relate to the fire cover proposals, which also suggests the planned changes to fire cover have factored into the consideration of Stockon Heath residents in their response to whether the draft CRMP identifies the key fire and rescue risks facing Cheshire.

Demographic analysis

The table below provides an analysis of the extent to which the respondent considers the draft CRMP has identified key fire and rescue risks according to the demographic characteristics of the respondent.

Levels of opinion to the package of proposals are provided in each table. It is important to note that not all respondents will have answered each of the questions in the survey, therefore totals for each category will vary. Data is included for those who have preferred not to identify each demographic characteristic.

Where respondents in a specific demographic are above the average overall figure (those who consider the draft CRMP to completely or mostly identify key risks in the overall chart, a combined 68.70%) they are colour coded green. Where consultees in a specific locality are below the average overall figure (those stating the draft CRMP identifies little or no key risks in the overall chart, a combined 14.58%) they are colour coded red.

To protect the anonymity of respondents and enable reporting, some categories with a lower level of response such as non-majority religious beliefs or ethnicities have been grouped together and reported against those who form the majority religion/ethnicity or have not stated any option. As with the geographic analysis, caution should be used given low levels of response in some demographics and it should not be treated as a definitive opinion. Respondents can also answer all or some of the criteria questions.

Demographic	No. of responses	Completely	Mostly	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
Age							
Under 18	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
18-24	7	28.57%	42.86%	0.00%	28.57%	0.00%	0.00%
25-34	13	30.77%	23.08%	23.08%	0.00%	15.38%	7.69%
35-44	40	15.00%	37.50%	12.50%	5.00%	30.00%	0.00%
45-54	41	17.07%	31.71%	14.63%	14.63%	17.07%	4.88%
55-64	58	25.86%	41.38%	12.07%	1.72%	17.24%	1.72%
65-74	111	39.64%	44.14%	8.11%	1.80%	0.90%	5.41%
75+	74	39.19%	47.30%	4.05%	0.00%	0.00%	9.46%
Prefer not to say (PNTS)	10	0.00%	40.00%	50.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Gender							
Male	165	28.48%	44.85%	12.12%	3.03%	6.67%	4.85%
Female	178	33.15%	37.64%	9.55%	4.49%	10.11%	5.06%
Other or PNTS	17	0.00%	29.41%	23.53%	17.65%	17.65%	11.76%
Trans Identity							
Yes	2	0.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	0.00%
No	262	26.34%	44.27%	11.07%	4.20%	10.31%	3.82%
PNTS	15	0.00%	26.67%	26.67%	20.00%	13.33%	13.33%
Ethnicity							
White British	319	33.23%	42.63%	8.46%	3.13%	7.21%	5.33%
Black and Minority Ethnic Group (BAME)	21	14.29%	28.57%	9.52%	9.52%	33.33%	4.76%
PNTS	9	0.00%	22.22%	55.56%	11.11%	0.00%	11.11%
Religion							
No religion	72	22.22%	43.06%	12.50%	4.17%	11.11%	6.94%
Christian	193	30.05%	45.60%	8.29%	3.63%	8.29%	4.15%
Other religion	6	33.33%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	16.67%
PNTS	38	31.58%	34.21%	23.68%	5.26%	2.63%	2.63%
Disability Status							
Disabled	63	36.51%	31.75%	12.70%	3.17%	9.52%	6.35%
Not Disabled	263	28.90%	44.49%	9.13%	3.80%	8.75%	4.94%
PNTS	20	15.00%	40.00%	20.00%	10.00%	10.00%	5.00%

Sexual Orientation							
Heterosexual	284	32.39%	42.96%	9.15%	2.11%	8.45%	4.93%
Gay/Lesbian	6	33.33%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	16.67%
Bisexual	5	40.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Other or PNTS	38	10.53%	36.84%	23.68%	18.42%	7.89%	2.62%

Commentary

While low levels of response in some metrics mean caution should be applied to analysis, there are two demographic groups where there are more substantial levels of respondents and further analysis may provide insight as to specific response levels.

In relation to age, there are higher levels of those aged under 65 who do not consider the draft CRMP to sufficiently identify key risks. This is most pronounced in the 35-44 age cohort (where 35% do not consider the CRMP to identify risk). Additional comments from these age groups suggest that opposition to the proposed changes to fire cover, particularly in Northwich and Stockton Heath, have been a factor in the survey results.

Regarding gender, there is a higher level of women and those who prefer not to say who do not consider the draft CRMP to identify key risks. When free text comments from these respondents are considered, this also suggests that the fire cover proposals have been a factor in response, specifically the conversion of four on-call fire engines to weekday fire engines and the impact on overnight and weekend resilience.
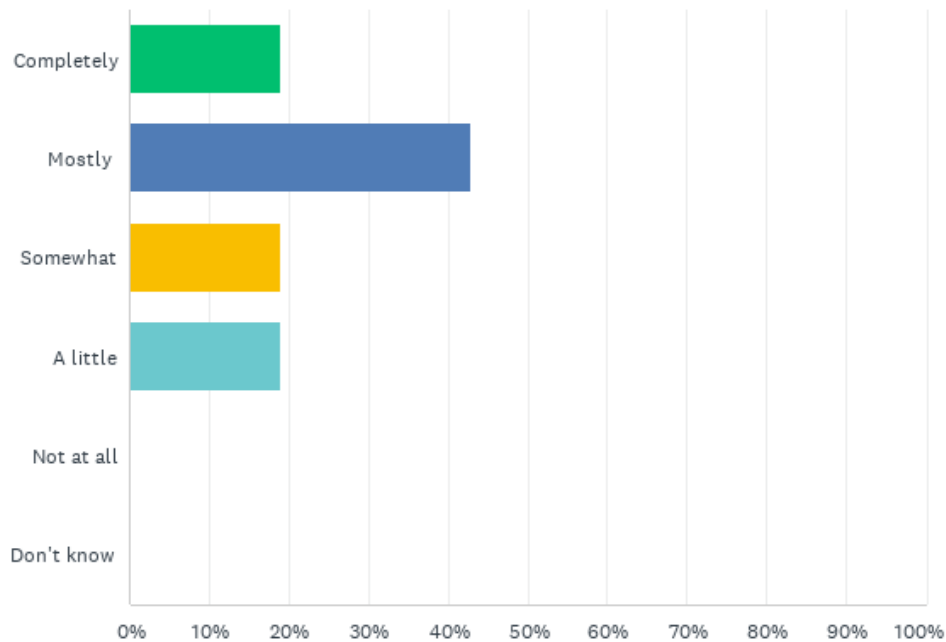
Staff responses

Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Completely	19.05%	4
Mostly	42.86%	9
Somewhat	19.05%	4
A little	19.05%	4
Not at all	0.00%	0
Don't Know	0.00%	0
Total	**100.00%**	**21**

Amongst responses from staff, 61.91% of respondents agreeing the draft CRMP completely or mostly identifies the key fire and rescue risks facing Cheshire, compared to 19.05% of respondents who felt the draft CRMP identified few of the risks. A further 19.05% of respondents felt the draft CRMP somewhat identified key risks.

Partner responses

The three partner agencies who provided a survey response all stated the draft CRMP either completely or mostly identified key fire and rescue risks.

6.3 Summary of Free Text Responses

Respondents were asked to consider any additional risks that they feel the Authority should consider as part of the CRMP process. A total of 171 comments were provided. Of these, 61 comments (35.67%) stated that the respondent had no further comment to make.

Many of the comments related to issues which were already accounted for within the draft CRMP itself. There were 38 comments (22.22%) which concern the provision of fire cover within the county, including feedback which referred to the fire cover proposals within the consultation.

A further 14 comments (8.19%) were made in relation to risks from transport networks. Specific risks highlighted include the volume of incidents on the road network and the emerging risk of electric vehicles.

The number of motorway crashes daily on the m56 and m6, the increasing number of electric cars with fires, the increased flooding in all of cheshire.

As more battery powered cars, bicycles, trains etc come into use, the fire risk due to these high flammable batteries could significantly increase.

<div align="right">

Responses from Northwich residents

</div>

Other risks which were highlighted include the impact of climate change (10 comments, 5.85%); ensuring that the Authority has considered the impact of increasing occurrences of flooding and wildfires. The perceived risk from an increasing population and growth in housing (9 comments, 5.25%) was also mentioned by some respondents.

Projected ageing population and increased dwelling poses greater risk. Secondly, the increase in electric vehicles increase the chance of lithium fires. Much more difficult to put out and risks dwellings in immediate proximity. These risks are not adequately quantified.

<div align="right">

Response from a Cheshire West and Chester resident

</div>

Ageing population and many old people being part cared for at home present an increased fire risk. Where NHS send elderly patients home fire risk should be assessed and fire alarms/smoke alarms provided.

<div align="right">

Response from a Chester resident

</div>

6.4 Management of Risks
Summary of Survey Responses

Q3 To what extent do you think that the package of proposals within the draft CRMP address the fire and rescue risks that we have identified?
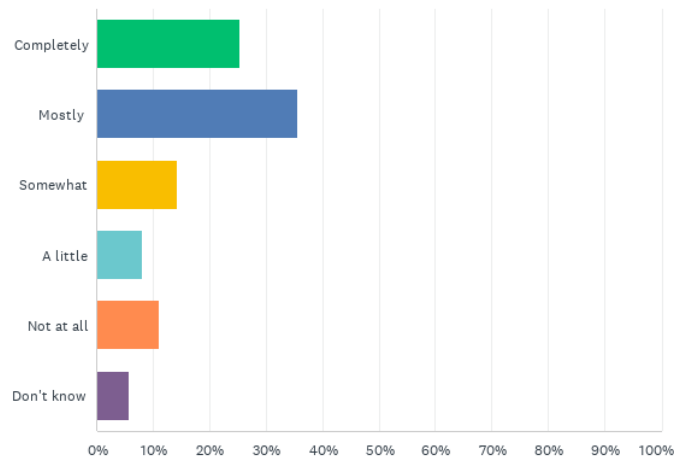
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Completely	25.27%	116
Mostly	35.51%	163
Somewhat	14.38%	66
A little	8.06%	37
Not at all	11.11%	51
Don't Know	5.66%	26
Total	**100.00%**	**459**

The chart above shows that 60.78% of respondents agreed that the draft CRMP either completely or mostly addresses the key fire and rescue risks that have been identified, compared to 19.17% of respondents who felt that the draft CRMP either did not address the risks or only addressed a few risks.

Public responses
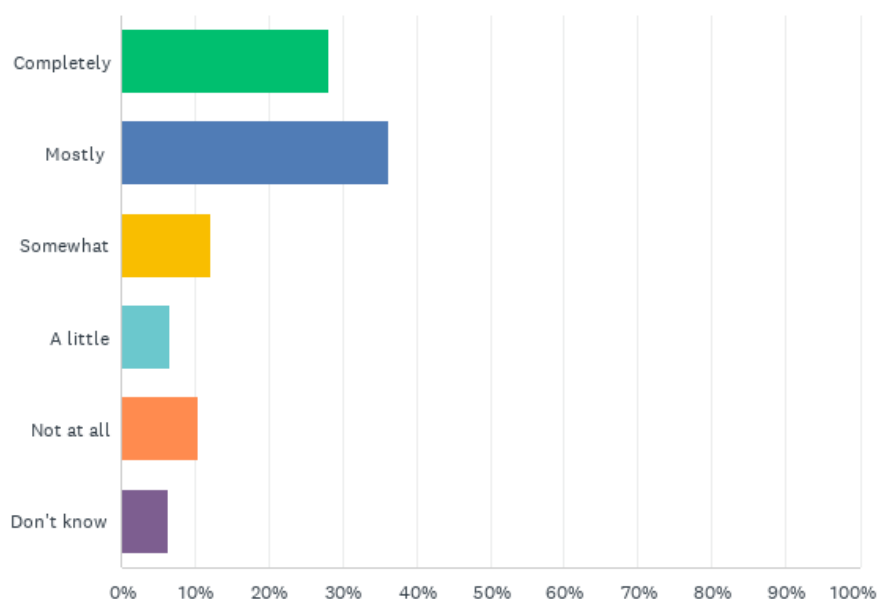
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Completely	28.12%	106
Mostly	36.34%	137
Somewhat	12.20%	46
A little	6.63%	25
Not at all	10.34%	39
Don't Know	6.37%	24
Total	100.00%	377

Of the 377 respondents who identified as being members of the public, 64.46% considered that the proposals within the draft CRMP either completely or mostly addressed the fire and rescue risks identified; whereas 16.97% felt that the draft CRMP either addressed few risks or none at all. A further 12.20% felt the draft CRMP somewhat addressed the key fire and rescue risks, while 6.37% of respondents did not know.

Geographic analysis

The tables below provide an analysis of response by the specific locality in which the respondent lives. The analysis covers the unitary authority area of the respondent, their postcode/post-town (using the first part of a full postcode), and the nearest fire station to the respondent. It is important to note that not all respondents will have answered each of the questions in the survey, therefore totals for each category will vary.

The degree to which respondents feel the draft CRMP identifies key fire and rescue risks (from completely to not at all) are provided in each table.

Where levels of respondents in a specific locality are above the average overall figure (either completely or mostly agree the draft CRMP addresses the identified fire and rescue risks in the above chart, a combined 64.46%) they are colour coded green. Where levels of response in a specific locality are below the average overall figure (the draft CRMP either addresses little or no risks in the above chart, a combined 16.97%) they are colour coded red.

This can help to highlight any localised issues regarding whether consultees consider the proposals within the draft CRMP to sufficiently address key fire and rescue risks; however caution should be used given low levels of response in some areas and it should not be treated as a definitive opinion. Respondents could answer all or some of the questions regarding unitary area, postcode and nearest fire station therefore individual totals will differ.

Response by unitary authority area

Total responses (inc. other and Prefer Not to Say (PNTS)): 376

Geography	No. of responses	Completely	Mostly	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
Cheshire East	154	26.62%	48.05%	14.29%	1.95%	1.30%	7.79%
Cheshire West and Chester	120	18.33%	29.17%	9.17%	13.33%	23.33%	6.67%
Halton	32	53.13%	31.25%	12.50%	0.00%	3.13%	0.00%
Warrington	52	37.10%	27.42%	11.29%	9.68%	8.06%	6.45%

Response by Post Town/Postcode

Total responses: 383

Geography	No. of responses	Completely	Mostly	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
Cheshire East							
Alsager (ST7)	8	37.50%	37.50%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Audlem (CW3)	2	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Crewe (CW1, CW2)	60	25.00%	50.00%	16.67%	0.00%	3.33%	5.00%
Congleton (CW12)	18	27.78%	55.56%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Holmes Chapel (CW4)	7	28.57%	57.14%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	14.29%
Knutsford (WA16)	21	23.81%	57.14%	4.76%	0.00%	0.00%	14.29%
Macclesfield (SK10, SK11)	28	28.57%	53.57%	14.29%	3.57%	0.00%	0.00%
Middlewich (CW10)	4	0.00%	75.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Nantwich (CW5)	8	37.50%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%
Poynton (SK12)	4	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Sandbach (CW11)	11	27.27%	54.55%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	9.09%
Wilmslow (SK9)	4	25.00%	75.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Cheshire West and Chester							
Chester (CH1, CH2, CH3, CH4)	12	25.00%	66.67%	8.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Ellesmere Port (CH65, CH66)	4	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Frodsham (WA6)	20	25.00%	55.00%	0.00%	0.00%	5.00%	15.00%
Malpas (SY14)	1	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Neston (CH64)	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Northwich (CW8, CW9)	52	11.54%	9.62%	15.38%	26.92%	30.77%	5.77%
Tarporley (CW6)	4	0.00%	50.00%	25.00%	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%
Winsford (CW7)	12	16.67%	50.00%	8.33%	0.00%	16.67%	8.33%
Halton							
Runcorn (WA7)	14	35.71%	35.71%	21.43%	0.00%	7.14%	0.00%
Widnes (WA8, L24)	11	63.64%	36.36%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Warrington							
Birchwood (WA3)	8	75.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Lymm (WA13)	1	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Penketh (WA5)	6	33.33%	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%

Geography	No. of responses	Completely	Mostly	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
Stockton Heath (WA4)	25	28.00%	28.00%	16.00%	12.00%	12.00%	4.00%
Warrington (WA1, WA2)	38	31.58%	47.37%	2.63%	2.63%	2.63%	13.16%

Response by Nearest Fire Station

Total responses: 286

Geography	No. of responses	Completely	Mostly	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
Nearest Fire Station							
Alsager	9	33.33%	55.56%	11.11%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Audlem	2	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Birchwood	8	50.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%	12.50%
Bollington	5	60.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%
Chester	9	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Congleton	16	37.50%	37.50%	18.75%	0.00%	0.00%	6.25%
Crewe	21	19.05%	38.10%	28.57%	9.52%	0.00%	4.76%
Ellesmere Port	4	25.00%	75.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Frodsham	17	23.53%	58.82%	0.00%	0.00%	5.88%	11.76%
Holmes Chapel	6	16.67%	83.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Knutsford	15	20.00%	66.67%	0.00%	0.00%	6.67%	6.67%
Lymm	4	50.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	25.00%
Macclesfield	16	18.75%	50.00%	18.75%	0.00%	6.25%	6.25%
Malpas	1	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Middlewich	4	0.00%	75.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Nantwich	5	60.00%	0.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%
Northwich	55	10.91%	10.91%	14.55%	25.45%	34.55%	3.64%
Penketh	5	40.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Powey Lane	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Poynton	4	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Runcorn	14	42.86%	35.71%	21.43%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Sandbach	8	37.50%	50.00%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Stockton Heath	17	29.41%	11.76%	17.65%	11.76%	23.53%	5.88%
Tarporley	4	25.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%
Warrington	13	38.46%	23.08%	7.69%	15.38%	7.69%	7.69%
Widnes	5	80.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Wilmslow	6	16.67%	83.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Winsford	13	15.38%	38.46%	15.38%	0.00%	30.77%	0.00%

Commentary

Across three of the four unitary areas (with the exception of Cheshire West and Chester), most respondents considered that the draft CRMP addresses key fire and rescue risks facing Cheshire. When analysis is undertaken at a more local level, there are some locations where respondents are more inclined to consider the draft CRMP does not address key risks. The notable location is Northwich, which is the only location (by postcode and nearest fire station metrics) where there is a majority of respondents who do not consider the draft CRMP to address sufficient risks.

Cross-analysis of free text comments provided by these respondents shows that the proposed change to fire cover in Northwich is a material factor in response. This is also apparent, albeit to a lesser extent, in relation to the proposed change of fire cover involving Stockton Heath and the lower than average levels of local residents considering the draft CRMP addresses fire and rescue risks.

Demographic analysis

The table below provides an analysis of the extent to which the respondent considers the draft CRMP has identified key fire and rescue risks according to the demographic characteristics of the respondent.

Levels of opinion to the package of proposals are provided in each table. It is important to note that not all respondents will have answered each of the questions in the survey, therefore totals for each category will vary. Data is included for those who have preferred not to identify each demographic characteristic.

Where respondents in a specific demographic are above the average overall figure (those who consider the draft CRMP to completely or mostly address key risks in the overall chart, a combined 64.46%) they are colour coded green. Where consultees in a specific locality are below the average overall figure (those stating the draft CRMP addresses little or no key risks in the overall chart, a combined 16.97%) they are colour coded red.

To protect the anonymity of respondents and enable reporting, some categories with a lower level of response such as non-majority religious beliefs or ethnicities have been grouped together and reported against those who form the majority religion/ethnicity or have not stated any option. As with the geographic analysis, caution should be used given low levels of response in some areas and it should not be treated as a definitive opinion. As above, respondents could answer all or some of the demographic questions which may lead to different totals for different metrics.

Demographic	No. of responses	Completely	Mostly	Somewhat	A little	Not at all	Don't Know
Age							
Under 18	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
18-24	7	28.57%	42.86%	0.00%	28.57%	0.00%	0.00%
25-34	13	30.77%	23.08%	23.08%	0.00%	15.38%	7.69%
35-44	40	15.00%	37.50%	12.50%	5.00%	30.00%	0.00%
45-54	41	17.07%	31.71%	14.63%	14.63%	17.07%	4.88%
55-64	58	25.86%	41.38%	12.07%	1.72%	17.24%	1.72%
65-74	111	39.64%	44.14%	8.11%	1.80%	0.90%	5.41%
75+	74	39.19%	47.30%	4.05%	0.00%	0.00%	9.46%
Prefer not to say (PNTS)	10	0.00%	40.00%	50.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Gender							
Male	165	27.27%	41.21%	11.52%	4.85%	7.88%	7.27%
Female	178	30.90%	35.96%	10.67%	7.30%	10.11%	5.06%
Other or PNTS	17	5.88%	17.65%	35.29%	17.65%	17.65%	5.88%
Trans Identity							
Yes	2	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	0.00%
No	262	26.34%	39.31%	11.45%	7.25%	11.45%	4.20%
PNTS	15	6.67%	20.00%	33.33%	13.33%	20.00%	6.67%
Ethnicity							
White British	319	31.35%	40.13%	9.09%	5.64%	7.21%	6.58%
Black and Minority Ethnic Group (BAME)	21	14.29%	19.05%	19.05%	9.52%	33.33%	4.76%
PNTS	9	11.11%	33.33%	44.44%	0.00%	11.11%	0.00%
Religion							
No religion	72	20.83%	36.11%	13.89%	6.94%	13.89%	8.33%
Christian	193	30.05%	43.01%	8.81%	6.22%	7.77%	4.15%
Other religion	6	50.00%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	16.67%
PNTS	38	28.95%	31.58%	26.32%	7.89%	5.26%	0.00%
Disability Status							
Disabled	63	34.92%	34.92%	9.52%	1.59%	12.70%	6.35%

Not Disabled	263	27.76%	39.92%	9.89%	7.22%	8.75%	6.46%
PNTS	20	15.00%	30.00%	35.00%	10.00%	10.00%	0.00%
Sexual Orientation							
Heterosexual	284	30.63%	41.55%	8.45%	4.93%	9.15%	5.28%
Gay/Lesbian	6	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	16.67%
Bisexual	5	40.00%	20.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Other or PNTS	38	10.53%	21.05%	34.21%	21.05%	7.89%	5.26%

Commentary

While low levels of response in some metrics mean caution should be applied to analysis, there are two demographic groups where there are more substantial levels of respondents and further analysis may provide insight as to specific response levels.

In relation to age, there are higher levels of those aged under 65 who do not consider the draft CRMP to sufficiently address key risks. This is most pronounced in the 35-44 age cohort (where 35% do not consider the CRMP to address risk). Additional comments from these age groups suggest that opposition to the proposed changes to fire cover, particularly in Northwich and Stockton Heath, have been a factor in the survey results.

Regarding gender, there is a higher level of women and those who have preferred not to say who do not consider the draft CRMP to address key risks. When free text comments from these respondents are analysed, this also suggests that the fire cover proposals have influenced responses, particularly in relation to the conversion of four on-call fire engines to weekday fire engines and the perceived impact on overnight and weekend resilience.
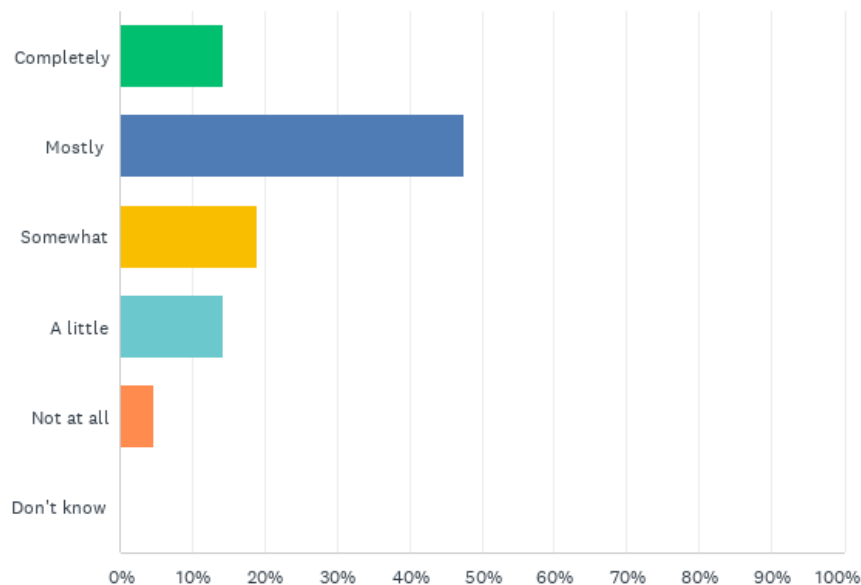
Staff responses

Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Completely	14.29%	3
Mostly	47.62%	10
Somewhat	19.05%	4
A little	14.29%	3
Not at all	4.76%	1
Don't Know	0.00%	0
Total	**100.00%**	**21**

Responses from staff were similar to the sentiment from the public responses; with 61.91% of staff respondents agreeing the draft CRMP completely or mostly addresses the key fire and rescue risks facing Cheshire, compared to 19.05% of respondents who felt the draft CRMP addressed few or none of the risks.

Partner responses

The three partner agencies who provided a survey response all stated the proposals within the draft CRMP either completely or mostly addressed key risks which had been identified.

6.5 Summary of Free Text Responses

Public responses

There were 126 free text responses provided by public consultees. Of these, 44 (34.92% of comments) were where respondents had indicated they had no further comment to make.

The provision of fire cover was referenced in 36 (28.56%) comments. 19 of these were respondents highlighting their preference for increased levels of fire cover across the county, in particular calling for more use of full-time resources.

> *"Obviously, you need greater provision of 24/7 appliances and staff, but to do that you need more money! This seems to be a highly competent use of resource within the budget you have. I am surprised by the very low availability of part-time staff and equipment. You obviously need to understand the drivers around this very low availability."*
>
> *Response from a Runcorn resident*

Nine comments (7.14%) raised a concern over the fire cover proposals and the subsequent impact on overnight and weekend cover.

> *"Why are all the plans for increased firefighters in the week - what's going on at weekend. Surely it would be best that at some sites the full time fire fighter posts were Tuesday to Saturday and then at other sites Sunday to Thursday - so that there is cover into the weekends."*
>
> *Response from a Cheshire West resident*

There were eight comments (6.34%) which related directly to the proposals regarding Northwich and Stockton Heath Fire Stations. Comments regarding Northwich expressed concerns over the loss of the second fire engine, while the Stockton Heath comments queried the need for the selling of the housing stock and called for the current on-call provision to be maintained.

> *"Provide adequate cover for Northwich which means not losing the second fire engine based in the town".*
>
> *Response from a Northwich resident*

> *"I think it important that the on-call firefighters renting houses should only be moved out if it is clear they have realistic accommodation alternatives (Stockton Heath). Is selling Authority houses at Stockton Heath really necessary?"*
>
> *Response from a Macclesfield resident*

A further five comments (3.97%) were provided regarding on-call availability, with respondents suggesting that there should be increased focus on recruitment and retention with better pay structures, which may alleviate availability issues within the on-call system.

"More recruitment in the on-call with better pay and improved conditions. Speak to other local groups mountain rescue/lifeboats who manage to provide cover in these areas for very little reward."

<div align="right">Response from a Frodsham resident</div>

The prevention activities in the community were referenced in 17 comments (13.49%). Respondents expressed their preference for more education and awareness in the community around a range of existing risks (smoke alarms, road safety, evacuation plans, electrical safety) and new and emerging risks such as electric vehicles.

"I am not sure the risks from, and dangers faced, from lithium-ion batteries in their various forms and uses is addressed strongly enough. This is an emerging issue but has the potential to be a serious risk and challenge to the F&RS."

<div align="right">Response from a Holmes Chapel resident</div>

There were five comments provided by staff respondents, of which one stated they had no further comment to make. Three comments related to the fire cover proposals, specifically a concern over a perceived reduction in service levels in Stockton Heath and from the conversion of four on-call fire engines to weekday engines.

Staff feedback

Four staff comments were received. One states the respondent has no further comment to make, while two comments relate to the proposed changes to fire cover. A further comment highlights the need to ensure adequate water supplies to non-domestic premises (NDPs):

"The process for ensuring adequate water supplies for all new NDP's requires a review, specifically in relation to the provision of hydrants and their addition to Firecore. Liaison between building control and Protection need to be better to ensure that the required water supplies are actually provided."

<div align="right">Response from a member of staff within Service Delivery</div>

6.6 Additional Staff Feedback

Feedback from a staff focus group held on 18 December 2023 referred to some risks identified within the draft CRMP and the proposals to address them.

Vulnerable families and domestic violence were raised as risks that should be highlighted within the CRMP. A question was raised as to whether local unitary level multi-agency meetings between fire and other partners were still being regularly held. The participant felt that these were a useful forum for resolving local issues but that post-Covid they had not been held as regularly as before.

One participant suggested that the Service's Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP), used to prioritise the inspection of non-domestic premises, could be improved. They said that the list of properties to be inspected that is generated by the RBIP doesn't always match to the data captured in the Service's SAFFIRE system or that changes in the use of a premises are not reflected in the RBIP. Pop-up shops were highlighted as a specific example of where changes in use are not reflected.

6.7 Partner Feedback

There were no significant comments on this issue received from partners.

7. Safe Use of Lithium-Ion Battery Products

7.1 Background and Proposal

The growth of lithium-ion battery powered products is seen as a new and emerging risk for fire and rescue services; particularly given the growth of the electric vehicle market and increasing use of electric bikes and scooters.

The consultation sought feedback from respondents on what type of lithium-ion products they own in the home, as well as any key safety considerations they have regarding these products. This feedback is intended to help shape the development of fire prevention advice regarding the use of lithium-ion battery products.

7.2 Ownership of Lithium-Ion Products

Overall Response

Q5 Are there any of the following lithium-ion battery powered products in your household? (Tick all that apply)
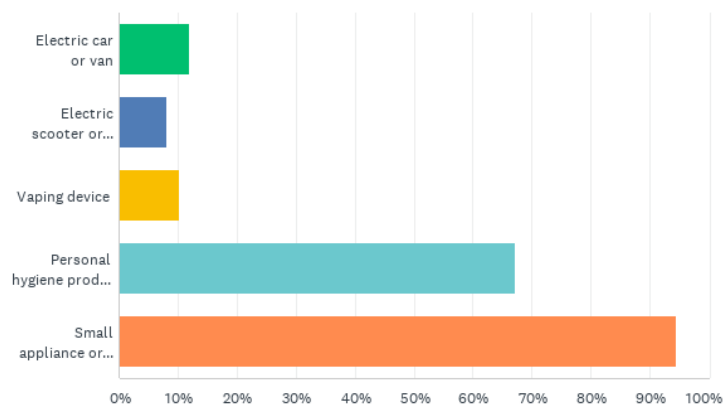
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Electric car or van	11.93%	50
Electric scooter or e-bike	8.11%	34
Vaping device	10.26%	43
Personal hygiene product	67.06%	281
Small appliance or toy	94.51%	396

N.B. The total number of respondents was 419. As respondents could select more than one answer, the number of responses for each option may not tally with the total number of respondents.

The chart above shows that amongst respondents the vast majority owned a small lithium-ion appliance such as a mobile phone, laptop, digital camera, or toy, while over two thirds of respondents owned a product such as a rechargeable toothbrush or other hygiene product.

Fewer respondents stated that they owned a vaping device, or a larger item such as electric bike or vehicle.

Public Survey
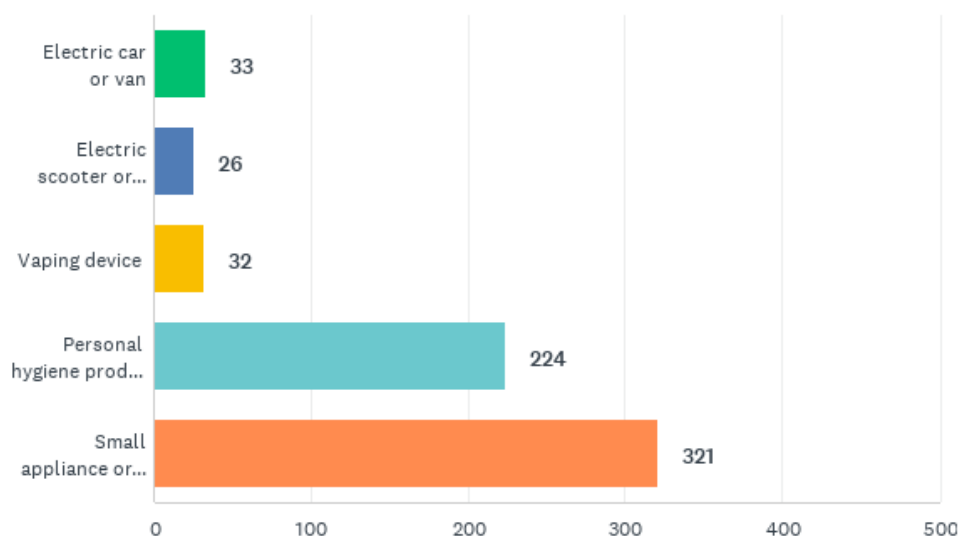
Option	Number of responses	Percentage
Electric car or van	33	9.62%
Electric scooter or e-bike	26	7.58%
Vaping device	32	9.33%
Personal hygiene product	224	65.31%
Small appliance or toy	321	93.59%

N.B. The total number of respondents was 343. Please note that respondents could select more than one option to the above question, therefore total responses may not correlate to the number of survey responses received.

Geographic analysis

Geography	No. of responses	Electric car or van	Electric scooter or bike	Vaping device	Personal hygiene product	Small appliance or toy
Cheshire East	141	9.22%	7.80%	7.09%	68.09%	95.74%
Cheshire West and Chester	108	9.26%	10.19%	11.11%	67.59%	92.59%
Halton	30	3.33%	3.33%	13.33%	50.00%	96.67%
Warrington	56	14.29%	5.36%	8.93%	64.29%	87.50%

N.B. The total number of respondents was 343. Please note that respondents could select more than one option to the above question, therefore total responses may not correlate to the number of survey responses received.

Analysis by unitary area reveals that there is near universal ownership of a small appliance (e.g. mobile phone, tablet) and a majority ownership of a hygiene product (e.g. electric toothbrush). Ownership of vaping devices are more prevalent in respondents from Halton, followed by Cheshire West and Chester, while ownership of an electric car or van is highest amongst respondents living in Warrington.

Demographic analysis

Demographic	No. of responses	Electric car or van	Electric scooter or bike	Vaping device	Personal hygiene product	Small appliance or toy
Age (Total respondents: 319)						
Under 18	0	-	-	-	-	-
18-24	7	14.29%	14.29%	28.57%	42.86%	100.00%

25-34	11	18.18%	18.18%	9.09%	81.82%	90.91%
35-44	39	7.69%	10.26%	12.82%	74.36%	94.87%
45-54	41	20.00%	2.86%	17.14%	80.00%	94.29%
55-64	56	5.36%	12.50%	16.07%	67.86%	91.07%
65-74	106	9.43%	5.66%	3.77%	64.15%	92.45%
75+	65	3.13%	4.69%	3.13%	54.69%	96.88%
Gender (Total respondents: 315)						
Male	148	10.81%	6.76%	7.43%	66.22%	92.57%
Female	167	8.98%	7.19%	11.38%	64.07%	94.01%

N.B. respondents could answer all, or some, of the demographic questions, which may lead to different totals for different metrics.

Commentary

When comparing data by the age of respondents, it can be seen there is near universal ownership of small appliances (smartphones, tablets etc) amongst all age groups. In most age groups (except 18-24) there are a majority of respondents who own a personal hygiene product (e.g. rechargeable toothbrush). Ownership of vaping devices is higher amongst those of working age, particularly the 18-24 age group.

Ownership of electric vehicles is highest amongst respondents aged 45-54, followed by the 25.34 age group (who also have the highest ownership of an electric scooter or bicycle).

Analysis by gender of respondents reveals little difference between male and female respondents regarding the ownership of different types of lithium-ion products, with ownership of vaping devices slightly more prevalent amongst female respondents.

Staff survey
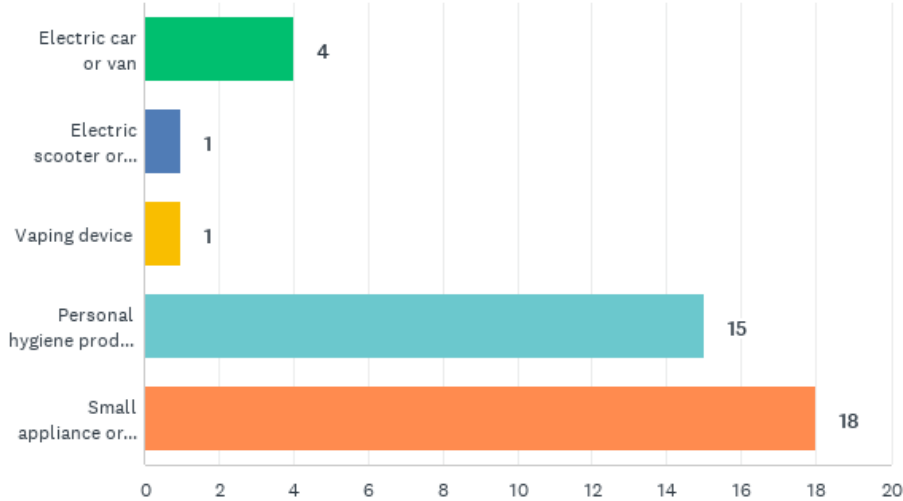
Option	Number of responses	Percentage
Electric car or van	4	22.22%
Electric scooter or e-bike	1	5.56%
Vaping device	1	5.56%
Personal hygiene product	15	83.33%
Small appliance or toy	18	100.00%

N.B. The total number of respondents was 18. Please note that respondents could select more than one option to the above question, therefore total responses may not correlate to the number of survey responses received.

Commentary

While response levels are lower, there is also universal ownership of a small lithium-ion product amongst staff, and a majority of respondents own a personal hygiene product like a rechargeable toothbrush. There were comparatively more owners of electric vehicles than public respondents.

Partner feedback

There were no significant comments on this issue received from partners.

7.3 Safety Advice
Overall Response

Q6 Regarding lithium-ion battery products, would you like to receive safety information on any of the following issues? (Tick all that apply)
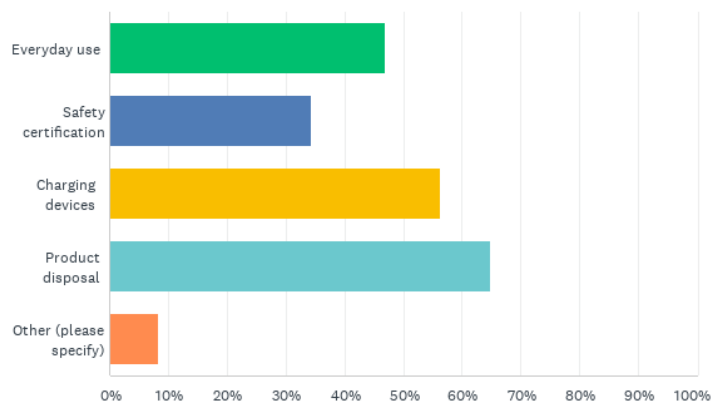
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Everyday use	46.98%	140
Safety certification	34.23%	102
Charging devices	56.38%	168
Product disposal	64.77%	193
Other	8.39%	25

N.B. The total number of respondents was 298. Please note that respondents could select more than one option to the above question, therefore total responses may not correlate to the number of survey responses received.

A total of 298 respondents answered this question. Responses indicate a broad spread in preferences regarding safety advice, albeit most respondents would prioritise information regarding the safe charging of devices (56.38%) and the safe disposal of products (64.77%). The spread of references suggests a need to provide a holistic approach to advice which covers several themes.

Of the 25 respondents who provided an "other" response, most of these stated that the individual had no further comment to make. A small number of comments highlighted that advice should also incorporate information related to electric vehicles and safety regarding domestic solar panels and accompanying battery installations.

Public survey
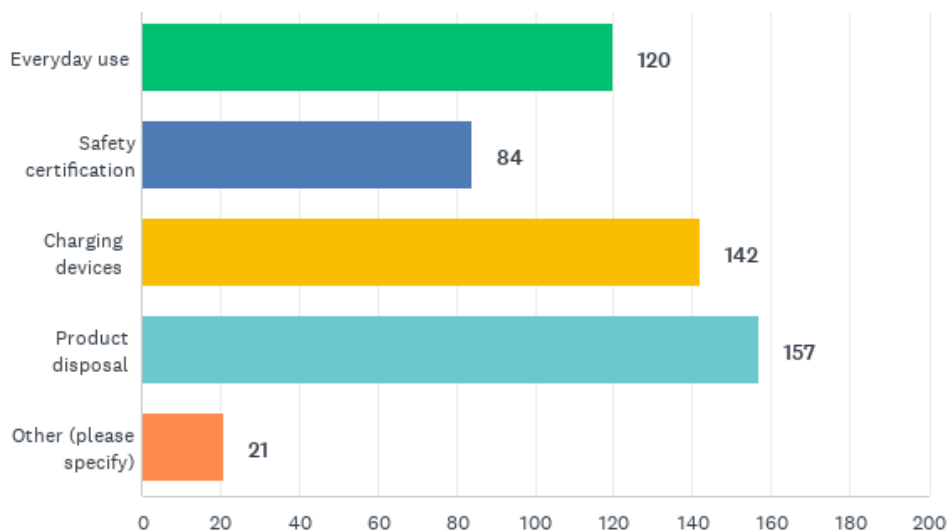
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Everyday use	48.98%	120
Safety certification	34.29%	84
Charging devices	57.96%	142
Product disposal	64.08%	157
Other	8.57%	21

N.B. The total number of respondents was 245. Please note that respondents could select more than one option to the above question, therefore total responses may not correlate to the number of survey responses received.

Commentary

Amongst public respondents, a majority would prefer to receive safety advice regarding safely disposing of a lithium-ion battery product, followed by advice on safe charging of devices. While under half would prefer advice on everyday use or safety certification of products, sufficient responses suggest that the safety advice developed in relation to lithium-ion needs to be holistic in nature, covering several different issues.

Staff survey
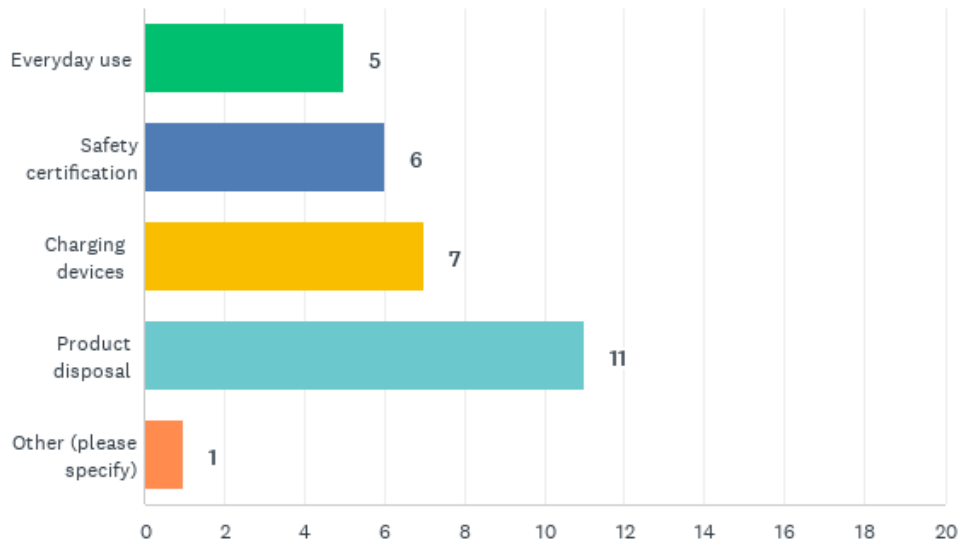
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Everyday use	33.33%	5
Safety certification	40.00%	6
Charging devices	46.67%	7
Product disposal	73.33%	11
Other	6.67%	1

N.B. The total number of respondents was 15. Please note that respondents could select more than one option to the above question, therefore total responses may not correlate to the number of survey responses received.

Commentary

Amongst staff respondents, although there is also a broad preference of safety advice, there is a higher concentration of respondents who would prefer to receive safety advice that provides information on how to safely dispose of lithium-ion battery products.

Partner feedback

There were no significant comments received on this issue from partners.

8. Changing How We Measure and Report Our Response Time

8.1 Background and Proposal

There is no national standard for measuring and reporting the response times of fire and rescue services. Each service has its own response standard according to its local risks and demands.

The Home Office measures the response times of each fire and rescue service using a standard methodology from the time a 999 call is answered. The incident data that it uses to report on this response time is compiled from primary fires i.e. fires involving buildings, vehicles, and other insurable property.

While this provides a consistent and more comparable set of data to use, it does not reflect the Service's current response standard of attending life risk incidents within ten minutes, with a target of meeting this on 80% of occasions.

This performance data is referred to by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) when they are conducting their inspection activity.

The draft CRMP therefore proposes:

Change our response standard from a response standard of ten minutes to life-risk incidents, with a target of meeting this on 80% of occasions, to an average response time to all primary fires within ten minutes.

Instead of starting the clock when the fire station is alerted, reporting would begin from when the 999 call is answered, before the control operator alerts the station. This is earlier in the 999-call process.

There are several reasons behind the proposed change. The proposed new standard is the same as that used by the Home Office and some other fire and rescue services. This makes comparison and benchmarking against peers more effective. The change to primary fires provides a considerably larger data set against which to measure the standard by than the cohort of life-risk incidents, providing a more robust gauge of performance.

Pre-consultation activity also revealed a preference for reporting from the time a 999 call is answered and highlighted that using an average response time is easier to understand.

8.2 Summary of Survey Responses
Overall response

Q7 To what extent do you support our proposed changes to how we measure our response times and how we report them?
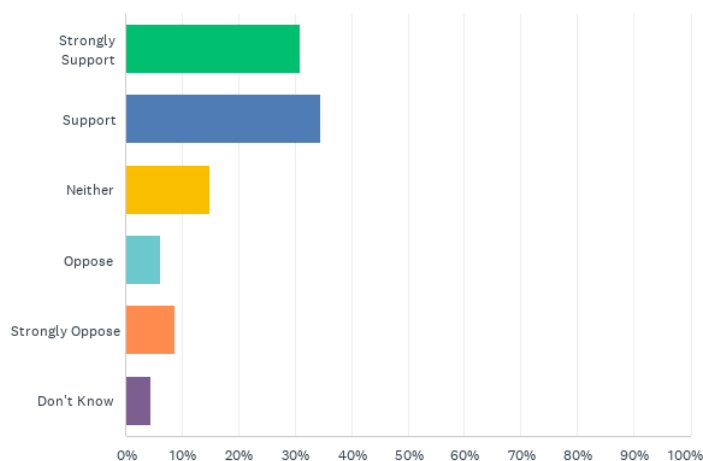
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Strongly Support	31.00%	137
Support	34.62%	153
Neither	14.93%	66
Oppose	6.11%	27
Strongly Oppose	8.82%	39
Don't Know	4.52%	20
Total	**100.00%**	**442**

The responses from the survey show that, overall, 65.62% of respondents expressed their support for the proposed change (those who answered strongly support or support), while 14.93% of respondents stated their opposition (oppose or strongly oppose) to the proposed change in measuring and reporting the response time. A further 14.93% stated they neither supported nor opposed the change. There were 20 respondents (4.52%) who stated they did not know.

Public Response
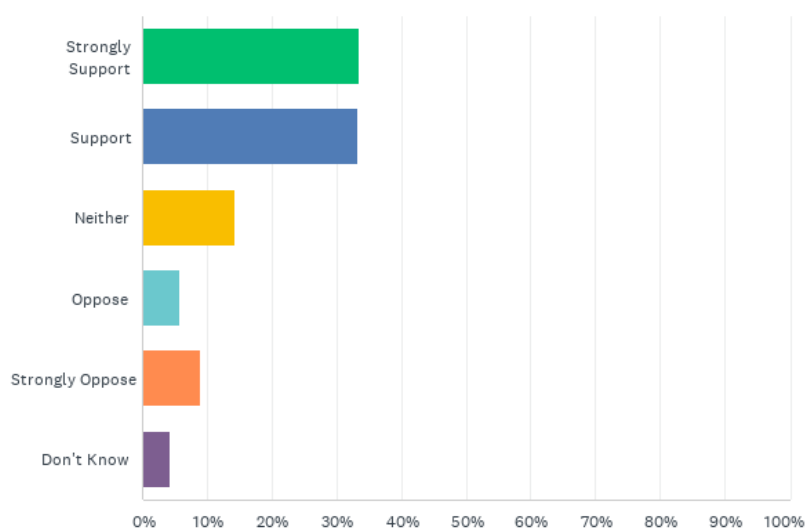
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Strongly Support	33.42%	126
Support	33.16%	125
Neither	14.32%	54
Oppose	5.84%	22
Strongly Oppose	9.02%	34
Don't Know	4.24%	16
Total	**100.00%**	**377**

Amongst the 377 respondents who identified themselves as members of the public, 66.58% expressed support for the proposed change in the measuring and reporting of response times, compared to 14.86% who opposed the change.

Geographic analysis

The tables below provide an analysis of response by the specific locality in which the respondent lives. The analysis covers the unitary authority area of the respondent, their postcode/post-town (using the first part of a full postcode), and the nearest fire station to the respondent. It is important to note that not all respondents will have answered each of the questions in the survey, therefore totals for each category will vary.

Levels of overall support and opposition to proposal is provided in each table.

Where levels of support in a specific locality are above the average overall figure (strongly support and support in the above chart, a combined 66.58%) they are colour coded green. Where levels of opposition in a specific locality are above the average overall figure (strongly oppose and oppose in the above chart, a combined 14.86%) they are colour coded red.

This can help to identify any localised areas of higher support or opposition to the proposal; however caution should be used given low levels of response in some areas and it should not be treated as a definitive opinion.

Respondents could also answer all, or some, demographic questions therefore the individual response totals for each question may differ.

Response by unitary authority area

Total responses (inc. other and Prefer Not to Say (PNTS)): 376

Geography	No. of responses	Strongly Support	Support	Neither	Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Don't Know
Cheshire East	154	31.82%	47.40%	12.34%	2.60%	1.30%	4.56%
Cheshire West and Chester	120	25.83%	20.83%	19.17%	10.83%	18.33%	5.00%
Halton	32	62.50%	25.00%	6.25%	6.25%	0.00%	0.00%
Warrington	62	38.71%	25.81%	16.13%	4.84%	9.68%	4.84%

Response by Post Town/Postcode

Total responses: 383

Geography	No. of responses	Strongly Support	Support	Neither	Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Don't Know
Cheshire East							
Alsager (ST7)	8	37.50%	62.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Audlem (CW3)	2	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Crewe (CW1, CW2)	60	26.67%	55.00%	10.00%	1.67%	3.33%	3.33%
Congleton (CW12)	18	22.22%	66.67%	5.56%	0.00%	5.56%	0.00%
Holmes Chapel (CW4)	7	57.14%	42.86%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Knutsford (WA16)	21	23.81%	38.10%	23.81%	0.00%	0.00%	14.29%
Macclesfield (SK10, SK11)	28	28.57%	50.00%	14.29%	7.14%	0.00%	0.00%
Middlewich (CW10)	4	25.00%	50.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Nantwich (CW5)	8	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Poynton (SK12)	4	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Sandbach (CW11)	11	27.27%	72.73%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Wilmslow (SK9)	4	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Cheshire West and Chester							
Chester (CH1, CH2, CH3, CH4)	12	66.62%	25.00%	8.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Ellesmere Port (CH65, CH66)	4	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Frodsham (WA6)	20	45.00%	50.00%	0.00%	5.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Malpas (SY14)	1	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Neston (CH64)	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Northwich (CW8, CW9)	52	13.46%	7.69%	30.77%	17.31%	21.15%	9.62%
Tarporley (CW6)	4	0.00%	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Winsford (CW7)	12	25.00%	25.00%	33.33%	0.00%	16.67%	0.00%
Halton							
Runcorn (WA7)	14	64.29%	21.43%	7.14%	7.14%	0.00%	0.00%
Widnes (WA8, L24)	11	72.73%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Warrington							
Birchwood (WA3)	8	75.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Lymm (WA13)	1	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Penketh (WA5)	6	33.33%	16.67%	33.33%	0.00%	16.67%	0.00%
Stockton Heath (WA4)	25	32.00%	12.00%	24.00%	16.00%	12.00%	4.00%
Warrington (WA1, WA2)	38	34.21%	39.47%	15.79%	0.00%	0.00%	10.53%

Response by Nearest Fire Station

Total responses: 286

Geography	No. of responses	Strongly Support	Support	Neither	Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Don't Know
Nearest Fire Station							
Alsager	9	44.44%	55.56%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Audlem	2	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Birchwood	8	50.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%	12.50%
Bollington	5	60.00%	20.00%	0.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Chester	9	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Congleton	16	25.00%	62.50%	6.25%	0.00%	6.25%	0.00%
Crewe	21	28.57%	33.33%	19.05%	4.76%	4.76%	9.52%
Ellesmere Port	4	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Frodsham	17	41.18%	52.94%	0.00%	5.88%	0.00%	0.00%
Holmes Chapel	6	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Knutsford	15	13.33%	53.33%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	13.33%
Lymm	4	75.00%	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Macclesfield	16	31.25%	43.75%	18.75%	6.25%	0.00%	0.00%
Malpas	1	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Middlewich	4	25.00%	50.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Nantwich	5	60.00%	40.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Northwich	55	16.36%	5.45%	29.09%	14.55%	27.27%	7.27%
Penketh	5	40.00%	40.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Powey Lane	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Poynton	4	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Runcorn	14	64.29%	28.57%	7.14%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Sandbach	8	12.50%	87.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Stockton Heath	17	29.41%	0.00%	29.41%	11.76%	23.53%	5.88%
Tarporley	4	25.00%	25.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Warrington	13	46.15%	30.77%	7.69%	0.00%	15.38%	0.00%
Widnes	5	80.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Wilmslow	6	33.33%	50.00%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Winsford	13	15.38%	38.46%	23.08%	0.00%	23.08%	0.00%

Commentary

In many areas of Cheshire, most respondents support the proposal; with no unitary or smaller geographies having most respondents who oppose the proposal.

Across three of the four unitary areas of Cheshire, most respondents expressed support for the proposal. The exception to this was across Cheshire West and Chester, where 46.66% of respondents supported the proposal. Cheshire West and Chester also has the highest proportion of respondents who oppose the proposal (19.16%).

When considering more local areas, the comparatively higher opposition in Cheshire West and Chester is because of higher than average levels of opposition amongst respondents in the Northwich area, and to a lesser extent, Tarporley and Winsford areas.

Cross analysis of additional comments from Cheshire West and Chester residents suggest opinion on the fire cover proposals could be impacting on the response to this proposal, with fire cover changes referenced in almost a quarter of comments. To a lesser degree, this trend is reflected in comments from Stockton Heath residents, suggesting that this may also be a factor in higher than average levels of local opposition in the Stockton Heath area.

Demographic analysis

The table below provides an analysis of levels of support/opposition to the proposal according to the demographic characteristics of the respondent.

Levels of overall support and opposition to the package of proposals are provided in each table. It is important to note that not all respondents will have answered each of the questions in the survey, therefore totals for each category will vary. Data is included for those who have preferred not to identify each demographic characteristic.

Where levels of support in a specific demographic are above the average overall figure (strongly support and support in the overall chart, a combined 66.58%) they are colour coded green. Where levels of opposition in a specific locality are above the average overall figure (strongly oppose and oppose in the overall chart, a combined 14.86%) they are colour coded red.

To protect the anonymity of respondents and enable reporting, some categories with a lower level of response such as non-majority religious beliefs or ethnicities have been grouped together and reported against those who form the majority religion/ethnicity or have not stated any option. Caution should be used given low levels of response in some metrics and it should not be treated as a definitive opinion. Respondents could also answer all, or some, demographic questions therefore the individual response totals for each question may differ.

Demographic	No. of responses	Strongly Support	Support	Neither	Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Don't Know
Age							
Under 18	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
18-24	7	28.54%	42.86%	14.29%	14.29%	0.00%	0.00%
25-34	13	23.08%	23.08%	23.08%	7.69%	23.08%	0.00%
35-44	40	20.00%	32.50%	22.50%	5.00%	20.00%	0.00%
45-54	41	14.63%	36.59%	14.63%	7.32%	21.95%	4.88%
55-64	58	32.76%	36.21%	6.90%	10.34%	10.34%	3.45%
65-74	111	38.74%	36.04%	18.02%	3.60%	0.90%	2.70%
75+	74	51.35%	31.08%	8.11%	1.35%	0.00%	8.11%
Prefer not to say (PNTS)	10	10.00%	60.00%	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%	0.00%
Gender							
Male	165	35.15%	32.73%	15.76%	6.06%	7.27%	3.03%
Female	178	33.71%	35.96%	15.17%	4.49%	6.74%	3.93%
Other or PNTS	17	11.76%	35.29%	5.88%	17.65%	23.53%	5.88%
Trans Identity							
Yes	2	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	0.00%
No	262	31.68%	35.11%	15.27%	6.11%	8.02%	3.82%
PNTS	15	13.33%	26.67%	13.33%	20.00%	20.00%	6.67%
Ethnicity							
White British	319	37.30%	35.74%	12.54%	4.39%	6.27%	3.76%
Black and Minority Ethnic Group (BAME)	21	14.29%	23.81%	33.33%	14.29%	9.52%	4.76%
PNTS	9	22.22%	44.44%	22.22%	11.11%	0.00%	0.00%
Religion							
No religion	72	23.61%	34.72%	18.06%	9.72%	8.33%	5.56%
Christian	193	38.86%	35.23%	12.44%	4.66%	5.70%	3.11%
Other religion	6	33.33%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	0.00%
PNTS	38	28.95%	36.84%	21.05%	5.26%	7.89%	0.00%
Disability Status							
Disabled	63	39.68%	26.98%	15.87%	1.59%	9.52%	6.35%
Not Disabled	263	33.84%	36.12%	14.07%	6.06%	6.08%	3.42%
PNTS	20	25.00%	40.00%	5.00%	10.00%	20.00%	0.00%
Sexual Orientation							

Heterosexual	284	37.68%	34.15%	12.68%	5.28%	6.34%	3.87%
Gay/Lesbian	6	33.33%	16.67%	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	16.67%
Bisexual	5	60.00%	20.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Other or PNTS	38	10.53%	36.84%	28.95%	10.53%	13.16%	0.00%

Commentary

While caution is needed given low response in some demographics, there are some variances to highlight. Where respondents were recorded, all age groups showed a majority in support of the proposed change except for the 25-34 age group (46.16% support). This age group also had the highest level of opposition (30.77%). While narrative responses are limited, some feedback suggests a concern over the change in reporting metric from life-risk incidents to primary fires.

> *"Tracking the times of primary fires is a good idea, but in your draft it almost suggests that you will stop tracking response times to life-risk incidents. I think tracking response times to both types of incidents are really important, and one shouldn't take precedence over the other."*

> Response from Stockton Heath resident aged 25-34

Over two thirds of male and female respondents support the proposal. However, a higher than average level of opposition is recorded amongst those who preferred not to state their gender identity (41.80% oppose). Additional comments provided by these respondents outline a preference to retain a percentage pass as a reporting measure, rather than introducing an average, which is seen as being easier to conceal poor performance.

> *"Time from start of 999 call is good but don't like the switch to an average time."*

> Response from Cheshire West and Chester resident who preferred not to state their gender.

Staff response
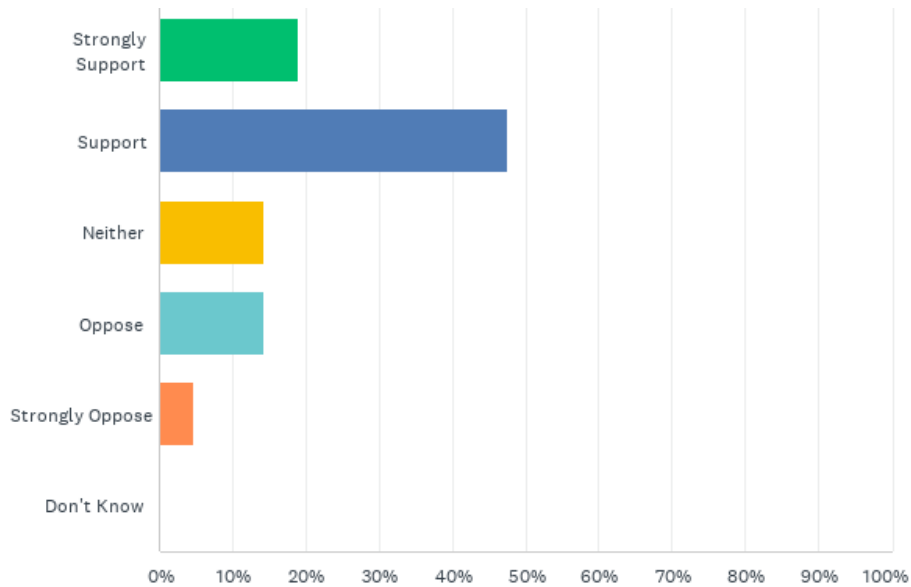
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Strongly Support	19.05%	4
Support	47.62%	10
Neither	14.29%	3
Oppose	14.29%	3

Strongly Oppose	4.76%	1
Don't Know	0.00%	0
Total	**100.00%**	**21**

While the response of staff to the consultation survey was more limited, the responses received show most respondents in support of the proposal (65.67%), against 19.05% who stated their opposition. A further three respondents (14.29%) stated they neither support nor oppose the proposed change.

Partner responses

The three partner agencies who provided a survey response all expressed support for the proposed change in measuring and reporting the response time.

8.3 Summary of Free Text Comments
A total of 136 free text survey comments were received in total as part of the consultation. 125 comments were from members of the public, 6 comments were provided from staff and 5 from those who did not state who they were responding on behalf of.

8.4 Public comments
There were 13 comments which expressed support for the proposed change, with reasons for this including the proposed measurement from time of call and the use of a ten-minute response standard.

Twelve comments were received regarding the proposed change in response standard from a percentage pass rate to the use of an average figure; suggesting that a move to an average figure could mask instances where there are significantly longer response times.

> *"While I understand the reasons for change (i.e. alignment with the Home Office reporting) the proposed change leaves more wriggle room and is less precise than the existing measure. Precise quantitative measures are far preferable to "average" measures, enabling better actions to be taken to improve things. Generally an "average" measure can hide many issues."*

> *Response from a Knutsford resident*

Comments were received from 11 respondents which acknowledged the benefit of being able to benchmark and compare response times more effectively, either with the Home Office figures or other fire and rescue services, under the proposed standard.

> *"I think it is important to standardise how response times are measured and a good decision to align this with the Home Office's approach to enable accurate benchmarking."*

> *Response from a Chester resident*

Some respondents queried whether the change to measuring primary fires as opposed to life-risk incidents meant that the Service was either not prioritising or measuring performance against non-fire life risk incidents, such as road traffic collisions. Eight comments received referenced this issue. A further 20 comments were made which related to the proposals regarding the changes to fire cover, while 17 were comments of a general nature.

Additional Feedback

In a response received via email from a member of the public, the respondent expressed support for the proposal but highlighted that it should be more than just the average

response time, which is reported, to account for longer response times which may affect incidents in more rural areas:

"While I agree with the 'behind the scenes' proposals to change the way you measure and report performance, I think you need to report on more than the average (median? mean?) response times. Even the GCSE maths syllabus requires students to learn both measures of (1) central tendency and (2) spread. One technique for 'spread' that 80% of students are taught is the box and whisker plot. Or a sorted bar chart of response times could be a more visual option? There are other ways of showing 'spread' but the principle is important here, especially concerning outliers in (rural) areas."

Email response from public consultee

8.5 Staff Feedback

Survey feedback reflected themes raised by public comments, such as an acknowledgement that the proposed change is a more accurate representation of a caller's experience and a query around how non-fire life risk incidents are accounted for, which was also raised by public respondents.

"The proposal you are suggesting means that life risk incidents are no longer taken into account for the figures produced. Why can't you keep the way that you measure life-risk incidents the same, but use this new method for all other incidents?"

Response from a Firefighter

Some feedback from staff suggests that they feel the proposed change would be a more challenging target for the Service to achieve, which could lead to responding crews being more pressured to hit targets.

"It seems like it could add a delay to each call, resulting in your crews feeling they have to take further risks to respond quickly in order to meet targets".

Response from a Firefighter at Holmes Chapel

8.6 Partner Feedback

The **Fire Brigades Union** offered support for the proposed change to include time of call within the response time. The response suggested that all life risk incidents should be incorporated within the standard and raised concerns about the level of scrutiny or control which the Fire Authority maintains over North West Fire Control, the entity which provides call handling services for Cheshire and three other fire and rescue services in North West England.

"The FBU fully support the proposal to change to standard to be met on 100% of occasions and one that commences from the time of call received. Indeed this is something we have campaigned for and recommended to the fire authority on the last 2 IRMP cycles… One area of this proposal where we differ is that the Union believes the 10 minutes standard should apply to all life critical incidents – Fire, Road, Water and Height".

Fire Brigades Union

The response from the **Chester Retired Firefighters** welcomed the proposed change to include call handling, citing that it provides a true indication of the level of service being delivered. However, their response also echoes the Fire Brigades Union call for all life-risk incidents to be included within the standard and the concerns around oversight arrangements for North West Fire Control.

The **West Cheshire Trades Council** response states it is "largely agnostic" over the proposed change, suggesting that the response time measurement is a tool for comparison

rather than performance management and it would be more beneficial to provide narrative on instances where the response time is not met, to provide the Authority with better oversight. It also supports the FBU's call for inclusion of all life-risk incidents within the ten-minute standard.

The response from **Bollington Town Council** stated that the council understood that improvements to response times can only be assessed once the plan is put in place and that it would like to receive performance data on the new reporting regimes to provide reassurance to its residents of continued good performance.

9. Proposals to Change the Provision of Fire Cover Across Cheshire

9.1 Overview of Proposals

The proposals to improve fire cover across Cheshire consist of a package of proposed changes which, cumulatively, is predicted to lead to an improved provision of guaranteed fire cover across the county and provide capacity to undertake more fire safety work in the community.

Together, these proposals would enable the Service to meet its current and new proposed response standard while working within its current budget.

Converting four on-call fire engines at Runcorn, Macclesfield, Northwich and Winsford into full-time fire engines which would operate during weekday daytime hours.

This proposal would see the second fire engines at the above locations change from on-call to become full-time fire engines operating during the weekday daytimes, which is the period of highest operational activity. Primarily these engines would provide an element of guaranteed fire cover in on-call areas (where cover is not guaranteed and weekday daytimes are a challenge for maintaining availability), though they would also cover across Cheshire as required operationally, as other fire engines do.

For instance, the second fire engine at Runcorn could provide cover across Frodsham and Tarporley; the second fire engine at Macclesfield covering Bollington and Poynton; the second engine at Northwich covering Nantwich, Audlem and Malpas, while the second engine at Winsford could cover across Middlewich, Holmes Chapel, Sandbach and Alsager.

Changing the duty system at Knutsford Fire Station from On-Call to Day Crewing.

This would see the crewing at Knutsford change from on-call (where firefighters live or work near the station and respond to emergencies via a pager) to day crewing, staffed by fulltime firefighters who are on station during weekdays and provide guaranteed on-call cover overnight and at weekends.

This would introduce guaranteed fire cover in the Knutsford area.

Reorganising the provision of full-time fire cover in the daytime in Warrington.

This would result in the full-time crew at Birchwood Fire Station being split between Birchwood and Stockton Heath, with full time cover in the daytime alternating between the two locations. The current on-call system at Stockton Heath would be disestablished and the associated housing stock sold to fund the Service's capital programme.

This would keep the existing full-time establishment of four engines within Warrington, with the fourth alternating its location equally between Birchwood and Stockton Heath. This would increase capacity to provide community safety work in Stockton Heath. In addition, the on-call crew at Birchwood, who provide overnight cover, can now provide cover in the daytimes where the fulltime cover is being provided in Stockton Heath.

Reviewing the On-Call Duty System

The final proposal is to review the on-call duty system to make it more attractive to potential and existing staff, thus improving recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters and improving the availability of on-call fire engines overall.

It is important to highlight that the consultation asked for views and opinions on the overall package of fire cover proposals. This is because the package is interlinked, with savings in some specific areas offset by increased cost in others to provide an overall package that increases the number of guaranteed fire engines available over current provision while maintaining the Service's existing budget.

For the purposes of analysing the feedback, while the survey responses provide an indication of overall opinion on the package of fire cover proposals, free text comments and partner responses have been categorised according to each element e.g. weekday fire engines, day crewing at Knutsford, reorganising fire cover in Warrington.

9.2 Summary of Survey Responses

Overall Response

Q9 To what extent do you support the overall package of proposals regarding changes to how we provide our fire cover?
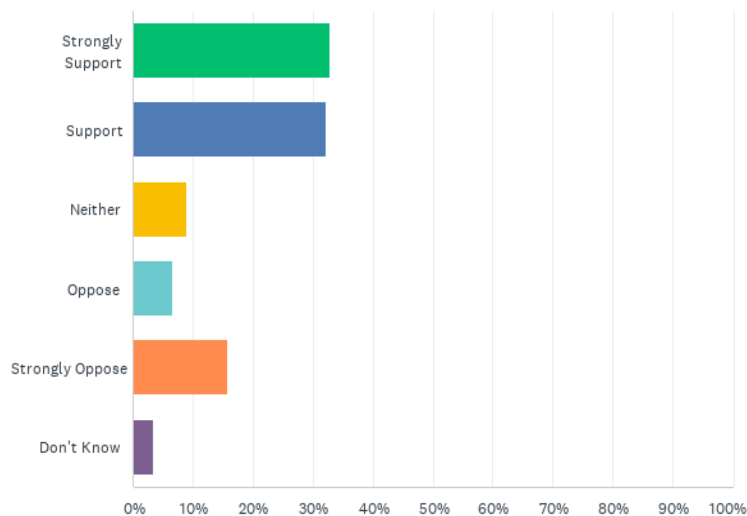
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Strongly Support	32.94%	139
Support	32.23%	136
Neither	9.00%	38
Oppose	6.64%	28
Strongly Oppose	15.88%	67
Don't Know	3.32%	14
Total	**100.00%**	**422**

The overall response shows that most respondents support the overall package of proposals to change fire cover across Cheshire. A total of 65.17% support the package of proposals compared to 22.52% who oppose them. Further comments were made about the proposals in a final 'additional comments' section of the survey and these are reported in section 12 of this report.

Public Response
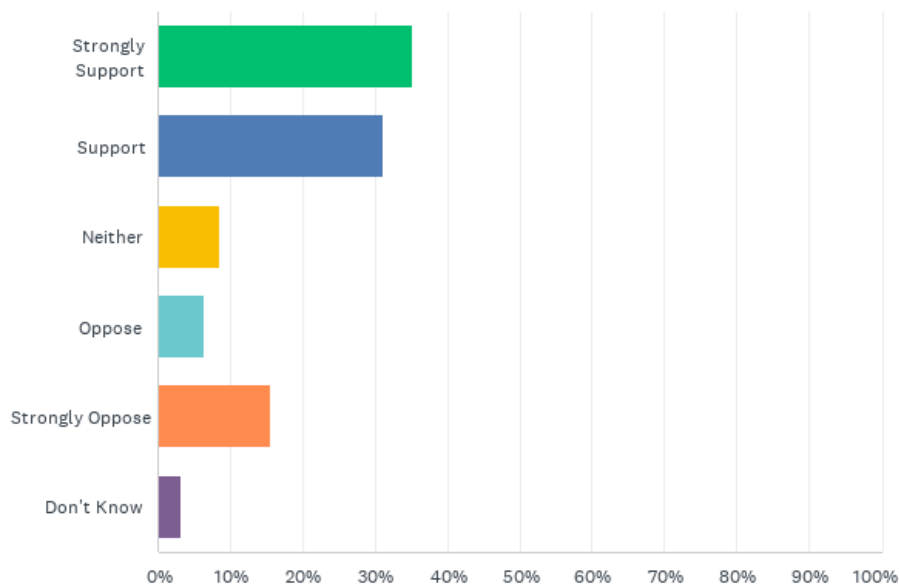
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Strongly Support	35.28%	133
Support	31.03%	117
Neither	8.49%	32
Oppose	6.37%	24
Strongly Oppose	15.65%	59
Don't Know	3.18%	12
Total	**100.00%**	**377**

Of the 377 respondents who responded as members of the public (there were respondents who did not identified), 66.31% expressed support for the proposals, while 22.02% stated their opposition to the package of proposals. There were 32 (8.49%) public respondents who neither supported nor opposed the proposals, while a further 12 (3.18%) stated that they did not know.

Geographic analysis

The tables below provide an analysis of public response by the specific locality in which the respondent lives. The analysis covers the unitary authority area of the respondent, their postcode/post-town (using the first part of a full postcode), and the nearest fire station to the respondent. It is important to note that not all respondents will have answered each of the questions in the survey, therefore totals for each category will vary.

Levels of overall support and opposition to the package of proposals are provided in each table.

Where levels of support in a specific locality are above the average overall figure (strongly support and support in the above chart, a combined 66.31% they are colour coded green. Where levels of opposition in a specific locality are above the average overall figure (strongly oppose and oppose in the above chart, a combined 22.02%) they are colour coded red.

This can help to identify any localised areas of higher support or opposition to the proposals; however caution should be used given low levels of response in some areas and it should not be treated as a definitive opinion.

Respondents could also answer all, or some, demographic questions therefore the individual response totals for each question may differ.

Response by unitary authority area

Total responses (inc. other and Prefer Not to Say (PNTS)): 376

Geography	No. of responses	Strongly Support	Support	Neither	Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Don't Know
Cheshire East	154	40.91%	41.56%	8.44%	1.95%	3.25%	3.90%
Cheshire West and Chester	120	26.67%	17.50%	8.33%	14.17%	30.83%	2.50%
Halton	32	43.75%	43.75%	9.38%	0.00%	3.13%	0.00%
Warrington	62	33.87%	27.42%	8.06%	4.84%	20.97%	4.84%

Response by Post Town/Postcode

Total responses: 331

Geography	No. of responses	Strongly Support	Support	Neither	Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Don't Know
Cheshire East							
Alsager (ST7)	8	62.50%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%	0.00%
Audlem (CW3)	2	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Crewe (CW1, CW2)	60	33.33%	48.33%	10.00%	1.67%	5.00%	1.67%
Congleton (CW12)	18	38.89%	50.00%	0.00%	5.56%	5.56%	0.00%
Holmes Chapel (CW4)	7	57.14%	42.86%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Knutsford (WA16)	21	47.62%	33.33%	4.76%	4.76%	0.00%	9.52%
Macclesfield (SK10, SK11)	28	39.29%	39.29%	14.29%	3.57%	3.57%	0.00%
Middlewich (CW10)	4	0.00%	75.00%	0.00%	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%
Nantwich (CW5)	8	50.00%	37.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%
Poynton (SK12)	4	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Sandbach (CW11)	11	45.45%	54.55%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Wilmslow (SK9)	4	75.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Cheshire West and Chester							
Chester (CH1, CH2, CH3, CH4)	12	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Ellesmere Port (CH65, CH66)	4	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Frodsham (WA6)	20	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Malpas (SY14)	1	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Neston (CH64)	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Northwich (CW8, CW9)	52	13.46%	1.92%	13.46%	21.15%	48.08%	1.92%
Tarporley (CW6)	4	25.00%	50.00%	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Winsford (CW7)	12	25.00%	16.67%	16.67%	16.67%	16.67%	8.33%
Halton							
Runcorn (WA7)	14	35.71%	42.86%	14.29%	0.00%	7.14%	0.00%
Widnes (WA8, L24)	11	54.55%	45.45%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Warrington							

Geography	No. of responses					
Birchwood (WA3)	8	50.00%	37.50%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Lymm (WA13)	1	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Penketh (WA5)	6	33.33%	16.67%	16.67%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%
Stockton Heath (WA4)	25	28.00%	24.00%	4.00%	4.00%	36.00%	4.00%
Warrington (WA1, WA2)	38	47.37%	34.21%	5.26%	5.26%	0.00%	7.89%

Response by Nearest Fire Station

Total responses: 286

Geography	No. of responses	Strongly Support	Support	Neither	Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Don't Know
Alsager	9	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Audlem	2	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Birchwood	8	25.00%	37.50%	12.50%	0.00%	12.50%	12.50%
Bollington	5	60.00%	20.00%	0.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Chester	9	44.44%	55.56%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Congleton	16	37.50%	43.75%	0.00%	6.25%	12.50%	0.00%
Crewe	21	33.33%	28.57%	28.57%	0.00%	4.76%	4.76%
Ellesmere Port	4	50.00%	25.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Frodsham	17	41.18%	58.82%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Holmes Chapel	6	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Knutsford	15	40.00%	40.00%	6.67%	6.67%	0.00%	6.67%
Lymm	4	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Macclesfield	16	37.50%	37.50%	18.75%	0.00%	6.25%	0.00%
Malpas	1	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Middlewich	4	0.00%	75.00%	0.00%	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%
Nantwich	5	80.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%
Northwich	55	16.36%	0.00%	10.91%	20.00%	52.73%	0.00%
Penketh	5	40.00%	20.00%	20.00%	0.00%	20.00%	0.00%
Powey Lane	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Poynton	4	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Runcorn	14	28.57%	64.29%	7.14%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Sandbach	8	37.50%	62.50%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Stockton Heath	17	23.53%	5.88%	5.88%	5.88%	52.94%	5.88%
Tarporley	4	25.00%	50.00%	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Warrington	13	38.46%	38.46%	0.00%	7.69%	15.38%	0.00%
Widnes	5	80.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Wilmslow	6	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Winsford	13	15.38%	15.38%	7.69%	30.77%	30.77%	0.00%

Commentary

The data shows that across three of the four unitary authority areas in Cheshire, most survey respondents expressed support for the package of proposals. There is a higher level of support for the proposals amongst respondents from Cheshire East and Halton compared to those who live in Cheshire West and Chester or Warrington (albeit most respondents from Warrington expressed support).

When analysing smaller geographic areas, in most areas across Cheshire – both at postcode level and by analysing the respondents nearest fire station – most respondents are in support of the overall package of proposals.

The difference in support at unitary level correlates to higher levels of opposition amongst respondents in the Northwich area (CW8 and CW9 postcode, those with Northwich as their nearest fire station); the Stockton Heath area (WA4 postcode, Stockton Heath as the nearest fire station) and in the Winsford area (WA7 postcode, Winsford as nearest station).

"I am concerned that Northwich is looking it's second engine and night time cover".

<div align="right">Response from Northwich resident</div>

"Stockton Heath needs more cover and should remain in a similar way as it is running."

<div align="right">Response from a Stockton Heath resident</div>

Higher than average levels of opposition are also documented to a lesser extent in Penketh (WA5 postcode), Middlewich (CW10 postcode), Tarporley (CW6 postcode, Tarporley nearest station) and Warrington (Warrington nearest station); though in each of these categories most respondents supported the proposals.

Demographic analysis

The table below provides an analysis of levels of public support/opposition to the proposal according to the demographic characteristics of the respondent. This can help to identify demographics where there is higher support or opposition to the proposals, however caution should be used given low levels of response in some metrics and it should not be treated as a definitive opinion.

Levels of overall support and opposition to the package of proposals are provided in each table. It is important to note that not all respondents will have answered each of the questions in the survey, therefore totals for each category will vary. Data is included for those who have preferred not to identify each demographic characteristic.

Where levels of support in a specific demographic are above the average overall figure (strongly support and support in the overall chart, a combined 66.31%) they are colour coded green. Where levels of opposition in a specific locality are above the average overall figure (strongly oppose and oppose in the overall chart, a combined 22.02%) they are colour coded red.

To protect the anonymity of respondents and enable reporting, some categories with a lower level of response such as non-majority religious beliefs or ethnicities have been grouped together and reported against those who form the majority religion/ethnicity or have not stated any option.

Demographic	No. of responses	Strongly Support	Support	Neither	Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Don't Know
Age							
Under 18	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
18-24	7	71.43%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	28.57%	0.00%
25-34	13	46.15%	0.00%	0.00%	7.69%	46.15%	0.00%
35-44	40	20.00%	27.50%	5.00%	2.50%	45.00%	0.00%
45-54	41	17.07%	21.95%	7.32%	17.07%	36.59%	0.00%
55-64	58	27.59%	37.93%	6.90%	17.24%	10.34%	0.00%
65-74	111	44.14%	38.74%	10.81%	1.80%	1.80%	2.70%
75+	74	55.41%	25.68%	8.11%	0.00%	1.35%	9.46%
Prefer not to say (PNTS)	10	10.00%	50.00%	20.00%	10.00%	10.00%	0.00%
Gender							
Male	165	32.73%	38.18%	10.30%	2.42%	13.33%	3.03%
Female	178	40.45%	28.09%	4.49%	8.99%	15.17%	2.81%
Other or PNTS	17	5.88%	23.53%	29.41%	23.53%	17.65%	0.00%

Trans Identity							
Yes	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
No	16	12.50%	50.00%	18.75%	6.25%	12.50%	0.00%
PNTS	2	0.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	0.00%
Ethnicity							
White British	319	39.81%	33.86%	6.27%	5.02%	12.23%	2.82%
Black and Minority Ethnic Group (BAME)	21	14.29%	19.05%	19.05%	9.52%	33.33%	4.76%
PNTS	9	11.11%	33.33%	33.33%	22.22%	0.00%	0.00%
Religion							
No religion	72	25.00%	36.11%	9.72%	5.56%	20.83%	2.78%
Christian	193	38.86%	34.20%	6.22%	6.22%	11.92%	2.59%
Other religion	6	50.00%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	0.00%
PNTS	38	34.21%	26.32%	18.42%	10.53%	10.53%	0.00%
Disability Status							
Disabled	63	41.27%	20.63%	12.70%	7.94%	12.70%	4.76%
Not Disabled	263	36.50%	35.36%	6.08%	5.32%	14.07%	2.66%
PNTS	20	15.00%	25.00%	30.00%	15.00%	15.00%	0.00%
Sexual Orientation							
Heterosexual	284	39.79%	33.45%	7.04%	5.28%	11.97%	2.46%
Gay/Lesbian	6	33.33%	16.67%	16.67%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%
Bisexual	5	60.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%	20.00%	0.00%
Other or PNTS	38	7.89%	28.95%	21.05%	15.79%	26.32%	0.00%

Commentary

Analysis by demographic provides some noted variances in levels of support, though caution should be used given the low response in some areas and should not treat this as a definite reflection of local opinion.

Of age groups reported in the survey, the 25-34 and 45-54 age groups show more respondents in opposition to the proposals (the other age groups contain a majority of respondents in support). Amongst these two cohorts, narrative responses do acknowledge the increased provision of cover across Cheshire during weekdays and the more efficient use of resources; though there is a perception amongst a small number of comments that the conversion of the four on-call fire engines is a reduction in service rather than an improvement.

> *"Less of a service doesn't compute to more service whichever way you spin it - less people, less vehicles - can't possibly equate to more safety".*

> Response from a Northwich resident aged 45-54

There is also a higher than average level of opposition amongst BAME survey respondents (32.85%). Narrative responses highlight some concerns over perceived impact during night times and weekends should the proposals be implemented, particularly in regard to a major incident.

> *"Still concern if there is a major incident occurring at out of hours and involves chemical release e.g. chlorine."*

> Response from a Halton resident of Chinese ethnicity

Perceptions of the impact on night time and weekend cover are also referenced in narrative comments of respondents who preferred not to state their sexual orientation (42.11% opposed proposal).

Staff responses
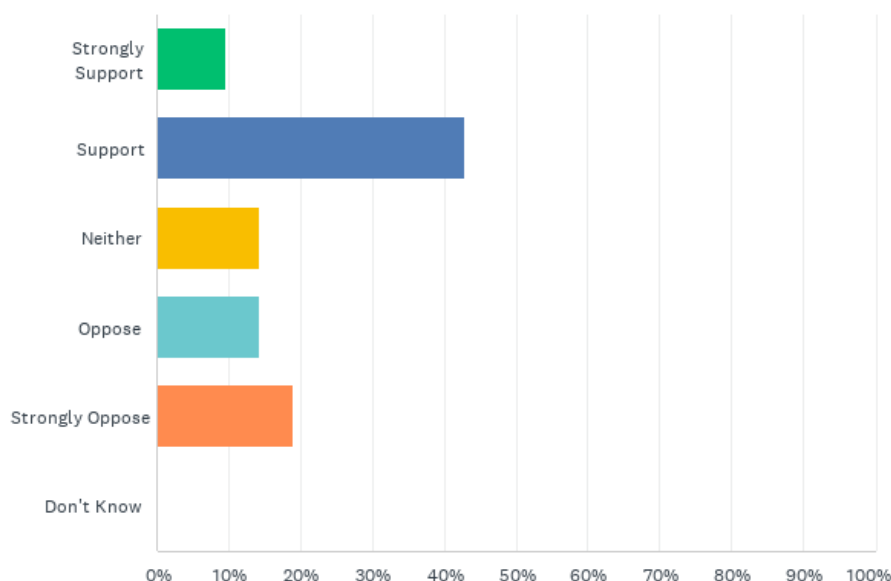
Option	Percentage	Number of responses
Strongly Support	9.52%	2
Support	42.86%	9
Neither	14.29%	3
Oppose	14.29%	3
Strongly Oppose	19.05%	4
Don't Know	0.00%	0
Total	**100.00%**	**21**

While staff responses to the survey were more limited, this also shows a majority of respondents (52.38%) in support of the proposals against 33.34% of staff respondents who oppose the proposals.

Partner responses

The three partner agencies who provided a survey response all expressed support for the package of proposals regarding fire cover.

9.3 Summary of Free Text Responses
Respondents to the survey were asked two free text questions in relation to the package of proposals; one which asked respondents to identify perceived benefits of the proposal and a following question which asked respondents to identify any perceived negative impacts from the proposal.

A total of 233 comments were provided regarding the positive impacts. Of these, 204 were provided from the public, 16 were from staff, 3 from partners and 6 from those who declined to state which category they belonged to. A further 4 comments were provided by individuals who skipped the question asking respondents to select who they were responding on behalf of.

In comparison, 232 comments were also provided regarding the negative impacts of the proposals. 205 were provided by the public, 15 were from staff, 3 from partners and 6 from those who declined to state which category they belonged to. A further 3 comments were provided by individuals who skipped the question asking respondents to select who they were responding on behalf of.

Public feedback is considered in section 9.4 and staff comments are considered in section 9.5.

9.4 Public Feedback

Overall commentary

Of the 204 public comments, the most frequently raised feedback was the benefit of having improved fire cover across Cheshire because of the proposals, which featured in 73 comments (35.78% of all comments). Responses highlighted the reassurance that this proposal would provide during weekdays and the increase in areas that are afforded with an element of guaranteed fire cover.

> *"The proposed changes would increase the geographical area of the county covered with guaranteed weekday provision."*
>
> <div align="right">Response from a Chester resident</div>

A further 31 comments (15.2%) highlight the positive impact that the proposals are expected to have on response times.

> *"Hopefully a speedier response time from full day time crewing"*
>
> <div align="right">Response from a Knutsford resident</div>

> *"More consistency in day time fire crews, including quicker response times."*
>
> <div align="right">Response from a Congleton resident</div>

There were 28 (13.73%) comments which expressed either general support of, or overall benefits due to, the package of proposals; while there were an additional 16 responses (7.84%) which were a comment of a general nature.

There were 21 respondents (10.29%) who said they had no further comment to make.

Comments from respondents in the demographics highlighted in the previous section can provide some reasons for higher than average levels of opposition.

Changing four on-call fire engines to full-time weekday fire engines

Associated positive impacts from this proposal which were referred to include a wider area of Cheshire having guaranteed cover; more reassurance for more residents and more availability to meet periods of higher demand.

> *"What you have outlined will definitely improve weekday coverage in regards to fire engines being available during the week, between the mentioned given times. It's certainly reassuring to know that there will be fire service coverage during these times"*
>
> <div align="right">Response from a Stockton Heath resident</div>

Nine respondents stated that they considered a benefit of the proposals to be a more effective and efficient use of existing resources.

"Better use of finite resources, improved use of manpower, and better handling of emerging threats from new sources such as batteries"

<div align="right">

Response from a Knutsford resident

</div>

Introduction of Day Crewing at Knutsford

Three comments made specific reference to the proposed change at Knutsford, all of which considered the proposal to be a positive move.

"Better cover for Knutsford area which is increasing in domestic and business properties."

<div align="right">

Response from a Knutsford resident

</div>

Reorganisation of daytime fire cover in Warrington

There were ten comments which referred to the proposed changes in Warrington. Nine of these relate to the change in fire cover and raise some concerns over what is felt to be a reduced level of cover in certain areas, while a further comment queried how the impact on staff would be managed with regards to the disposal of housing stock at Stockton Heath.

"Clearly there are issues about reducing some services especially at Birchwood and Stockton Heath (where the cuts could be construed as a way of releasing funds for Warrington's new fire station). In my opinion the idea of introducing full time cover 50% of the time in an 8-day cycle is a recipe for risking people's lives. Domestic fires can happen anytime in the week and equally when bad traffic prevents appliances from crossing the motorway or canal to cover."

<div align="right">

Response from a Warrington resident

</div>

9.5 Staff Feedback

Changing four on-call fire engines to full-time weekday fire engines

Comments received from staff through the survey show most respondents agree that the proposals would lead to improved levels of guaranteed fire cover, particularly during periods of peak activity. Coupled with this is the increased capacity to undertake community safety work to reduce risk and demand.

This is mirrored in feedback from most team and watch visits through the consultation process.

"More guaranteed fire cover during weekdays is positive as is providing more capacity for community work."

<div align="right">

Response from a member of fire staff

</div>

Staff concerns with the proposals centred on the effect on overnight and weekend cover, as well as the impact on affected staff. This includes both those directly impacted by the proposals but also the secondary impacts of on-call staff in other stations seeing reduced levels of activity due to the availability of a nearby full-time fire engine.

"Loss of activity for on call appliances due to extra day appliances will result in on call personnel leaving the service. This then will reduce the number of appliances available

overall and may lead to shortfall at weekends and in the evening, especially in spate conditions."

<div align="right">

Response from an On-Call Crew Manager

</div>

"With the changes, on call shouts will decrease, there should therefore be a change to minimum contract hours for crews as people will be less likely to give up 50 hours on their days off if there is even less check they'll turn out, it's becoming less attractive as a result and more migration opportunities should be available."

<div align="right">

Response from a Firefighter

</div>

Engagement with staff at locations directly affected by the proposals led to several comments and questions around the practical implementation of the proposals. This focused on the processes of redeployment of staff and the introduction of a new duty system, including recruitment of staff on to that system and the technical details such as start/finish times and base locations.

A suggestion was raised at the staff focus group on 18 December as to whether consideration had been given to expanding the on-call support model instead of proposing the changing of the four on-call fire engines.

Introduction of Day Crewing at Knutsford

Comments received from staff were largely supportive of the proposed introduction of day crewing at Knutsford, indicating that there was an understanding of the rationale behind the proposal and that it would enable better fire cover.

"There is a positive by bringing Knutsford fire station to a day crewing model."

<div align="right">

Response from a Firefighter

</div>

"Knutsford changing to DC1 is a good move".

<div align="right">

Response from a Watch Manager

</div>

However, there were some specific queries raised in relation to the element around the transfer of the technical rescue unit from its current base at Lymm to Knutsford. These centred on the staffing numbers of the unit and the compatibility of training requirements with a day crewing duty system. An alternative suggested was to use Knutsford as a specialist animal rescue capability and maintain technical rescue at Lymm.

Staff feedback from those based at Knutsford station focused on the issues around allocation of day crewing housing and transfer of staff on and off station, depending on whether they remained at Knutsford or transferred to another station.

Reorganisation of daytime fire cover in Warrington

Feedback from operational staff working at Stockton Heath raised questions around the release of the housing associated with the station and the support that could be offered by the Authority to help those individuals affected to navigate their change in circumstances.

9.6 Partner Feedback

Changing four on-call fire engines to full-time weekday fire engines

In its response to the consultation, **the FBU** offered its qualified support for the proposal to convert four on-call fire engines into full-time weekday engines.

"The FBU give qualified support to this proposal. Whilst we welcome the proposal to increase the number of full-time fire fighters and full-time pumps, we do have some concerns that need to be addressed.

1. A clear assessment of the anticipated lag times of a secondary appliance in the areas where the second retained (On Call) appliance is being removed, specifically on evenings and weekends. Given that on average, three of the six pumps affected are available at any one time on weekday evenings and weekends, the proposed removal will impact on the attendance time of the second appliance – which is fundamentally critical in providing safe systems of work to enable a rescue or intervention to the public, but also in implemented safety procedures for fire fighters.

2. A clear explanation on how the overall resilience of the service will be impacted on weekday evenings and weekends given that the service will have four less appliances to call upon. Put simply, where incidents require supplementary appliances (assistance make up) how will this impact the rest of the fire cover in the county based on risk modelling, and how will the service mitigate the impact on fire fighters required to attend these incidents that require periods of arduous work activity and manage the rest and welfare of the workforce.

3. The proposal of 'roaming pumps' needs further detail. The FBU require each team of fire fighters (pump crew) to start and finish their shift at the same station – to do otherwise would incur forced overtime which is unacceptable and a breach of our member's contract.

4. The facilities available to the crews should be the exact same as any other full-time station. If this requires capital investment to bring stations up to the same standard, then this needs to be costed and agreed within the CRMP. Retained staff should never be viewed as second class citizens.

5. For those members impacted by these proposals (removal of their On-call post), the FBU require that;

(i) The individual be offered a wholetime position within the service

(ii) Where the individual cannot be offered a full-time post (already full time in Cheshire or another FRS) or they decline the offer then a relocation support package to another Retained/On Call station be offered

(iii) Where relocation is not practical or declined then a severance package be put in place. The current position in the absence of a policy, of statutory minimum redundancy terms should be revised to provide enhanced exit payments that adequately and appropriately recognise the individuals service and commitment to the communities of Cheshire, and the loss of income where no other like for like position exists on the open labour market that works around one's primary employment or utilises the skillset of a firefighter".

<div align="right">

Fire Brigades Union

</div>

Responses in support of the proposed weekday fire engines were also received from **Holmes Chapel Parish Council**, highlighting the additional benefit to the community within the existing financial envelope.

The Parish Council is supportive of the proposals and appreciate the additional benefit to our community at no extra budgetary cost.

<div align="right">

Holmes Chapel Parish Council

</div>

Support was also received from **Bollington Town Council**, citing the improved response time and provision of community safety work in the local area. The response from Bollington Town Council also requested that performance data be shared once the changes are implemented to provide reassurance of continued good service.

"Bollington Town Council supports the Cheshire Fire Authority 2024-2028 Draft Community Risk Management Plan for the following reasons:

- *Improved incident response for Bollington by virtue of the Macclesfield roving appliance being based in Bollington at times when the Bollington service is depleted.*
- *Better provision for community safety work in Bollington such as home fire safety assessments, fire protection visits and inspections of sites at risk such as larger businesses and hotels."*

Bollington Town Council

The submission from **Northwich Town Council** raised concerns over the element of the proposal to change the second fire engine at Northwich Fire Station from on-call to a full-time weekday fire engine. The Council highlights concerns over what it considers to be a reduction in service during night times and weekends, with reference to the delay in a second fire engine attending a fire in the local area – leading to potentially more damage.

"Residents and council members have serious concerns about the reduction in service, particularly during the night and weekends when most fatalities occur. Having another engine 20 minutes away is more likely to result in loss of life.

The loss of the second fire engine is likely increase the likelihood of fires causing more damage as there may be delays in waiting for the second engine to arrive. This will result in an increased likelihood of more severe damage to properties and disruption to businesses and travel as the scale of the damage will be greater.

It appears that the second engine is not manned due to ongoing recruitment freeze.

The changes are going to result in redundancies and the loss experienced, dedicated, trained firefighters who are only able to work on an on-call basis due to having other work commitments.

We are unable to offer our full support for the proposed changes, especially the withdrawal of the second engine in Northwich and the reduction in availability of services at nights and on weekends. We would hope that this aspect of the restructuring could be reconsidered."

Northwich Town Council

Local Cheshire West and Chester councillor **Cllr Sam Naylor** (Labour, Witton), also reiterates these concerns in his response opposing the conversion of the second fire engine at Northwich.

"It is my view that the removal of the retained engine from Northwich could have a detrimental effect on both fire officers and the residents of Northwich, particularly at night and weekends and in a worst-case scenario could place lives at risk.

I understand the poor performance in availability of the retained engine but consider that this is a direct result of a failure to attract and recruit enough retained officers."

Councillor Sam Naylor

Introduction of Day Crewing in Knutsford

Following a briefing from officers to **Knutsford Town Council Community Committee**, the minutes of the meeting confirm Councillors support for the draft CRMP and the proposal for Knutsford Fire Station.

The consultation response of the **FBU** also outlines its support for this proposal but does raise an objection to the intention of transferring the technical rescue unit from its current base in Lymm to Knutsford:

> *"We support this proposal having opposed the downgrading of the station which was approved by the authority back in 2014.*
>
> *Given the lack of guaranteed Cheshire Fire cover in the corridor between the Cheshire and Greater Manchester border, this will ensure we meet our statutory obligations to keep the residents and properties of Cheshire safe without the over reliance on support from neighbouring Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service.*
>
> *We should also see as a consequence greater prevention and protection activity.*
>
> *The CRMP proposes to revert Knutsford back to Day Crewing (which the FBU support), however with this is also an aspiration to move the Rope Rescue capabilities – currently based at Lymm Fire Station and mobilised with a crew of 5 – to Knutsford with a crew of 4. This would represent a reduction in safety standards and this element is opposed by the Fire Brigades Union."*

> *Fire Brigades Union*

Responses from the **Chester Retired Firefighters** reiterates the concern over crewing a technical rescue unit with four firefighters and not five.

Reorganisation of Daytime Fire Cover in Warrington

Responses were received from several stakeholders regarding this proposal.

In its response, the **FBU** state that the current on-call provision at Stockton Heath should be maintained; citing that the risk profile in the area requires the maintenance of current arrangements:

> *"The risk profile doesn't warrant a removal of fire cover at Birchwood, Stockton Heath or the pan Warrington area, and the cost of keeping the appliance and crew is a mere circa £150,000 from a total 51.7 million pounds budget. In simple terms the benefit (cost savings) doesn't outweigh the risk. The current response provision at Stockton Heath should be maintained."*

> *Fire Brigades Union*

Warrington District Trades Union Council also raised concerns over the proposed reorganisation of fire cover in Warrington, citing the risk profile in the Birchwood area and the impact on response times in Stockton Heath:

> *"Reducing Birchwood fulltime crews by 50% would have a significant risk not only for the local community but also for the wider area given the network of motorways, local industries, and potential environmental issues.*
>
> *The proposal to remove on call at Stockton Heath would be detrimental to the local community as they would have to wait for the arrival of the next available appliance."*

> *Warrington District Trades Union Council*

The response from **Stockton Heath Parish Council** outlines the Council's support for the plan and understood the rationale behind the proposed change:

"Specifically, in Stockton Heath, we understand the rationale to change the village fire station from on-call to full-time crews, to remedy the current poor response availability at this location, sharing response to emergencies with Birchwood. We recognise the difficulties in recruiting sufficient on-call firefighters.

We were pleased that the Service understands the potential disruption to the individual lives of the current on-call employees and is committed to finding equitable solutions.

We are also pleased that the new proposed arrangements will allow for a better distribution of the 'safe and well' visits, so that more will be available in our village."

<div align="right">Stockton Heath Parish Council</div>

The response from **Birchwood Town Council** did not provide any further comment beyond seeking reassurance that additional prevention and protection work, which the proposals enable, will be carried out in the Birchwood area:

"One of the proposals set out in the CRMP is to reorganise daytime fire cover in Warrington, and to relocate a full-time fire engine from Birchwood to be used in Stockton Heath for four out of eight days, given the level of resource available. We have been assured that response time is still anticipated to be within 10 minutes and that we would still have the support of Warrington, Lymm and Stockton Heath Fire Stations when a full-time engine is not available in Birchwood.

At the presentation, and in the CRMP document, it is highlighted that the proposed changes would see an increase in prevention and protection work such as 'Safe and Well Visits' and safety inspections. Birchwood Town Council see this as an added benefit to the local community.

Councillors would appreciate assurances that the additional prevention and protection work will be carried out in all areas, including Birchwood.

With all things noted above and Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's operational constraints being considered, Birchwood Town Council does not have anything further to add."

<div align="right">Birchwood Town Council</div>

Other Stakeholders

Officers held face to face briefings with several other stakeholders in relation to the proposed changes to emergency fire cover. These included:

Members of Parliament

- Rt Hon Esther McVey MP
- Mike Amesbury MP
- Andy Carter MP
- Edward Timpson CBE MP
- David Rutley MP

Unitary authorities

- Cheshire East Health and Communities Committee
- Cheshire West and Chester Scrutiny Committee
- Halton Safer Policy and Performance Board

- Warrington Stronger Communities Committee

Town and Parish Councils

- Frodsham Town Council
- Macclesfield Town Council
- Nantwich Town Council
- Poynton Town Council

While no official responses were received from the stakeholders listed, the briefings were generally well received, and no formal concerns were raised in respect of the proposed changes to fire cover during these briefings.

10. Reviewing Our On-Call Duty System

10.1 Background and Proposal

Fire engines that operate in the more rural and less populated areas of Cheshire are usually crewed by on-call firefighters. On-call firefighters live or work within five minutes of the fire station and are alerted by pager to respond to incidents. They have fewer incidents to deal with compared with full-time firefighters; fire engines operated by full-time firefighters are available 24/7.

On-call firefighters undertake their role as a part-time job, often in addition to demanding full-time employment and busy lives outside work. They are highly committed and work extremely hard to maintain the availability of the fire engine so they can respond to emergency incidents and support their communities.

Unfortunately, in recent years, the overall availability of on-call fire engines has declined; in some areas, quite significantly, especially during the day when we tend to be busiest. Despite the best efforts of our on-call firefighters and some initiatives that have been trialled, it has not been possible to reverse this decline.

The decline in on-call availability is a major challenge across the country, not just in Cheshire. Therefore, through this CRMP, we reaffirm our commitment to the on-call duty system and our on-call firefighters. The CRMP proposes to review the on-call duty system to make improvements to its effectiveness and efficiency, improving both recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters.

The consultation asked respondents to provide comments and suggestions to improve the on-call duty system and any specific themes or issues which should be considered.

10.2 Summary of Survey Free Text Responses

A total of 176 free text comments were received via the online survey and through consultation roadshows. Of these, 153 were provided by public respondents and 14 from staff.

There was a total of 57 comments where the respondent indicated that they had no further comment to make on this issue. Ten comments offered general support for carrying out a review, while an additional 24 comments were made which were general in nature and not directly related to the review of the on-call duty system.

10.3 Public Feedback

The most frequently raised theme, present in eighteen public comments (11.76% of total) is the need to ensure pay and recognition for on-call firefighters is improved. Some comments suggest that improving pay and recognition will in turn lead to increased recruitment and retention.

> *"Increase pay and performance-related incentives - currently (and I know this to be the case at a number of stations) the large majority of the regular work (i.e., not incidents) is performed by a small number of staff. Recognition for the people putting the effort in would be a big help."*

> Survey response from Middlewich resident

> *"Make the on-call role more attractive to prospective candidates perhaps include things such as free gym memberships in addition to wages providing added value and incentive."*

> Survey response from a Birchwood resident

There were 12 comments (7.84%) in which residents called for a further increase in full-time resources and reduction in the number of on-call resources across the county; citing the changes to work practices and the challenges around availability.

> *"Be careful not to throw good public money after a bad ill-conceived duty system that isn't fit for the modern work environment".*
>
> Survey response from a Warrington resident

Other main themes from public commentary include suggestions to make the recruitment process more effective/efficient (9 comments, 5.88%); raising awareness amongst the community and employers of the on-call duty system (9 comments) and considering ways to improve flexibility (including widening the catchment area) and work/life balance within the role (7 comments, 4.58%).

> *"Make it easier for people to become part time firefighters. Sometimes the health and safety aspect and form filling, box ticking discourages genuine willing candidates."*
>
> Survey response from a Frodsham resident

> *"Perhaps a higher profile with regards to recruiting, especially part time fire fighters. I wasn't even aware that the fire service had part time staff."*
>
> Survey response from a Birchwood resident

> *"Living or working 5 minutes from fire station is very restrictive - think should widen slightly to 6 or 7 minutes".*
>
> *"Please consider family / work life balance. In call is great until demand outweighs need and experience."*
>
> Survey responses from Northwich residents

10.4 Staff Feedback

There were 14 comments provided from staff as part of the survey. The most frequently raised issue was around improving pay and recognition, with 5 comments. This is followed by suggestions relating to improving the speed of the recruitment process and pathway to gaining operational competency (3 comments).

> *"As well as better pay for on-call firefighters, you should streamline the processes for both recruitment and qualification as competent. The current systems for both are too long winded and result in losing too many staff during the process."*
>
> Survey response from a Firefighter at Holmes Chapel Fire Station

> *"Need to pay more and maybe introduce a salary and have a weekly change cover banding to reflect the cover you actually did that week."*
>
> Survey response from a Watch Manager

Three comments were provided which relate to the impact of changes to fire cover on on-call firefighters, in particular the impact on morale and reduced ability to attend to emergencies if a full-time fire engine is in the vicinity of an on-call fire station.

There was also a suggestion to review over the border mobilising (where resources from neighbouring fire and rescue services are mobilised to attend), to provide more opportunities for on-call crews to attend incidents.

Two further comments provide suggestions for increasing flexibility, either by providing additional flexibility regarding contracted hours of on-call cover, or through introducing a medical response to provide additional opportunities for firefighters to respond.

A comment from the staff focus group questioned if there was any data available to suggest the reasons behind a reduction in on-call availability, while it was acknowledged that those currently working the system i.e. on-call firefighters, would need to be involved and engaged in the review process to make improvements.

10.5 Partner Feedback

The FBU provided detailed commentary in their consultation response. While agreeing with the proposal to strengthen the on-call system, it highlights what it sees as several key issues which are impacting upon the duty system, which are outlined below:

- *Public and employers' lack of awareness of the Retained Duty System. Most people are aware of the presence of a Fire Station in their community, but few appreciate how it is staffed.*
- *An increasing reluctance by primary employers to release employees from their place of work to attend incidents, due to economic pressure.*
- *Changing patterns of employment requiring more and more people to travel further to places of work and therefore away from the locality of their Fire Station.*
- *Fewer self-employed people seem to be available to work as Retained Firefighters, again due to economic pressures and low levels of remuneration in the Fire and Rescue Service.*
- *The need to make the Duty system more 'family friendly' and reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.*
- *Lack of investment in Retained Station buildings/facilities.*
- *Poor remuneration for commitment to availability.*
- *Lack of management training of Station personnel on all levels/roles: 'people management' skills, public relations, fairness at work, diversity.*
- *Very limited scope for personal and career development within the Retained Duty System of the Fire and Rescue Service.*
- *The perception of the work of Firefighters on the Retained Duty System is not always matched by the reality.*

Fire Brigades Union

The FBU submission suggests that there should be a focus on improving pay and financial recognition and that awareness of the on-call system (which should be a local and national initiative) should be improved. It is also suggested that acknowledgement should be given to the impact on on-call availability of the Service's migration policy, whereby competent on-call firefighters are able to apply to become wholetime (full-time) firefighters.

> *"The FBU support the pathway into the full-time service for those who have the skills and reward for those who have spent years protecting their local communities as a part time firefighter, however every time the service 'migrates' 10 On Call staff, 500 hours of availability is removed from the system."*

Fire Brigades Union

The response from the **Chester Retired Firefighters** also highlights societal changes and an evolution in employment trends and practices, which they consider the fire and rescue service has not kept up with and adapted to effectively. They also refer to the Service's on-call migration policy, stating this has been a factor in recruitment and retention issues.

"I find it difficult to understand how the Migration process from PT (part-time, or on-call) to WT (wholetime, or full-time) has not raised alarm bells before, given the obvious difficulty in PT recruitment. It's like robbing Peter to pay Paul."

<div align="right">

Chester Retired Firefighters

</div>

The **West Cheshire Trades Union Council** reiterates the importance of improving pay in strengthening the on-call system and suggests that what is sees as the current low level of remuneration is a factor in retention problems.

11. Equality Impact Assessments

To support the development of the proposals within the draft CRMP, a suite of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) were developed to ensure that equality considerations are considered in the development of proposed changes to services. They can be accessed via the following link: https://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/news-events/latest-news/have-your-say-on-our-draft-community-risk-management-plan-2024-28/

Consultees were asked if they had any comments to make regarding the EIAs, or if there were any other equalities issues which the Authority should consider in developing the CRMP.

11.1 Equalities Considerations

Respondents were asked to provide any additional comments in relation to the EIAs which had been produced. 124 comments were received in total, of which 115 were from the public, 6 were from staff and 3 were from stakeholders.

A further 14 comments (11.29%) were comments of a general nature which were not related to the EIAs. There were 11 comments (8.87%) which questioned the relevance of producing EIAs and the asking of equality related questions within the consultation survey.

There were 12 comments (9.68%) which reflected some feedback on either a protected characteristic or the EIA process. Four comments referred to age, suggesting it should be a key consideration for both the service provided to the community and within the organisation itself, given the demographic changes within the county.

> *"As the demographics of the county is changing (ageing) you need to consider that re: kit (mobility issues, confusion etc)"*
>
> Survey response from a Northwich resident

> *"Ageism is a huge issue and often overlooked especially in regard to frontline staff".*
>
> Response from a Winsford resident

One comment received felt that it was important that rural populations are considered as equally as urban populations.

> *"Surely everyone should be treated equally - this is a rural area, so don't just concentrate on Urban populations please."*
>
> Survey response from a Holmes Chapel resident

Another comment recommended that staff needed to have a good level of English-speaking skills to relay safety advice or information.

> *"You need to ensure that all applicants can speak English fluently as officers may be dealing with people in a very heightened and frightening situation, not being able to understand the officer could impact on safety."*
>
> Survey response from a Knutsford resident

Three comments referenced the recent developments in the news regarding cultural issues within the fire and rescue service; with respondents calling for assurance that there are robust procedures in place to deal with instances of such behaviour or ensure that equality actions are delivered.

"Clearly the serious sexual harassment issues that have arisen in other brigades need to be considered to ensure that members of a diverse workforce are adequately protected by appropriate whistle-blowing policies being in place and implemented."

<div align="right">Survey response from a Warrington resident</div>

"Challenge and show that the stereotypical view of the fire service in Cheshire is totally incorrect given the stories that have been published in the media about other fire services across the country. Encourage monitoring from external lay bodies to ensure the equalities impact assessments are being delivered."

<div align="right">Survey response from a Stockton Heath resident</div>

Two staff comments reflected on the need for better facilities for women within the Service, and that the organisation should assure itself that its internal promotion processes take due regard to equality requirements.

12. Additional Comments

Finally, respondents were asked if they had any other comments they wished to make. A total of 142 comments were provided in total. Of these, 48 (33.8%) were the consultee stating they had no further comment to make. This left 87 public comments and 7 staff comments of substance.

12.1 Public Comments

There were 29 public comments which expressed support for the proposals within the draft CRMP. Consultees acknowledged the depth and detail of the draft CRMP, and the proposals were viewed as a positive step forward for the Service and community.

> *"The proposal table shows an increase on every provision you plan to change. This is a definite positive move for Cheshire. It's nice to see no cutbacks."*
>
> *Survey response from a Runcorn resident*

> *"The report appears to be very inclusive and takes a strong proactive approach."*
>
> *Survey response from an Alsager resident*

> "Within the realistic financial options, it is a good plan."
>
> *Survey response from a Poynton resident*

There were 14 comments which expressed concern or opposition to the proposals within the draft CRMP. The majority of these centred around the proposed removal of the second fire engine in Northwich and the perceived impact that this would have on the community.

> *"Please don't reduce engines and staffing covering of the Northwich area which has had massive development of extra housing in the area."*

> *"What will happen to the fire engines at night when there's no cover? Just sit there when they could be saving lives?"*
>
> *Survey responses from Northwich residents*

Three comments expressing concerns related to the proposed change at Stockton Heath and the associated removal of Authority housing, citing the impact on staff within the houses.

> *"Consider the optics of displacing families that have served Cheshire as On Call firefighters for years."*
>
> *Survey response from a Warrington resident*

Two responses highlighted the need to resolve pension issues for retired staff following the McCloud ruling on public sector pensions.

Eight comments related to prevention and protection activities in the community, with calls for more awareness of fire safety and education of the community at all age levels.

Seven comments were provided which referred to the importance of positive industrial relations and questioned if recent industrial relations within the service had worsened.

There were 19 comments which were general in nature and provided a mix of response which was not necessarily related to the draft CRMP. This included general thanks to staff for the work they do.

Three comments were received in relation to the consultation process. One comment expressed their appreciation for the information provided and the opportunity to be involved

in the consultation. A further comment appreciated that the proposals were out to consultation but felt that they were not adequately qualified to provide a comment. One additional comment called for more visibility of the consultation process.

12.2 Staff Comments

Three comments were general in nature, with one comment reiterating the public comments regarding the need to resolve the pension issue for retired members. Regarding the CRMP, one comment highlighted a concern around the proposed change within Warrington.

> *"The fire cover provision for Warrington is far too political rather than covering risk, why accept 10 + response time for Stockton Heath responding from a station surrounded by fields when there's a station in the middle of a residential area that will be crewed for 28% of the time".*

Survey response from a Firefighter at Stockton Heath Fire Station

A further comment from a member of staff outlined the perceived overall benefit of the proposals within the CRMP.

> *"Overall a positive package of proposals for Cheshire."*

Survey response from a member of fire staff at Sadler Road

This page is intentionally left blank

APPENDIX 3

Cheshire
Fire Authority

2024-2028 Community Risk Management Plan

Consultation Feedback: Additional Resources

www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

Introduction

This document provides serves as a repository for additional information regarding the consultation on the Authority's draft 2024-2028 Community Risk Management Plan.

It features the following:

- Full narrative comments. These are narrative comments provided by consultees through the consultation survey. These are structured to follow the format of the survey document and cover the following issues:

  - Identification of risk
  - Management of risk
  - Safe use of lithium-ion batteries
  - Measuring and reporting our response time
  - Changes to the provision of fire cover
  - Reviewing our on-call duty system
  - Equalities considerations
  - Additional comments

- A profile of survey respondents, consisting of:

  - Public survey respondents and Staff survey respondents

- A copy of the consultation survey, which can be accessed here (file opens as pdf):

  Consultation
  Survey.pdf

  (If reading this document as a paper copy, please request a survey by emailing consultation@cheshirefire.gov.uk or in writing to FREEPOST CHESHIRE FIRE CONSULTATION)

- Full copies of non-survey responses received from the public

- Full copies of partner responses. The partner responses included are from:

  - Holmes Chapel Parish Council
  - Northwich Town Council
  - Bollington Town Council
  - Birchwood Town Council
  - Stockton Heath Parish Council
  - Warrington District Trades Union Council
  - West Cheshire District Trades Union Council
  - Chester Retired Firefighters
  - Councillor Sam Naylor

*Please note that the response from the Fire Brigades Union is provided as a separate appendix to this document

Narrative comments

The draft CRMP survey asked respondents to provide free text, narrative comments, on a range of issues. These are provided in full across the following sections. Where a respondent has indicated they have no further comment to make to a question, these are not included in the report. Text where someone self-identifies in the survey response will be removed; although email responses will be attributed to a respondent.

Identification of risk

Question: Are there any other fire and rescue risks that are not included within the draft CRMP which you think we should consider?

Public comments

- Land wild fires
- Not much detail around effects of climate change of the move to battery energy industry
- Funding issues for risks that are already present and attended such as floods etc
- Floods are more common, this area needs more attention.
- Climate change will dictate - we cannot guess
- Flooding?
- more frequent flooding episodes
- Heathland fires are increasingly common. High-rise building fires probably need a different approach e.g. Grenfell.
- Campaign to stop the production of disposable barbecues.
- I would like to see Fire Authorities push for a ban on sales of portable disposal barbeques. These items are a fire risk during summer months. Free up some funds to pay for distribution and fitting of smoke alarms in homes, especially to the more vulnerable in our communities.
- Banning of portable Barbaques
- Reducing the number of fire engines around the Northwich and winsford area is an accident waiting to happen
- There should be no reduction in services as times will increase due to traffic problems and extra fires with all the new building occurring
- Switching from on call to day shifts leaves gap in provision weekends and nights (when risk of harm from fire is higher)
- Not enough fire engines/staff to cover the area.
- Yes the risk involved in cutting roles and appliances
- We need on call all the time , we often have our local fire sent miles away to cover other areas. Which will leave our area very short and dangerous.
- Reducing fire cover in Northwich is not in the interest of the people of Cheshire.
- The draft proposal has been put together without sufficient input from local stakeholders. Meetings have been put off/ignored. Further, members of the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service have made it clear they feel the changes will put lives at risk.
- I am concerned that there are no on call fire engines in / near Chester and Ellesmere Port area when there are a couple in close proximity in other areas. Particularly how busy Chester is with the surrounding areas.
- Total staff increases to support resilience

- I am concerned about the lack of planning to the evening, night and weekend cover.
- I think the majority of issues are covered. Maybe an increase in cover during firework season?
- Weekend cover - surely fires are not just on weekdays. All the statements are fine but without any stats of how often there are fires in the day, evening, night, week or weekend its hard to tell how good they are
- Week end risk factor greater is accepted, recognising social and sporting activity increases over a week end. Thus the debate the increase week day cover, resulting cost is not justified
- Add middlewich to a daily maned station
- 3 appliances at night providing 0% cover
- Involvement by the Service under mutual aid to incidents in neighbouring counties.
- What times are classed as "weekday daytimes"?
- I like to know how fire cover is being coordinated effectively if a fire break out in evening and at weekend. There has been many take away shops in Runcorn and risk of fire could be in evening or weekend or late time of day
- It does fundamentally revolve around 'fire' (understandably!) whereas the FB do cover rather more (that's a compliment).
- Night cover.
- Time is of the essence. If fire appliances come from Lyme can you guarantee their rapid travel through the roundabouts near motorways?
- Cover in the densely populated area
- Birchwood is too far for a fire in Appleton or Stockton heath
- Birchwood could potentially be left without adequate fire cover. On call doesn't work for most stations in the daytime so we can't rely on an on call cover. The roads can be horrendous in warrington if bridges are off or it there's an accident on a motorway, so getting a fire engine to this area could be extremely difficult without a fire engine based in the area. You'd be relying on over the border cover for birchwood
- Neston area still not covered yet we rely on Merseyside to cover us
- What happens if there is no pump is available and my house is on fire or there's a flood for example? What if there is a large wild fire and there aren't enough fire fighters for another example? This is a very short sighted proposal
- Reducing the amount of fire engines overall is a dangerous and irresponsible ide
- The inability of senior managers to acknowledge their own shortcomings and genuinely listen to staff when they were told previously that downgrading fire cover in Knutsford was a poor decision
- Water rescue needs to be fully funded and undertaken by Fire and rescu
- It is clear that a failure to address stagnant pay in the Fire sector will result in industrial action, yet the plan fails to refer or plan for this
- Additional cost
- There are risks arising from lack of funding and lack of skilled crews.
- I think the fire cover and response times are very good as it is and in these times of financial distress and uncertainty we shouldn't waste money
- Cutting staffing is a huge risk factor
- I would imagine that you have the county risk-assessed by area for dmoestic fire, business fire and RTC, with appropriate provision of appliances and staff. Perhaps a risk assessment map published against your proposed strategic plan would aid assessment

- Initial calls should trigger an immediate response not after the call handler has asked a barrage of questions. That way an engine is already on its way whilst the caller is still on the line
- Prevention and safety of resident
- Never "completely" given risks by their very nature are unknown.
- I think it's impossible to identify all future risks. The areas we are aware of are being addressed by the plan
- Yes, don't bash in people's front doors anyway
- The draft is so comprehensive and informative, it is difficult for me to comment with no experience or knowledge of the subject matter but you have my complete support.
- Response to non-fire emergenciesthat are currently responsibility of fire teams.
- Not sure was terror organisations mentioned?
- An appendix with all KPI's would have given far more credence .The variety of figures included seem to have been hand picked in the main to support your views
- It doesn't seem to address night time cover. I would have thought that this is the time where more people have issues in their homes - through cooking, plugging in electric car, candles etc.
- Yes people such as my neighbour who had to put a fire out on a residents property across the road on my street single handed as there is not the service to deal with it. If he hadn't risked his life and intervened the property and adjoining would have gone up in flames and perished. Should not be cutting services but increasing.
- Education in schools and community to help prevent fires and rescue operations.
- Check house wiring and smoke alarms + carbon monoxide
- Still issues at The Deck Runcorn,A prohibition notice was put on the complex due to flammable cladding and the risk to residents.An additional fire alarm system was installed at owners cost.Yet Four years on we are still here?
- No, but wall mounted high amp car chargers might become very much more common
- Rise in home wood burner use
- Increase in housing in the area, which is not addressed appropriately
- This does not consider the increase In houses being built in the area - which increases the risk availability
- Projected ageing population and increased dwelling increase poses greater risk. Secondly, the increase in electric vehicles increase the chance of lithium fires. Much more difficult to put out and risks dwellings in immediate proximity. These risks are not adequately quantified.
- elderly population needs ie getting up if fallen
- The amount of new homes should be further considered in plans.
- Ageing population and many old people being part cared for at home present an increased fire risk. Where NHS send elderly patients home fire risk should be assessed and fire alarms/smoke alarms provided.
- What about the new houses to be built when Fiddler's Ferry Power Station is demolished in December 2023?
- Not a lot of reference to growing population and whether this will affect number of kids ncidents.
- I don't recall seeing the mention of the incinirator being built in Rudhead which will attract hundreds of lorries and increase the risk of incidents by its sole nature.
- Busy race events at Oulton Park or other venues not recognised

- Whilst you mentioned non-domestic properties, i.e. businesses, it would be good to see factories/chemical works mentioned independently. Places like Solvay Interox near Latchford/Walton pose, in some ways, greater risks than that of other types of business premises due to the storing/usage of chemicals on a much larger scale.
- Will there be sufficient training time for on-call personnel including familiarization of major fire risk premises, given the low level of availability
- Schools, hospitals, sport centres - public buildings
- Spot checks on care/nursing homes and facitilies where possible to check fire regulation compliance.
- Skip fires in residential areasmaround November/December related to availability of fireworks.
- I feel the council could help more (re: fire risks) by making sure all the rubbish is cleared around bins that people fly tip! Also the grids and drains around the residential areas should be cleared out more - to prevent possible flooding.
- Would like to see more action to tackle nuisance fireworks
- The number of motorway crashes daily on the m56 and m6, the increasing number of electric cars with fires, the increased flooding in all of cheshire
- risk from terrorism risk from rail crash
- Railways should be considered more
- Response to incidents on the M6 J17-19? This stretch seems to have a lot of problems.
- Enforcing parking regulations where inconsiderate parking can block fire engine access - e.g. Mereheath Park, Knutsford incident in June 2023
- The figures are reduced not increased despite demand currently, more cars on the roads, worse road conditions and lack of ambulances due to them being stuck at hospitals.
- The ability of local authority to safely close roads, offer diversions and lights, or police on traffic control. Partially covered.
- Electric car car issues when involved in rta incidents
- Problems in appliances getting across Warrington at times when the motorway is blocked and the town is grid-locked. This means it is sometimes difficult for one station to support another when contingencies arise.
- Road accidents could be considered in more detail given the motorway network in Cheshire.
- Electric vehicles including cars, van, bikes etc seem to be involved in many incidents of late, causing actual loss of life. perhaps reviewing these at all levels would be wise, as i understand that they are very incendiary and often difficult to put out.
- Flood plain erosion projection coordination. Smart motorway increase in workflow
- As more battery powered cars, bicycles, trains etc come into use, the fire risk due to these high flammable batteries could significantly increase.

Staff comments

- Staffing other on_call stations during the day
- Keeping the four fire engines that are being taken off on evenings and weekends available with the oncall crews that are already in place
- Water supplies for non-domestic premises (NDP). NDP's are being built and occupied without adequate water supplies being available.

- confining the residents of Stockton Heath and surrounding suburbs including warrington to inefficient fire cover
- More specific action regarding wildfires.

Partner comments

- Instead of trying to follow other services and all the cuts to improve be innovative and stand up against government to get more money to improve services
- A suggestion that the with the increase in usage of hotels as temporary accommodation for various co-horts e.g. homeless and asylum seekers - that these properties be identified and risk and response be considered.

Management of risk

Question: Are there any other activities or approaches which we should be considering to address the fire and rescue risks which we have identified?

Public comments

- more inter agency training
- Not specifically, though genuine integration of emergency services would further mitigate risks. Current proposal to "improve" integration is motherhood and apple pie and has been around for 20 years (at least in respect of healthcare)
- Heathland fires may require stronger links to other services, eg. for air/water support. On a recent visit to new york the strategy seemed to be to send excessive support (fire engines etc) to relatively small fires in high-rise towers to esnure minimal fire development into a full tower catastrophe.
- See above; some data o number of mutual aid deployments in the last year to each neighbour would be useful; also, any of their deployments to Cheshire incidents.
- If there is a major fire in industrial area and chemical site in Runcorn do we have sufficient resources to combat fire/chemical risk? How often some type of coordinated exercise is carried out and assessed?
- Not really. Maybe consideration could be given to online attacks to the IT system. What strategies could be put in place to minimise risk.
- Having sight of comparative data analysis based on current measurements would be far more open and inclusive
- Giving locals more of a say rather than it being from centralised government as this has been the case for too long the needs of the local people are not being met. Simple as that and people can see this in plain sight.
- Your modus operandi was to save money. This overarching ethos has imposed a bias on the risk analysis. This should be undertaken by an independent body.
- The draft proposal has been put together without sufficient input from local stakeholders. Meetings have been put off/ignored. Further, members of the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service have made it clear they feel the changes will put lives at risk.
- Inculcating the same loyalty and pride as the RNLI
- Holly senior managers and fire authority members to account
- Poor management
- Depends on extending the definition of primary fires.
- same imponderable as above but this is NOT a criticism - just a fact

- Give realistic predictions for the future. When there are fires they require large turnouts eg Roberts factory.
- Employ younger people
- Additional cost
- Very comprehensive
- My knowledge in the area is limited but on reading the information sounds as if covered.
- You all do a great job
- Obviously, you need greater provision of 24/7 appliances and staff, but to do that you need more money! This seems to be a highly competent use of resource within the budget you have. I am surprsied byt he very low availability of part-time staff and equipment. You obviously need to understand the drivers around this very low availability.
- You shouldn't be looking at cutting firefighter numbers or availability
- Don't cut staff / resources
- Yes. Do not reduce the number of fire engines or firefighters . The risk is far greater than ever given the economic reliance on electrical vehicles, scooters and other appliances in the home. To reduce the emergency response capabilities with increased risk of fire is not an appropriate plan.
- Retaining or even increasing current staff and appliance capacity
- Keep same number of fire fighters and fire engines
- The aging population living in flood areas, the number of incidents /crashes on the roads in Cheshire over previous years. If reduction is due to budget cuts then consider asking business to make donations to keep the service going with more units.
- Do not remove or decrease the current service or available engines
- Increase fire cover to reduce attendance time.
- Increase staffing and not sharing appliances
- Senior managers trained in resilience and ready and able to crew the engines and special appliances
- Faster response time
- As long as the firemen/women feel confident, adequate fire engines available in their area (together with adequate numbers of firefighters)
- Evacuation of elderly and disabled from high rise property
- Proximity of emergency services
- You are failing to provide an adequate service to rural areas -aligning a goal of yours to the home office is not logical
- Have fire appliances in the community that can be rapidly deployed with sufficient staff
- There should be more firefighters which would enable more pumps to be available when required. To reduce the number of on-call firefighters just because you consider their availability to be have been reduced, shows that you have not considered the fact that there has been a lack of recruitment. Hence you have expected those minimal numbers to cover all shifts out of hours, alongside their mandatory full time jobs elsewhere which is totally inadequate.
- People's lives! I fail to understand how reducing the number of fire fighters will improve response times and save lives.
- Water incidents and flooding are not covered by a statutory duty

- Height and water rescues
- Flooding may become a bigger concern with cliamte change, cars ending up in rivers, skidding on surface water; people trapped in vehicles. Yet summers increase fire risks now the sun seems to be more intense, high temperatures.
- I understand that under your proposal there will be: 4 less fire engines every night and weekend. 75 posts made redundant, 55 trained firefighters up for redundancy. Northwich and Winsford to go from 4 fire engines to 2 fire engines.
- Explain about night time cover - especially in Northwich where we are loosing that provision.
- Provide adequate cover for Northwich which means not losing the second fire engine based in the town
- Stats on call outs don't match general plans when looking at Northwich station - a second pump is vital
- Why not re-engage retired firefighters on limited contracts to boost day time availability of OC appliances in the short term
- More recruitment in the on-call with better pay and improved conditions. Speak to other local groups mountain rescue/life boats who manage to provide cover in these areas for very little reward.
- The wholetime stations mentioned where the on-call appliances would be staffed in the daytime and roaming around where cover is needed - surely this would be better to choose 4 on-call stations to convert to day crewed? Firstly, reducing the amount of time lost where the appliance is en-route to the station where cover is needed. Secondly, the on call staff at these stations already have a route to a whole time career at their own station. Surely it would be much better for the morale of on-call staff to have that chance to staff their own station and support their communitites? On call morale is very low and this would have helped. There are already very few opportunities for career progression from on call, you have taken this away as well. Don't be surprised to lose a lot of staff over this move, I know a number of on call firefighters who are considering leaving because there is no chance to progress via migration or wholetime.
- Appropriately staffing the on call with fair pay
- Enhanced Community Roles supporting rural in call stations during office hours, why not train Prevention staff to drive appliances so they can increase On Call availability in areas such as Cheshire West during the day when working locally
- Reduced cover is areas at weekends risks increased deaths due to fire
- The fire engines are are being got rid of and made day time only in the week, why not keep them on call at night?
- Firestorm don't know what time or day of the week it is. Switching focus to weekday working will be of detriment to northwich and wider mid cheshire region.
- Leave the engines where they are
- Seem to cover most areas at key times of the day (weekdays). overnight cover would be better but on limited budget appears to be best use of resources.
- I don't have the information about weekend/over-night risks - the plan seems to focus on weekday cover.
- Why are all the plans for increased firefighters in the week - what's going on at weekend. Surely it would be best that at some sites the full time fire fighter posts were Tuesday to Saturday and then at other sites Sunday to Thursday - so that there is cover into the weekends.

- Rural areas seem to be sparsely served especially evenings and weekends.
- Night cover.
- advice on new technologies and inventions to educate the public
- More visits to schools, primary and secondary, so that children can see the impact (age appropriate) of fires in the house and community.
- I worry about foreign electrical plugs etc. How can i have them tested?
- A lot of elderly people use mobile scooters. Suggest more talks given at retirement homes on the dangers of battery care.
- Explain how to activate smoke batteries.
- Education at junior school level about fire risk, plus for people known to be less mentally able to cope.
- Flyers to schools about the value of safety central visits
- More school visits to young children. Fire risk advertising to be increased if financially viable. e.g. batteries exploding, unsafe charging practices.
- Ongoing assessment of presmies (busines and private) to ensure there are no fire risks presented (or otherwise). Premises that are empty and derelict are a risk and some need to be demolished with liaison with the councils.
- I am not sure the risks from, and dangers faced, from lithium ion batteries in their various firms and uses is addressed strongly enough. This is an emerging issue but has the potential to be a serious risk and challenge to the F&RS.
- More awareness. Awareness meetings could be held in community halls, schools, libraries in most villages and towns. If tea and biscuits are provided people will turn up.
- Mainly education of the public regarding advice on using certain products and their storeage and to recognise potential fire risks.
- To check fire alarms, regularly, for vulnerable people.
- Services for children and young people seem a bit disjointed. Will the review of prevention address thus?
- Proximity of major motorways and RTAs.
- Risk posed by increased numbers of foreign HGV's on our motorways/roads and potential accidents - are they properly regulated like british drivers/vehicles?
- I think it important that the on-call firefighters renting houses should only be moved out if it is clear they have realistic accomodation alternatives (Stockton Heath). Is selling Authority houses at Stockton Heath really necessary?
- Retain cover in Stockton heath
- Leave Stockton heath maned
- Use the second fire engine at Penketh to do the cleanup ver at Stockton Heath , and leave Birchwoods fire engine alone. Thus would give you a fire engine in every area of Warrington during the day - North, East, South and West.

Staff comments

- Not have stealth cuts removing fire appliances with ridiculous proposals regarding Stockton Heath, Birchwood & roving appliances during the day.
- Better recruiting for the on call firefighters to create more availability and a better resilience during spate conditions
- The process for ensuring adequate water supplies for all new NDP's requires a review, specifically in relation to the provision of hydrants and their addition to

Firecore. Liaison between building control and protection to be better to ensure that the required water supplies are actually provided.
- crewing for the 4 new day pumps will not be sustainable and all 4 will not be available all the time without the system being propped up by overtime staff

Partner comments

- Improve industrial relations, listen to firefighters ideas instead of begrudging them.
- Other premises that support vulnerable adults also to be registered with risk and response considered accordingly.

Lithium-ion batteries

Question: Regarding lithium-ion battery products, would you like to receive safety information on any of the following issues?

Public comments

- I want to know how many fire engines would need to be deployed to a car lithium fire at a public building or block if flats.
- Garaging of electric cars
- Safety of electric cars involved in accidents
- Note : Most people are not aware of the dangers surrounding electric cars
- Care management of solar battery packs
- Solar panels connected to storage batteries
- Recycling
- E cigs
- Is this a Fire Authority's problem
- Drills
- How to safely store products with lithium-ion batteries.
- Where to buy safe replacement batteries.
- Not an expert but can understand the dangers

Staff and partner comments received all stated the respondent had no further comment to make.

Measuring and reporting our response time

Question: Do you have any comments on this proposal that you would like us to consider?

Public comments

- Does it address the time to reach the more locations e.g. out in the countryside?
- None, if anything they need to drive faster if part of the time is used on the phone.
- Rank reasons for not meeting standards (suspect e.g. indiscriminate parking and consequences of over-development would rank highly)
- The ambulance service had target response times and couldn't stick to them, so be careful as you will judged.
- This seems like it will make it much harder for all crews to respond to incidents within the 10 minute target time.

- Time for Runcorn to Tarporely / Delamere area will be slower
- The call handling time is critical, the resources at a shared control however do not lend themselves to quicker call handling times, bring the function back in-house
- It will be difficult to compare if your start times will be open to human error unless your notifications can be an automated initiation time alert.
- Consider being even more transparent by detailing time taken in Control as well as time taken from mobilisation to arrival ie break down the 10 minutes even further
- Just that bringing Cheshire into line with other authorities will enable comparisons.
- I think it is important to standardise how response times are measured and a good decision to align this with the Home Office's approach to enable accurate benchmarking.
- I was surprised that this was not in place now. good for the public that measure is standard used across the UK for comparisons on performance.
- Statistics can be manipulated however you process them. As long as they are consistent long term that's all that matters. Don't fudge the numbers.
- Comparing like for like is better than having to interpret differing methods of measurement. It will help in consistency for the future.
- It seems sensible to align with national practice in measuring and recording response times.
- This should be set nationally for the whole of the UK. It would be absurd if each F&RS developed its own, completety different systems. A Cheshire-only scheme, and different for all the 40+ services in the UK, would make any comparisons meaningless.
- The changes will enable better and consistent recording & monitoring of response times and for comparison with peer services
- Surely the Home Office must have some guidelines to maintain consistency across England, as to how response times should be recorded.
- Agree that following standards recommended by Home Office and followed by other forces makes sense
- Please clarify whether we are losing nighttime cover. On call staff will just not be fit for purpose
- Simple mathematics say that this can't work with an ever increasing population and the cutting of services.
- Getting in and out of Northwich is getting worse due to the increase in house building
- Any reduction in emergency cover is not acceptable.
- Do not reduce resources
- Madness to reduce northwich to a single engine
- Review that stats on Northwich station, your view is not in line with its requirements
- Not only do you propose to reduce the local cover , within a few years the need will be greater due to more electrical products in use like vehicle home charging . To reduce what we have is madness.
- Sharing appliances is not improving cover
- As with the police could there be a roving fire engine at the far ends of the district.
- An increase in fulltime cover during the day helps with motorway cover for any incidents that arise.
- The reasons why there is a low response availability need to be looked at. Is is low crew availability ? If so then a better recruitment campaign needs implementing and fast rather than chewing the fat.

- I am satisfied with the cover as it is.
- There should be increases in both full time and part time firefighters also more voluntary positions should be made. Towns and villages are increasing in size at a great rate, yet emergency services do not seem to be keeping up.
- The changing of the crews stationed at Stockton heath
- Cutting your volunteer firefighters is a terrible plan all focused on cost cutting. They do vital work in the community that is needed for young people to understand the risks and dangers.
- Why do you want to change the way you measure and report the time it takes your firefighters to get to incidents?
- No I think the proposed are significant and relevant changes
- The review of response times is driven by cuts.... nothing else.
- Why is it monitored, just get there.
- Both current and proposed are pretty much the same, to me.
- Keep others safe
- I would have saved the money for thge bags and survey and put it to the fire services.
- The fire service already do an amazing job
- Better to use smoke alarms
- Do you yourselves think the times are adequate
- Proximity to emergencies
- Greater cooperation with local councils over local parking. In towns like Macclesfield and Crewe, the town centre parking amongst rows of terraced houses surely slows response times greatly.
- Just to be safe
- I think you need to really enforce the fact that responses times are crucial as it does sound a bit like you are not as bothered with them from the wording you have used.
- Cutting costs costs lives
- If you are changing other factors e.g. fire cover levels, changing how the response time is measured will make measurement of current to future state open to misinterpretation.
- Bring control back in house
- You do not seem to offer direct comparison data and this suggests a rather cynical manipulated presentation of the rationale
- I have concerns about response times overnight, weekends and holidays.
- Response times are vague, non comitial. Loosely worded with no contract specifics with the public.I have memories of the manchester arena explorions.,
- Again public safety. It's not logical in the slightest.
- Ridiculous idea, shame on you
- Its a good idea - time saves lives.
- Agree with proposals - anything that helps improve service levels has to be a good thing to support.
- Faster response time
- I go along completely with the proposals
- No, a good idea
- Good that emergency calls are monitored from the moment a 999 call is placed, rather than when you received it.
- I think 10 minutes is an outstnading arrival time to destination.

- Makes good sense - although we have not got any concern that the fire service will response as quickly as is possible on all occasions
- The proposals do not feel like 'excuses' to avoid management and minimum service levels etc, they were well explained and seem credible.
- No - you seem to have covered most things.
- I'm sure these have been carefully considered and all avenues appear to have been taken into account.
- Seems logical.
- Tracking the times of primary fires is a good idea, but in your draft it almost suggests that you will stop tracking response times to life-risk incidents. I think tracking response times to both types of incidents are really important, and one shouldn't take precedence over the other. As a public service, and an emergency one especially, ensuring that you track as many data points as possible surely should be a priority for you, so that you can optimise your performance, i.e. the saving of lives, as much as you can. By not tracking one data point, you'll lose valuable data, which will only lead to you starting to track it again in the future. If it's your intention to track response times to both primary fires and life-risk incidents, then disregard the above.
- Why does it only apply to fires
- All incidents should be taken into account not just ones you cherry pick.
- Should extend to all life risks not just fire
- You are moving to only primary fires, so no measure on risk to life. Does this mean you expect response times to risk to life will go up?
- Sounds like you are de-prioritising threat to life incidents
- It seems to be a matter of semantics and play on words. Targets and response times should be didactic, not "woolly"
- I support improvement however: Original Statement: ""Respond to life-risk incidents within 10 minutes on 80% of occasions."" Revised Statement: ""The average response time to primary fires in Cheshire will not exceed 10 minutes."" Comparison: Clarity and Specificity: Original: The original statement explicitly mentions ""life-risk incidents,"" providing a broader scope that encompasses various emergencies. Revised: The revised statement narrows the focus to ""primary fires,"" which may be more specific but could potentially exclude certain life-risk incidents that don't involve fires. Measurement Metric: Original: Utilizes a percentage metric (80% of occasions) to quantify the target. Revised: Shifts to an average response time metric, which may simplify measurement but could be less intuitive for interpreting the overall effectiveness of responses. Flexibility: Original: Offers flexibility in achieving the target on a percentage basis, allowing for variations in incident types and circumstances. Revised: May be perceived as more rigid due to the average response time requirement, potentially allowing less flexibility for incidents that require more or less than 10 minutes. The first statement is more **specific** and **measurable** than the second one. It defines what kind of incidents are considered as life-risk, and what percentage of them should be responded to within 10 minutes. The second statement is more **general** and **ambiguous**. It does not specify what kind of fires are considered as primary, and what happens if the average response time exceeds 10 minutes. In my opinion, the new statement is **not** an improvement over the old one, because it **lowers** the standard of performance and **reduces** the accountability of the service. The old statement sets a clear and achievable goal, while the new statement leaves room for interpretation and excuses.

Consequently, I do not believe you will improve things with this new target statement, quite the opposite

- Average response times are very easily affected by extreme numbers. I see this being dropped and changed back very quickly when this is realised. Hitting 8/10 hires within 10 minutes is much easier than keeping the average wait time for these fire under 10 mins.
- I do not agree with moving to average response time as this is a dilution of the standrad. By all means change to measure from point the phone call is received but retain the 80% within ten minutes element.
- You need to use an honest and realistic c way of measuring response times instead of monopolising the results by changing the way you record the times
- Average allows too much leeway.
- report both average and % response times
- Time from start of 999 call is good but don't like the switch to an average time.
- While i understand the reasons for change (i.e. alignment with the Home Office reporting) the proposed change leaves more wriggle room and is less precise than the existing measure. Precise quantitative measures are far preferable to "average" measures, enabling better actions to be taken to improve things. Generally an "average" measure can hide many issues.
- While i strongly support the need to standardise the methodology for measuring call out times nationally, i am unconvinced by the arguments about preferring an "average" time measurement - the key time is how long it takes an appliance to be called and arrive at the fire/incident.
- You should already be measuring from when the call is received and you should keep the 80% not just primary fires
- The time calculated should be from the initial 999 call as that gives a truer measurement.
- Response times should be included as time from call. That is what matters to the public
- It sounds very good to measure times as experienced by the end users.
- Measuring correctly from start to finish
- Measuring true response times is good.
- Not at all. think the proposed changes give a clearer and fairer picture.

Staff comments

- The proposal you are suggesting means that life risk incidents are no longer taken into account for the figures produced. Why can't you keep the way that you measure life-risk incidents the same, but use this new method for all other incidents?
- Measuring of response time should always be from recieving the call in control until time in attendance unlike Cheshires diabolical fudging of figures.
- It seems like it could add a delay to each call, resulting in your crews feeling they have to take further risks to respond quickly in order to meet targets
- I would like to see it being reported in hours rather than percentages.
- cheshire fire will struggle to meet 10 minute response times at times using this approach
- More reflective of true experiences of callers.

Partner comments

- We are supportive of the changes to Knutsford fire station.
- Instead of cherry picking so you can manipulate figures all incidents should be covered and reported.

Changes to the provision of fire cover

Question: What do you consider to be the positive impacts of introducing the proposed changes to our provision of fire cover?

Public comments

- More reliability with the increase in full-time firefighters.
- Guaranteed cover at certain times
- What you have outlined will definitely improve weekday coverage in regards to fire engines being available during the week, between the mentioned given times. It's certainly reassuring to know that there will be fire service coverage during these times. Other than that, I think your documents outline the benefits of your proposals adequately. However, in my opinion, it very much seems to miss certain points out, or at least doesn't emphasize the downsides to your proposals.
- More full time pumps
- Knutsford is a big hub in Cheshire and would give a good link in the network
- Better availability
- Cover will improve
- Increasing the number of fire engines from 17 to 21 is a positive and welcome step.
- Greater spread of coverage for the county
- Better availability of service
- The proposed changes would increase the geographical area of the county covered with guaranteed weekday provision.
- Keeping a reasonable cover of firefighters, within a restricting budget.
- Better service
- Better daytime/weektime cover by full time firefighters.
- Better cover and provision. More areas covered full time instead of on-call in areas where population is growing and so are road networks.
- Better cover for weekday fires
- Increased cover
- Providing cover at the right time in the right place is a good thing. Statistics help with this.
- More areas covered
- Adequate cover for more areas.
- More full time firefighters/engines
- Better daily availability for fire response and rescue in local communities is a positive change.
- More consistent availability
- Full-time cover returning to Knutsford
- More areas provided with cover, more of the time
- Higher availability of fire rescue day and night. Larger areas covered - larger population of Cheshire will feel safer.
- Having more wholetime fire engines.
- More cover, getting to fires within the parameters considered.
- Better provision of fire appliance availability and faster response times.
- Good to improve cover
- better spread of cover
- more crews during day

- Cover will be improved
- More cover will always be beneficial
- More cover available and quicker real time response times
- Stronger cover during the day when there is greater risk to life in work places.
- better cover for when it's needed
- More guaranteed cover for my neighbourhood
- Higher risk areas at peak times would have increased cover
- better coverage and response times
- Better daytime cover
- Providing guaranteed coverage to more of Cheshire is very important.
- More cover via extra staff
- Increasing the availability of full-time cover in the countyand in this way countering partially the failures of staffing firemen "on-call"
- More immediate and more extensive cover.
- Better area availability, reduce risks
- a more evenly spread service in case of emergency.
- Would result in more fire cover in Frodsham
- More stations covered. No reductions of fire engines or closure of fire stations is great news.
- More available cover at high risk times.
- More responsive cover with daytime fire engines rather than relying on on-call fire engines.
- Better overall coverage.
- Providing part time day cove to full time day cover, which will enhance public safety.
- Full time cover during daytime when most incidents are likely to occur and response times across long distances slower due to traffic will be an improvement across the county
- More engines during the week.
- Increase guaranteed weekday daytime fire cover.
- Increase in week day availability is great.
- Full daytime cover.
- Better cover for Knutsford area which is increasing in domestic and business properties.
- Wider, more balanced and consistent cover.
- Better and safer cover
- Better and safer cover
- More day cover
- Better cover throuhg the day at busiest times.
- It sounds like more engines will be available to the public
- Very good overall cover of the area
- More full time cover.
- Greater daytime coverage
- Positive impact to the amount of cover in Cheshire, however it will have a seriously negative impact to the morale of the staff who find a roaming appliance at their station.
- Better cover
- Wider coverage of the whole county.

- Better cover in rural areas.
- Increases the number of appliances available but it must be remembered fires happen at any time and these additional appliances shouldn't just be used to cover courses etc
- As a service provider I expect Cheshire Fire Authority to work out the best arrangements to meet their targets.
- Where are the mechanisms to evaluate the changes actual delivery to enable remedial action to be taken
- The change to response time if achievable would be possible. But I think it's not been thought through and will be dropped when you realise this.
- Centralisation creates more burn time and this is in areas that are directly under the flight paths of the UK third busiest airport. The roads in this area are very congested and with the rise in the projected population, are getting busier. The journey times from distant fire station are likely to be longer.
- I don't see the need to change them.
- Saving lives - imperative
- Is this saying you have poor management?
- Please see my answer to Q2
- Fire Blanket
- If the people doing the job feel it is the right thing to do then i support their point of view.
- Please see previous comments.
- Vulnerable people, single through no choice of their own.
- Lacks detail, no contract with the public.
- Won't know until possibly a year after their introduction. Impact not known at present
- Safer and cheaper to prevent rather than react.
- Don't know - far too complex for me!
- Less fires
- We'll be safer
- It will be an improvement
- Improvement for all the areas which is good, at the same time maintaining safety.
- I assume on limited budget this is best way forward.
- This seems like a step forward
- For the better
- Well constructed and presented document; in my view police and health services problems will likely impact achievements of the fire service in the area of integration
- I think that it is a very good proposal.
- More public support
- Greater confidence in what you do
- Call out time, full time staff and training
- If daytime is the prime a rea of usage, then the changes should be very positive.
- That fire will be under control quicker.
- It sounds very good to measure times as experienced by the end users.
- Sensible proposals.
- On Paper everything looks good hopefully it would work ok.
- Peace of mind. Less loss of life
- Saving people's lives.

- Living in a village and elderly (83) it gives me more confidence if I need to call you as Holmes Chapel, my nearest, is only part time.
- It would help peoplke to feel safer knowing that if ou ring 999 FIRE they will be there within ten minutes.
- Local populations re-assured. Other emergency services reassured as they often requirethe fire service's assistance.
- It's all for our safety
- Fit for purpose
- Just keep going
- Really happy with what the fire service do.
- Prevention - lowering the risk of fire.
- More professional staff
- I was surprised that nantwich and the surrounding area doesn't have a dedicated fire engine, considering the size of the population and the fact that it is rural - and you might get more accidents on rural roads and farms needing heavy lifting gear.
- Look closely again at outlying areas such as Audlem.
- with a waste recyleing centre in middlewich amongst other industries it should have a more day crewed station
- No mention of Penketh area even though following demolish arranged for December 2023 and 800+ homes proposed to be built.
- All positive except for the plans for Warrington
- Addresses the clear need to have full time firefighters - there is obviously a problem recruiting and retaining on-call officers
- This removes a number of unacceptable anomalies. The fact that a station (Northwich) can have 1% on-call availability is a nonsense......14.4 minutes per day.
- Swapping from volunteer staff to more employed staff.
- Less reliance on the sporadic On Call duty system
- More practical and realistic usage of resources and personnel with responsible redeployment policy.
- More flexibility and use resources where they are most needed. However, working with statistics is risky as no one knows the future
- It's a way of maintaining service in a time of scarcity of financial resources.
- Better use of finite resources, improved use of manpower, and better handling of emerging threats from new sources such as batteries.
- Improve efficiency. Improve manning. Improve coordination effectively.
- Feel safer, more efficient
- To be efficient
- Mainly improved efficiency and more effective use of resources that are available.
- To be efficient and keep costs down.
- Unable to see any positive impacts.
- Money
- None, although you get daytime in the week, there is less evening and weekends (I assume council tax will be reduced with these cuts?)
- Reorganisation sue to finding does not work. Reorganisation if more funding was coming in to the local authority would
- £ budget
- Not an all. Bat shit crazy
- What positives ?

- This is a pig in a dress you have dress up the changes that are a real time reduction in cover
- none, it appears to be less fire engines at large periods of the time
- Need to consider Stockton East and Birchwood which will not have enough cover. There will be less weekend and evening fire cover in general.
- Non. It's all cuts driven.
- Concerned that the overall number of appliances is reduced
- "you'll sell this a positive and it being cost neutral yet I can't see how this is possible.
- I agree with selling housing stock at fire stations that no longer require them."
- Very unclear how that improves the poor service in the south of cheshire
- Council saves money and residents get less service for their obligatory tax payments
- Financial at expense of safety
- There aren't any
- Hopefully reduce your maximum response times, without impacting average times. Possibly, there may be advantages in developing recommendations for fire risk in rural areas to minimise impact and spread of fire in deeply rural areas where response times will be higher. ""Park your farm machinery a good way from your fuel storage"" for instance. But this would have to be coordinated with law enforcement to prevent theft.
- Much better overall. Better response times if firefighters are full time and on-site.
- Better view of actual response times. Better availability of fire engines / crews.
- Improvement i response times
- Better response times
- Quicker response time
- Less part time and more full time people so should help to improve responses.
- If it shortens the time of response it will be good.
- Better overall response times. More accurate reporting/monitoring.
- response times
- A faster response time
- Quicker response times and more manpower and availability of engines means more life and buildings could be saved.
- Better response to emergencies. More full time jobs
- Improved TATs for responses.
- Quicker responce times
- At least an attempt to improve response times.
- More consistency in day time fire crews, including quicker response times.
- If response times improve, then a positive impact is acheived.
- Shorter response times
- It should make the response time shorter leading to less loss of life and damage to property.
- Improved response times as well as prevention.
- Hopefully a speedier response time from full day time crewing
- Improving the response times can only benefit everyone.
- Better response times
- It would make a positive impact in the wa a fire is reported, the quicker you respond to the fire must be a better way.
- Average response time of 10 mins across the Service area.

- Faster response times.
- Response speed
- Quicker response times and to increase the number of fire engines available at any one time.
- Quicker response. Make firefighting a more attractive career to recruit high caliber talent.
- The ability to achieve the response times because crews are on station.

Staff comments

- There is a positive by bringing Knutsford fire station to a day crewing model.
- The down grading of Stations cannot possibly be described as a positive impact. What kind of delusionary world are you and the Fire Authority living in?
- Better cover for Knutsford, obviously.
- The daytime cover would improve
- improved fire cover during daytime hours
- The provision of flexible fire cover that is fluid and responsive to the ever changing risks of the Cheshire.
- better response times
- Having increased availability throughout cheshire is obviously paramount and something I agree with. Whichever way this is achieved has to be a positive for the safety of our communities.
- More fire engines available
- creation of 4 day pumps
- More guaranteed fire cover during weekdays is positive as is providing more capacity for community work.
- Increase in number of wholetime firefighters. Increase in available appliances improving response
- A guaranteed pump in an area is great
- Having more fire cover available when it is needed the most
- Better overall cover
- Knutsford changing to DC1 is a good move

Partner comments

- It would be better to have those stations whole-time 24/7
- Communication and consultation on the process is key.
- More availability

Question: What do you consider to be the negative impacts of introducing the proposed changes to our provision of fire cover?

Public comments

- On page 42/17 of the full/summary CRMP documents, you state that you wish to ""strengthen the on call system"". But this seems to be in conflict with proposals two and four, where you wish to dismantle the on call cover currently available to certain areas. Your fire cover focus seems to majorly be on weekdays, which may be better

for some business premises, but most people, despite the increase in people working from home, are more active at home during the weekends. Wouldn't this mean that people are more likely to cause fire related incidents during the weekend? At the same time, people are at home mostly in the evenings during the week, and yet your proposals suggest that there would be no evening cover in some areas such as Stockton Heath. As a home owner in Latchford, I'm concerned that if there were a fire incident nearby, especially if it were at a chemical works like Solvay Interox that handles hydrogen peroxide, the response time to such an incident would be reduced. Adding to that, as you mention on your documents, Cheshire's population is aging, and that is especially true of West Latchford and Stockton Heath. If the elderly and young are the most affected and at risk from fire incidents, surely it would be a bad idea to remove on-call firefighters from their duty in Stockton Heath? Whilst I understand the need for increasing funding to ensure people are protected from fire incidents, and that selling the on-call accommodation that you have in Stockton Heath would provide such additional funding for you, I don't think that funding the future of the fire service in Warrington should put any of the general public at risk; that seems very counterintuitive to me. Wouldn't having fire engines that would be otherwise crewed by on call staff sitting empty be a waste of resource/funding also? Finally, your documents mention lots of data/figure, specifically on the availability of fire engines, but it lacks in an equal representation of data regarding when fire incidents actually occur. For example, on page 11 of your summary document, it states the following: ""We are proposing this change because the availability of the on-call fire engine at Runcorn in the day was on average 23% in 2022/23." That's all very well, but where is the data showing that the on call fire engine was actually needed during the day during daytime hours? Where is the data showing that on-call fire engines aren't needed at night? To me this lack of data suggests that I'm not seeing the entire picture, and so I'm sceptical as to whether your proposals are justified. Please ensure that you provide all the data needed to prove to the general public that your proposals are in our best interests.

- A slightly higher response time if the fire is in one of the three 'off' days.
- Sharing engines in the way you're suggesting could mean a shortage of cover if a big fire happened.
- Clearly there are issues about reducing some services especially at Birchwood and Stockton Heath (where the cuts could be construed as a way of releasing funds for Warrington's new fire station). In my opinion the idea of introducing full time cover 50% of the time in an 8 day cycle is a recipe for risking people's lives. Domestic fires can happen anytime in the week and equally when bad traffic prevents appliances from crossing the motorway or canal to cover.
- Stockton Heath needs more cover and should remain in a similar way as it is running.
- Lack of timely cover in Stockton Heath & Appleton
- Lower response times, lower cover for Stockton heath and surrounding areas
- The on call duty system does not guarantee 24hr fire cover. The decision to remove the on call establishment was taken due to poor availability of the Stockton heath appliance. Taken from Crmp 2024-2028: During 2022/23, Stockton Heath's on-call fire engine was available only 10% in the day and 67% at night. This has worsened to 4% in the day and 62% at night in the first five months of 2023/24. Replacing this on-call cover with full-time cover on 50% of days will be, on balance, more effective. For clarity, "full-time cover on 50% of days" in reality is :- 7am to 7pm, 3 days on 3

days off equates to 48hrs per week (7 days). Which is 48hrs out of 168hrs or 28% available per week.

- Birchwood and Lymm too far from Stockton heath and Appleton
- Warrington cover needs re-thinking. You need a fire engine in every part of warrington in the daytime, without relying on on on call cover.
- Reduced fire cover in Warrington
- Lack of detail in the call out rates and the types of incidents to allow informed comment in consultation
- I have already seen the negative impacts on my own street even prior to there proposed changes.
- This appears to redistribute where will have the most cover.
- All of it
- Will there sufficient full week cover
- Maybe more staff needed
- If a really big fire, not enough back up.
- Looks like we're going back to where we were a few years ago - deja vu all over again!
- i feel there shouldn't be any... otherwise why change?
- Fire Blanket
- Cover is being considered for short term plans. Looking at longer term new homes estates & the volume of people in areas would be more effective future proofing planning.
- Nobody knows the exact time an emergency will come in. From m experience of calling the fire service, the response time has been outstanding.
- One could argue the cover today is adequate.
- Union participation?
- Same as above
- may tie up a machine where it would have been available to arural locality
- Don't have the knowledge to answer this.
- Not my area...
- N/A - not sufficiently aware/knowledgeable.
- Seems focussed on high population ares rather than rural-whether you like it or not ,you have rural areas
- Stretching of night time cover, could lead to longer arrival times at night, thus increasing the potential for loss of life.
- there will be less fire engines evening and weekends.
- Lose of manned cover 24/7. Having a service which is on call only could result in a major increase in response time.
- Working a business model around fires know what time it is and what day of the week it is.
- Increased riosk at nightime for loss of life and significant property damage
- Having less fire engines
- less cover and resilience at weekends
- Less engines overall at weekends and evenings
- Ensuring weekend cover especially for the Motorways and Chemical industry
- No improvement to evening, night and weekend cover.
- Evening and weekend cover appears to be reduced
- Think night cover change could comprise performance.

- We would like 24/7 cover during day and night but it all comes down to finances.
- You are removing valuable on call services during the evening which are needed.
- Not so much cover at weekends and yet surely Saturday's could be very busy.
- Only in the week cover - think cover should be spread into the weekend - find it very strange there is no mention of weekends - does that mean its all covered on high overtime costs or are there different staff covering weekends
- Reduced cover
- longer response times in an evening due to oncall staffing.
- Reduced night cover
- Proposals focus on daytime cover. Overnight cover impact is insufficiently clear.
- Reduced night time cover
- Reductions through the night and weekend availability.
- Why only weekends? Surely most accidents i.e. motor accidents, leisure activity accidents happen at weekends.
- No overnight cover except emergencies.
- Still concern if there is a major incident occuring at out of hours and involves chemical release e.g. chlorine.
- Less cover at night (weekends)
- Possibly cover at "lower risk" times?
- Lack of cover out of hours. Fires don't just happen between 8-6, even if your past figures show an increase within those hours.
- Lack of availability at night and weekends
- Of course the parttime firefighters are also doing an outside job so it willhave an impact on them moneywise.
- Possible loss of some current on-call fire personnel?
- Reduction of on-call firefighters (part-time) and their travelling from distance places when their rented accommodation is denied would become a operational hazard in case of severe emergency.
- Lack of availability on nights and weekends when more severe incidents are more likely to occur. Disenfranchisement of OC staff as they will see their jobs as low hanging fruit
- The part time firefighters have always been a valuable resource. I would hope that there would still be a role for volunteers in the future.
- Risk of redundancies?
- How are you going to encourage people to train and join the fire service to ensure enough staff?
- No arrangements to increase the number of current and/or proposed number of fire stations and/or fire engines? No mention of whether sufficient staff/firemen/firewomen are employed?
- Changeover of staff will cause disruption initially maybe
- Do you have enough man/woman power to achieve the extra areas or do you need to recruit?
- Perhaps the impact on the workforce - will they be stretched too much?
- Impacts on staff
- Loss of jobs for P/T firefighters
- Loss of jobs
- Cost. Potential part-time job losses
- None except possibly to some staff

- A lot depends on how existing personnel react to change. It may suit some to work as on-call personnel others may prefer the opportunity to work full-time. Retention and recruitment issues.
- Impact on staff
- Staff availability, illness
- The selling of the fire service houses for a lump sum contribution to new upgraded fire station in Warrington. The relative costs for maintaining these properties is unknown - to me - but the availability of a rental home to people working in this sector must be invaluable. If the workforce do not value this then selling could be a possibility. The housing is an asset that won't be replaced once sold.
- Position of all on-call firefighters.
- Loss of some part time roles
- Perhaps the loss of some on-call firefighters.
- I would strongly urge support to any current part time staff that may be displaced by the changes to some p/t stations particularly any who are in rented service accommodation
- The effect of current crew who may be at risk of having to change their current job or worse.
- Reduced staff
- Firefighters losing their homes?
- The loss of jobs.
- Staff redundancies.
- Displacing of families from their homes to achieve this.
- Further reducing morale and motivation to the crews at stations where a roaming appliance will be stationed.
- Reducing staff. Reducing appliances
- there will be costs to implementing these changes, especially when re-introducing day crewed fire stations instead of oncall where your oncall numbers at these stations is low. increase in staff means more costs.
- I would imagine the cost but it is a service that we need
- Probably an increased cost
- More cost for the council tax payer.
- Ther must be an increase in costs.
- Increased costs
- The extra funding needed will obviously come from an increase in household rates.
- Increased revenue through council tax
- Cost
- Increased cost. Acheiving the targt response time and being content with that. No mention of improving performance beyond that.
- None - except increased cost
- Costs, but it is necessary
- More costly & slower response times
- Not enough people to cover emergencies. Too focused on cost cutting
- Really concerned about reduced fire engines in the Northwich area
- Looking at the map on page 11, it is clear that Northwich and Macclesfield must have a whole time fire engine. However, this is not what you are proposing. Those towns have kept increasing their population and you are reducing the services

- Winsford and Northwich will be under supported. Response times for this area will not improve under your proposals
- I am concerned that Northwich is looking it's second engine and night time cover. The population in Northwich is growing. We are also close to the M56, M6, canal and rail lines - all which propose danger. I would have thought that more incidents occur at night time when people are back at home.
- Putting the lives of people in Northwich at greater risk should there be a major incident
- Reduced crew in my area of Northwich
- Winsford and northwich, 2 growing towns, dropping 50% of engines and serious crew reduction? Absolute madness.
- Massive risk, Northwich station covers a huge and growing population - going to one pump is ridiculous and without care to human survival in immediate emergencies that require prompt attendance
- Longer burn time for fires. Remember, Hartford has the highest concentration of schools in the UK. How many of these schools have sprinkler based systems? Secondly, with climate change, we can expect more flooding events and brush fires. Is this really the time to make cuts in response times for multiple pump stations?
- Removal of Northwich's second fire engine, with trained staff based in Northwich isn't an acceptable option.
- Northwich needs sufficient cover
- Losing the second fire engine from Northwich
- While i do understand and agree with the rationale, it still feels concerning to see one of Runcorn's fire engines be converted.
- Runcorn does not seem to be covered that much.
- Less cover for Northwich and longer response times for a second fire engine
- Less of a service doesn't compute to more service whichever way you spin it - less people, less vehicles - can't possibly equate to more safety
- Fewer engines available overall
- Cutting staff and resources (cutting staff = loose expertise / experience and numbers. Cheshire has many risks - motorway networks, over 50 COMAH sites, major train lines.... cutting staff and resources reduces an effective response to incidents in these areas alone never mind the residential and business premises
- The number of fire engines available is correct at the moment to reduce this number us reckless amd unacceptable
- Increased risk of electrical fires does not support diminished resources by reducing the number of fire engines and trained response people.
- There should be no reduction of fire engines, Cheshire is being overwelmed with more housing
- Longer response times
- Reduced cover, greater fatigue on staff
- Less Firefighters, diluted fire cover, weaker response times.
- Still will not give the cover required at all times not just the days
- I hope existing measures are not too thinly spread having a negative impact on response times and subsequently staff morale.
- If the number of firefighting staff is reduced (only to save money)
- fewer immediate responders
- Still seems to be a net reduction in F/T firefighter posts

- Less ability to address fires, residents losing out
- Don't know, maybe deaths.
- Safety
- Cutting staff will lead to loss of life and further damage from fire spreading with longer wait times for crews to get to the station and get fire engines immobilised
- This WILL put lives at risk
- People will die
- Reduction in staffing and engines isnt safe
- Reduction of services loss of lives and jobs and a fearful elderly population who are vulnerable.
- Reducing the current fire engine cover will put lives at risk . As the local engineers are often sent elsewhere to cover over areas when in need .Which leaves us short locally.
- You are putting people at risk. As a local councillor and a litigation solicitor I feel you are at risk of a challenge if you go through with these changes.
- Lives can be lost
- Although the risk to life change is not favourable, this change is a measured balance.
- Risk to life in densely populated area
- Mainly it's too risky, response times will be slower equalling more injuries/deaths, what if there are several emergencies occurring simultaneously? I think a lot of the information you have provided is spin to suit your own agenda.
- Risk to life as you are cutting vital staff.

Staff comments

- The four fire engines that you propose to take from Northwich, Winsford, Macclesfield, and Runcorn will be sat empty at nights and at weekends with this proposal. Currently, with the limited number of on-call staff at these 4 stations, it is difficult to crew them during the day. This is why you want to re-deploy them to other areas of the county during busier times, However, these on-call fire engines are very regularly on the run at night times and weekends, so you are effectively reducing your night cover by four fire engines. This will mean an increase in reliance from neighbouring brigades for any major incidents that happen during the night time and weekend hours. I don't think it is acceptable for you to knowingly leave these fire appliances empty, when there are crews willing and able to work during these times. These roaming pumps will also start to affect your on-call firefighters in other parts of Cheshire. As you know, the wages of an on-call firefighter are very little. They rely on turning out to incidents to make their money. By having the roaming pumps in those areas, the wages for those on-call firefighters will start to decrease, (as the roaming pumps will pick up these incidents) and on-call staff will lose interest in doing the job. This will cripple the rest of your on-call availability. I feel like you are shooting yourself in the foot. The proposal to remove the on-call staff at Stockton Heath, and to have the station crewed for only half the week during day time hours is ridiculous. If you want to have the area covered for only half a week during the day, at least consider keeping the on-call staff at night time, in the same way that Birchwood is covered.
- The down grading of two stations, reduced fire cover of an evening
- No improvement to daytime cover in the areas where it's most needed
- The loss of the four oncall fire engines at night and weekends

- Day wholetime pumps go off duty during peak activity hours. Also loss of activity for on call appliances due to extra day appliances will result in on call personnel leaving the service. This then will reduce the number of appliances available overall and may lead to shortfall at weekends and in the evening , especially in spate conditions.
- Opposition by local communities fearing a degradation of their fire cover.
- will affect people especially those affected who are wholetime and oncall, this may have an effect on moral
- The obvious one being loss of jobs for those who wish not to become a WT firefighter, I myself would have been likely to choose not to have taken the role of a WT firefighter and therefore would have had to finish a job that I enjoy doing and of which had been an ambition from a young age.
- crewing shortages for the new day pumps, losing 5 pumps at night will impact on the services ability to handle larger incidents or spate fire call conditions
- A reduction in fire cover within the Birchwood area.
- Moving ropes to Knutsford putting public & firefighters at risk of injury or worse by reducing training & responding with a team that contradicts not only national rope rescue standards but also NFCC guidelines. By doing this, this clearly shows a lack of understanding that senior managers have of rope rescue. On-call firefighters losing their jobs & potentially receiving very poor redundancy pay for huge commitment over a number of years. Placing some On-call into financial hardship by forcing them out of houses. Reducing number of Appliances available at night putting public at risk & not being able to facilitate reliefs at jobs.
- less fire engines as a whole being staffed, more should be done to improve the on-call availability
- Cost implications and the effect on current staff
- With the changes, on call shouts will decrease, there should therefore be a change to minimum contract hours for crews as people will be less likely to give up 50 hours on their days off if there is even less check they'll turn out, it's becoming less attractive as a result and more migration opportunities should be available.
- Putting the rope rescue back onto a DC1 system is wrong. I believe that the service is looking at changing the way the Rope rescue team operates. This should be trialled at Lymm 1st. Its a negative move and leaving a multi million pound purpose built rope station with no rope capability does not make sense. I feel this will reflect badly in the public eye, it will also cause an issue with the future DC1 staff at Knutsford with the additional complex training running alongside an inconsistent shift pattern. Knutsford have the Animal rescue as a special already which WILL work with the DC model system. Putting ropes at Lymm will mean 2 x stations will need training at 2 different specials which will cost time, money and detachments which will have future impacts on staffing. There are also Specialist lead roles which will require training people up for, there are not enough experienced personnel to take this role on. It would be like asking a probationary FF to take on a Watch Manager role.

Partner comments

- Complacency from the on-call in that all testing, maintenance, cleaning of equipment, training and non availability near whole-time start times.
- Lack of engagement in the consultation process despite the efforts to communicate.

Question: Are there any alternative models of providing fire cover which you think we should consider?

Public comments

- Rural Cheshire looks as though there is not much response centres - perhaps one from Chester or one from Crewe is relocated.
- Your document mentions that there are currently 15 on call firefighter posts in Stockton heath. 10 of these are currently filled, with 5 of them being full time fire fighters; which I assume means that full time fire fighters have chosen to be on call too. As an additional note, I admire their dedication. Considering that you are proposing selling all nine houses in Stockton Heath to gain additional funding for your capital programme, this suggests that none of the full time firefighters who are also on call live in these houses; is this correct? Would you ask fire fighters who are on full time duty to leave their homes? I'm unsure of this. If the full time fire fighters are not living in those houses, then only five of those nine houses, if the on call fire fighters do not house share, are currently occupied. This means that you could sell four of them without cutting the current on call crew, thus gaining you funding for improving and ensuring that night time coverage for the area stays the same. This only holds true it the above assumptions are correct though. The other obvious, but not so helpful, alternative would be to fund your capital programme in another way. I'm unsure of the fire service's ability, or legal restrictions, when it comes to crowdfunding or other methods of gathering income. Of course, I'm not suggesting that this would gain you anywhere near as many funds as selling nine properties would accomplish.
- close Stockton Heath FS fully, it's never available, closer wholetime firestations can be in the area quicker.
- Retain Stockton Heath instead of lymm
- do understand changes to on call duty system need to happen and the service is under financial constraints but in my opinion, having a fully staffed 24/7 shift station near to Lymm truck stop surrounded by fields and leaving a fire station partially crewed in the middle of a residential area which has far better access to all suburbs around Stockton Heath and quick access into Warrington, this does not present efficient fire cover for the community of Stockton Heath or Warrington. With regard to the sale of fire service properties at Stockton Heath, the revenue from these will go into the capital budget to rebuild/ refurbishment of existing fire stations across Cheshire. Some of this revenue should be put toward the alteration of Stockton Heath community fire station into a 24/7 shift station and relocate the Lymm fire crews to Stockton Heath and the partial crewing arrangements implemented at Lymm instead of Stockton Heath.
- Leave Stockton Heath maned
- Use the the second fire engine from Penketh to provide the cover at Stockton Heath, and leave Birchwood fire engine in Birchwood. That way you'll have a fire engine located in all areas of Warrrington in the daytime - north, south, east and west .
- Wholetime cover 2 appliances at Warrington
- I spent 40 years at sea in the merchant navy on tankers. I would say that automatic fire systems, especially in industrial buildings, but also in farms, would help. Outlay is high, but maintenance is affordable - sympathetic enforcement is key. I'm thinking mmore of initial water sprinkler course and hi-ex and hot foam cover of key assets and personnel areas.

- If you are going to focus on fire prevention. Keeping the existing on call staff/engines and then getting another one of day shift only for emergencies but also for outreach/prevention as set out in the draft
- Please continue education in fire prevention techniques in the community.
- Maybe every home should be required to have at least one fire extinguisher. The government are happy to waste billions on all sorts of things so they could easily provide this.
- Free fire safety checks
- Indentify with any pensioners and vulnerable groups and more visit to check adequacy of fire prevention devices installed. If not adequate, offer to improve warning system e.g. smoke and fire detector/alarm.
- Improved public education on prevention in the home, outdoors and in the work place. With specific info with regard to use of dryers/dishwashers in the home. Charging equipment with lithium-ion batteries.
- Increase cover not reduce.we know where this led policing so if you want to end up with privatisation crack on.
  Don't let the politician cut down in public funding and services, We saw the results during Covid. More promotions about Fire fighter volunteering should be made. Germany is a good example.
- Don't cut staff.
- Make all stations whole time
- Increase staff levels
- Whole-time
- Is this just a way to get more manpower.
- all fire stations to be crewed 24/7
- Proper full time round the click crewing throughout
- Leave well alone
- I wish I knew. It seems that people are taking it into their own hands. Speak to a local politician who cares about the local area and report that back to central government as I guess it is a funding issue that is causing this re structuring. You can't do nothing until this is addressed.
- Without knowing the driver and constraints e.g. funding - that is an unfair question !
- You have not sufficiently engaged with the local community and/or your workforce. There are alternate proposals which you have not listened to.
- Communication systems between teams and central control must be in excellent condition
- This is what the management are paid to do, without impacting on the service they provide.
- I hope the proposed changes are reevaluated in 18 months time and adjusted to fit purpose.
- Fire Blanket
- All seems ok, but will you change direction if residents/users give compelling reasons to do so? Also, I assume Holmes Chapel Fire Station continues unchanged?
- Should provide stats in report of when fires occur over full week, day & night & also what type of fires, house, business, vehicle etc
- Do what you are paid to do more efficiently

- Possibly a comparison with other areas seeing that the size of population in this area is increasing so fast that any data will be out of date by the time the proposals are implemented
- I imagine budget constraints limit what you can do. Better local government funding would help, but that's a wider political question.
- As long as your response time is the same then all good.
- May be that areas such as North Shropshire ,Nw Staffordshire and sth Cheshire should be an authority in themselves.I would question the County approach
- Council should be less wasteful
- Not sacking a lot of trained firefighters who choose to risk their own lives to help others
- Don't try and fix what isn't broken just to save money
- If you did they day time Monday to Friday fire engines, but kept them on call nights and weekends? If you are struggling to recruit people make it more desirable, I was told at an open day how little the on call are paid for how much they do
- Retaining night time and weekend cover in Northwich - whether it is through a second on-call engine, or just staffing the retained engine for longer.
- Further fulltime cover in new stations in the amber areas
- Consider asking wealthy businesses in the area to sponsor a unit for a year. That way the money doesn't come out of the budget.
- What about non emergency events on the a556
- Retain second engine
- Given the large industrial chemical plants, could they be asked to subsidise additional pump units through a tax write off?
- Leave the service as is .Do not reduce the engine cover we have .
- day crewing systems
- Re-employ retired firefighters to bolster OC during day shifts until a workable solution is found to the recruitment and retention of OC staff
- A single fire engine which is mobile at the periphery of the department. Home visits to the elderly to check their fire alarms.
- Maintain on call and build out the day crewe
- The issue Cheshire faces is that it is a large are made up of factories and farmland in northwich. The a556 is a busy road as well. I do not feel reduction is wise
- Revising the remuneration, sufficiently for on-call officers so that the work is attractive and secures a well trained and reliable workforce.
- local fire engines? Like the old days but you've already thought of this
- Is the on-call model valid now? 1% availability, and many not much higher, suggests it is not.
- Every station should have at least one fully paid full time member on site.
- Increase changes to include weekends.
- Possibly introduce a local system of where the public have a dedicated point of contact with their local station to report any concerns.
- Offer the day crewing to the stations where the cover is needed, not just where there is already a whole time and a "spare" on call fire engine.
- Perhaps encourage some form of initial private fire cover in large factory and industrial sites like Stanlow or Weston Point.
- Property fund the retained system to allow this less expensive option succeed

- Really don't think on-call is a modern way of proving a service. Communities don't look out for each other like they used to.
- Consider recruiting more on call firefighters to spread the shifts evenly and hence maintain a safe area for people to live.
- Return of 5th riders and second pumps at key locations including Warrington, Ellesmere Port and Widnes

Staff comments

- Place the 4 roaming pumps back at their original stations at night and on weekends to be crewed by on-call staff. Keep the on-call staff at Stockton Heath for night time cover. Adequately fund the On-Call firefighters for their dedication and time. Put money and resources into recruiting for On-call stations, instead of focussing on wholetime.
- On call system is broken and been poorly managed (yet the person responsible has been promoted to SLT level👤) only in Cheshire! Increase the number of nucleus &DC1 stations and wholetime
- Change more stations to day crewed
- Better recruitment and rewards for the current oncall system creating better availability across the whole of the county
- From what I understand of the new movements for the 4 new roaming appliances and the possibility of housing one of the appliances potentially at our station, my concern is the reduction in incidents that we attend because of the length of time the appliance will be on station at the beginning and the end of their shifts. (for example this could possibly mean that throughout the day our on call appliance will not turn out to a one pump incident in our area whilst the appliance is sat on our station either waiting to start their daily duties or for when they return to the station in time for ending their shift (approximately 2 hours at the start and at the end of the day) - This then having a negative impact on station moral, reduction in pay and reduction in incidents attended with the potential for skill fade in specific areas.

  I would like to suggest a couple of options for the housing and also the coverage of the 4 appliances, please see below:
  Option 1:
  Appliances currently at Runcorn, Northwich, Winsford and Macclesfield - House these appliances in their current stations and positions, this then not having any need for movement of appliances and any cause for concern to local residents being under the impression that ""their"" station is being reduced to 1 pump and effectively feeling like a loss of cover. These stations already being the base station for the roaming appliances, they will continue to co-inside and share the station with a whole time appliance rather than an on call appliance. - As this is their current stations, it is evident that their is ample space for a full crew to use all facilities rather than housing an appliance on an on call station with limited space already that by adding another crew of staff to a small station inevitably will be an enclose cramped space for everyone rather than a good working environment. Each of the 4 appliances will then be detailed their daily duties and travel to and from their cover stations where they will provide additional cover as noted in the CRMP.

  Option 2:

From reading and seeing the map on the CRMP, In my opinion, I feel the below as being an options for all areas:

Macclesfield Appliance (Weekday Fire Engine 3): I feel the way this option has been put forward already is the most sensible option and makes complete sense.

Runcorn Appliance (Week daytime Fire Engine 1): Housing Station: Chester Fire Station (There can be a space made available for this appliance, there is ample space for an additional crew and they have the facilities to cater for an increased number of staff). Station areas to cover: Frodsham/Tarporley/Malpas. The reason I would suggest this option for the Runcorn appliance is that by being housed at Chester station, this is central to all 3 station areas of Frodsham, Tarporley and Malpas, with easy access to all 3 areas within a reasonable time scale. The Runcorn appliance will then cover 3 areas rather than proposed 2 (Frodsham and Tarporley).

Northwich Appliance (Weekday Fire Engine 4): Housing Station: Alsager Fire Station (Space to house a second appliance securely in an appliance bay. New station with all available facilities and drill yard space.). Station areas to cover: Alsager/Nantwich/Audlem. The reason I would suggest this option for the Northwich appliance is that by being housed at Alsager station, this is a newer station with full access to all facilities. There is a second appliance bay to house the roaming appliance securely. Close to a large risk area being close to the M6 motorway and have easy access to both Nantwich and Audlem areas within a reasonable time scale. The Northwich appliance will cover Alsager, Nantwich and Audlem instead of the proposal in the CRMP of Malpas, Nantwich and Audlem.

Winsford Appliance (Week daytime Fire Engine 2): Housing Station: Winsford Fire Station (Already based at this station and has been for a number of years. Obviously has the space to cater for an increased in staff levels. Space on the drill yard. Space to safely house the appliance in an appliance bay). Station areas to cover: Middlewich/Holmes Chapel/Sandbach. My rational around this option is that instead of Winsford covering 4 areas which was proposed in the CRMP which was Middlewich, Sandbach, Holmes Chapel and Alsager, this option would mean that all roaming appliances with the exception of Macclesfields appliance (Weekday Fire Engine 3), each appliance will share 3 areas to provide cover rather than 1 covering 2 areas, 1 covering 3 areas and 1 covering 4 areas. - Winsford is within spitting distance of all 3 areas of Middlewich, Sandbach and Holmes Chapel with ease of access to these stations. I hope these options can be carefully considered.

- The services approach to ""fixing oncall system by creating oncall support crew managers and stn manager was expensive and failure. the failure of the service to focus on the recruitment of oncall personnel to raise oncall establishments to max 15 staff, the failure of oncall is down to lack of recruitment and shoddy recruitment drives and equipment. like WT stns, lack of staff equal pumps off the run

- Close Stockton Heath and release the capital to fund more of the capital rebuild. Remove the second at Penketh to increase the cover at Macclesfield to wholetime.

- Yes return Knutsford back to its former day crewing model then move rope rescue back. Yes it will cost more money but at what price to do we put on public & firefighter safety?

- More day crewing systems additional whole time stations strategic locations

- Leaving Animal rescue at Knutsford and The Rope Rescue at Lymm

Partner comments

- 24/7 whole-time cover is the only guaranteed available service.

Strengthening the on-call system

Question: Do you have any comments that you would like us to consider when reviewing our on-call duty system to make it more effective and sustainable?

Public comments

- Improving on call should not reduce engines in certain areas
- Possible loss of some current on-call fire personnel?
- Currently you have 5 locations in mid cheshire. Is it feasible to hit your response times with that number of locations?
- Please do not make cuts to the service
- "We have lots of rural areas around aswell as some very much populated.
- We need the current service to remain unchanged."
- Keep the full time allocated officers based in Northwich rather than relying on on call officers.
- The on-call system only works if the firefighters are near the fire engine. Your proposal looks to move the fire engines away from populated areas.
- You want to strengthen on call in one area and cut it in another very contradictory
- As I understand the present system, works? No justification for change, unless a contract of sear support is included.
- This model will make large numbers of people finically worse off in what is a difficult time for everyone. There are large numbers of dual-role employees who will lose income and additional pensions which have been payed into historically.The on-call system needs more investment, the answer seems to be to just offer those being made redundant a Wholetime job and if you already have one then that's just unfortunate. This deal has already been approved behind closed doors and will no doubt go ahead. Previous failed projects namely the Rapid Response Units also cast doubt onto this project being successful. All the above and making people homeless all for an extra 9% guaranteed cover doesn't sit right with me.
- firefighters routinely taking on multiple jobs in addition to their core employment. I'm not against it, but it should not impact alert call availability.
- Train them in animal rescues and country road accidents
- More punishment for those that do not keep their availabilities.
- If a rota is strictly adhered to, regardless of incidents/call-outs, part timers will feel more engaged/valued.
- Living or working 5 minutes from fire station is very restrictive - think should widen slightly to 6 or 7 minutes
- Please consider family / work life balance. In call is great until demand outweighs need and experience.
- Have more flexibility so people don't leave to main cover levels and experience. Also allow greater training for the on-call to be as effective in the day to day and some specialist calls
- Again - unfair question without the data as to what is driving your thought process
- More resources given the increased risk of electrical fires
- The biggest threats to sustainability are the duplication of services through a lack of centralisation of management and back office functions. This is where efficiency savings should be made in order to protect customers service

- I would ask why it is currently not as desired.
- Continuous measuring of performance and willingness to change structure quickly
- Hard to improve a system that is not invested in at government level
- Difficult to comment without knowing the reasons whey there has been such a fall off in availability but almost a 50% rise in costs. Is this a result of Covid? Not enough data to tell us.
- Much higher on-call availability. What is the reason(s) for the very high on-call expenditure?
- I trust the people doing it to know what's best.
- To first try the new proposed system, for maybe a certain period of time to find the results.
- You are the experts and I am sure that you will continue to monitor changes to check that they are meeting the goals.
- I was impressed that call out staff live or are housed close to the fire stations.
- None that would be practical. Budget considerations.
- As long as the proposed HR changes don't exceed budget!
- Maybe some device could be useful for hoax calls
- Has the changing terrorist positions been taken into consideration? We seem to be in an increasingly violent time. What would happen if any major incidents were to take place especially weekends and night times?
- At least a proper exercise once a year to test out effectiveness of fire service when facing a major fire or release.
- The on-call firefighters will always be slower than permanently manned stations. Difficult to address if on-call is to stay as is.
- Please ensure that the call handlers know the area thoroughly. I had occasions to phone the police at Winsford and they did not know where the George's was, a large local parl (George 5th playing fields). This was outside their local area.
- Your relying mote on part time firefighters.....what happens if none are available
- What is the availability of on call firefighters?
- Seems sound.
- I agree with strenghtening the on call system
- agree
- Long overdue
- Happy with your proposals.
- Doing great work
- Great news
- Totally support intention but too little info on crucial performance to be as constructive as I would wish.
- Listen to your staff and unions.
- Please don't overdo the review and thinking and get on with trials to see what actually works.
- Listen to staff, the money wasted on the OC project over the last few years is ridiculous and has resulted in lower availability due to migration into the whole time without a plan to cover the lost hours
- Ensure you listen to the on-call firefighters as they will have valauble fedback to consider.
- Not being able to maintain/increase number of people prepared to be on-call is not something which the CFRS is experiencing. This endemic in all leisure occupations

i.e. choirs, volunteering for charity work and even going to church, this is throughout all walks of lifeand started after the first world war, governmental resources are a pointer to reversing this trend.

- Identify why the service is not appealing to the public ? There must be reasons and the lack of them suggests systemic barriers in management understanding which will not be resolved by avoiding the issue
- Make it more desirable to join, and don't get rid of as many fire engines
- Maybe open days and education days at the fire station? A greater leaflet drop on lithium batteries storage and disposal? maybe introducing fire extinguishers in cars with lithium batteries as standard?
- It needs better marketing for a bigger base of volunteers from a wider cross section of the community
- Need to encourage/reward new/young volunteers.
- Perhaps a higher profile with regards to recruiting, especially part time fire fighters. I wasn't even aware that the fire service had part time staff.
- Defo more reward and perhaps let the communities know who are their on-call firefighters so people can thank them for their service?
- You can't improve pay to improve service you need the numbers simple mathematics.
- I'm not very well informed about how this system works, but the fact you want to strengthen it is encouraging. In my mind though, as well as improving working conditions and wages for your on call staff, I'd also look into not reducing their number, as it puts the general public at a greater risk; especially when it reduces night time coverage.
- More flexibility and better pay.
- They deserve the increased pay and reward as they can have to deal with difficult and dangerous situations. Rapid response is needed especially in relation to farm incidents
- Clearly change in law to incentivise the model and investment into it
- Difficult to strike a balance with costs and maintaining availability. Improved morale and conditions can help.
- Would support improving reward for them
- Firefighting is both hazardous and scary and part time firefighters should be rewarded. Also immediate counselling made available if necessary (It possibly is)
- I support ensuring on-call firefighters are compensated appropriately for their working arrangement.
- Totally agree that all firefighters be properly and advantageously rewarded
- In my opinion your review seems to consider the level of the service. I have only good things to say about the Fire Service and fire personnel in general - I'm sure they are not paid enough and definitely don't receive enough support from central government.
- will you be stepping away from national pay awards to pay staff more? you've paid staff over the past few years to improve the oncal through the oncall programme with no success. The oncall role has changed significantly, parity in job description means more commitment in training. Consider downgrading the role to be a first response role until wholetime staff arrive.

- Make the on-call role more attractive to prospective candidates perhaps include things such as free gym memberships in addition to wages providing added value and incentive.
- Make it more appealing, offer a higher salary or other benefits
- Increase opportunities for career development to increase staff morale. Increase pay and performance-related incentives - currently (and I know this to be the case at a number of stations) the large majority of the regular work (ie, not incidents) is performed by a small number of staff. Recognition for the people putting the effort in would be a big help.
- A costly review has already taken place and vast sums have been spent instead of addressing the core issues of pay. A senior officer was brought in four years ago to address this but nothing has improved in fact it's got worse yet he's been promoted? Utterly ridiculous rewarding failure
- You need to retain an on-call system. Maybe look at how you can retain and recruit personnel, and change the distance the live from the station.
- Make it easier for people to become part time firefighters. Sometimes the health and safety aspect and form filling, box ticking discourages genuine willing candidates.
- Hopefully by making it more attractive you will attract more part time staff and get the numbers back to where they should be.
- The on-call system is obviously not fit for purpose and is unattractve to a post-covid workforce. It is not recruiting staff and reliability of attendance is very poor.
- As above, the positions of part-time and on-call firefighters needs to be attractive to fill the vacancies within the service.
- I am a paramedic that is based at Macclesfield. I currently live about 2/3 minutes from Congleton fire station. I would love to become an on-call firefighter. Recently on an incident, I was informed Congleton weren't recruitng. Is this correct? I will post my details on the opposite page.
- I know people who were interested but backed out when faced with wasting their time on diversity training & other unnecessary input
- Make it easier for people to apply to be an on call fire fighter and actually respond when they do apply. I've only ever seen an advert for on call fire fighters on Facebook, not everyone is on Facebook
- Better pay and more suitable recruitment
- If the current system works then happy to continue with it but it would be better to have eight hour shifts rather than part-time firefighters.
- Stations should be manned 24/7 rather than a on call service
- If there is a need for on call that means there should be a whole time pump
- support but need to recognise the changes in society mean this is less efficient or attractive as it once was
- Changing world of work and community means it should be replaced
- Why can't get more full time fire engines/firefighters
- Clearly it doesn't work satisfactorily
- Is this what you would do if money was not a restriction? I don't think so. Would all on-call be full-time employees if you had the money? Ask for more money.
- Full time well paid staff
- Employing more full time firefighters if the number of part time declines further.
- Be careful not to throw good public money after a bad ill conceived duty system that isn't fit for the modern work environment

- I would scrap it. It's outdated.

Staff comments

- Do and proper and complete review of how you recruit and retain on-call firefighters. It is unacceptable that it takes different amounts of time for people to join as an on-call firefighter. From over a year for a wholetime firefighter from another brigade, to a couple of months for a complete newbie. How does this happen? There is no consistency on how the recruitment is managed. People get bored of waiting in the system and leave. Do better.
- System broken, time to take ownership and admit the the present age on call doesn't work. Increase wholetime stations in rural areas covering a larger area
- As well as better pay for on-call firefighters, you should streamline the processes for both recruitment and qualification as competent. The current systems for both are too long winded and result in losing too many staff during the process.
- Doing this would create more availability of the four engines proposed to be changed. The engines being moved to these areas would take the more rural oncall stations shouts as they would be closer and mobile. So that would have the adverse effect and create a low moral that would end up with firefighters leaving their posts and creating less availability in those stations. That would probably end up creating a worse position of availability at day and nights
- improve speed of the recruitment process , has to be more incentive for people to join and be retained once in the service.
- Based on anecdotal evidence, on-call firefighters who are purely on-call should not feel put on or disadvantaged by fellow colleagues who may also be whole-time.
- I would like to see an increase in pay for the on call - however wouldnt every employee in every walk of life.
- recruitment so each station had the required number of staff to have a chance to run properly. pay and recognition needs to improve
- Need to pay more and maybe introduce a salary and have a weekly change cover banding to reflect the cover you actually did that week.
- Provide a more flexible approach than the standard 50hr week contract. Particularly for the training centre, there is a decent pool of staff who could staff a second fire engine at Winsford or as a resilience basis during weekday hours, but may not be able to fulfil 50hrs a week.
- You need to support the On-call more. You have promised to do this over the years but failed to do so if you had then the On-call would probably be in a better place. Due to that lack of commitment this has caused the On-call to feel neglected & see that the only concern was whether the appliance was available or not. The commitment shown by many of the On-call completing above their contracted hours with no numeration has been repaid with job losses
- In the Service we have several RRRU's that are not being used at on-call stations and most days the crewing isn't sufficient, but the crewing would be sufficient to crew the RRU. However the RRU's wont respond to fires and firefighters may not want to turn out to Red 1 calls. Kill two birds with one stone, train the on-call crews up to a more medical capacity and have them respond to Red 1 calls for NWAS in the RRRU's . Or have the RRRU's move to a wholetime station and provide an extra person to crew it, leaving sufficient fire cover across Cheshire.
- throwing money at them won't fix the problems. Review your over the border agreements, and only send OTB to life risks

- Increase pay and also recognition for the On Call personnel. There is a lot of facts which are negative (Which I understand has to happen) in the report and an awful lot of changes on the horizon for the On Call personnel. More thanks and recognition is required.

Partner comments

- Obviously it is impossible and unpractical to have whole-time at every station but on-call does not have the appeal it used to have. Worklife balance is highest priority and you do not care about that in any shift system. Listen to staff and stop the bullying tactics.
- Publicising to employers the advantages of having oncall firefighters expertise.

Equalities considerations

Question: Do you have any comments or feedback on our equalities impact assessments, or are there any other equalities issues you believe we should be considering?

Public comments

- Whoever is physically fit, mentally alert, wishes to serve, capable of following orders, observing discipline and working as part of a team should be recruited, from any background or section of society.
- The best candidate for the job should be selected, as simple as thatregardless of background etc.
- As the demographics of the county is changing (ageing) you need to consider that re: kit (mobility issues, confusion etc)
- think it will be a good idea to open a cadet program for 18 and above to give people with additional needs as I find come 18 barsices princes trust. Some people find difficult to in role with us program
- Better womens facilities
- Ageism is a huge issue and often overlooked especially in regards to frontline staff
- Surely everyone should be treated equally - this is a rural area, so don't just concentrate on Urban populations please.
- It is important that full equalities impact assessments are completed for any changes proposed
- Ensure continued assessment of the needs and wellbeing of all staff regardless of any differences.
- I would like to take this opportunity to say how grateful my Husband and I are (83 and 84) for the checks on the 3 smoke alarms in our bungalow and the friendliness of the Fire Officers.
- You need to ensure that all applicants can speak English fluently as officers may be dealing with people in a very heightened and frightening situation, not being able to understand the officer could impact on safety.
- I feel the on call is second best to the fire service
- Clearly the serious sexual harassment issues that have arisen in other brigades need to be considered to ensure that members of a diverse workforce are adequately protected by appropriate whistle-blowing policies being in place and implemented.

- There has been bad press regarding some fire stations, regarding the treatment of woman firefighters. Althought equality laws are in place, they must be seen to be upheld at grassroots level.
- To challenge and show that the stereotypical view of the fire service in Cheshire is totally incorrect given the stories that have been published in the media about other fire services across the country. Encourage monitoring from external lay bodies to ensure the equalities impact assessments are being delivered.
- Sadly to see numbers if staffing being reduced is hard to accept, perhaps some consideration to using AI (artificial intelligence)
- This proposal is well written as well as the survey (I like the mention of the pages so we can directly and quickly read more information if required.
- This will massively effect them.
- Sounds correct to me.
- All sounds over the top
- Insufficient information to make a considered opinion.
- Have the firemen been asked and their involvement in the changes been listened to?
- I think everything has been covered.
- Would these changes be proposed for London? How many lives will have to be lost before it is changed back? As there appears to be demand for the service then why change / reduce what is not broken?
- I work for Warrington Borough Council as a carecall responder, hence I have seen how quickly the fire service respond to potential fires and also attend, to gain entry into properties when no key safe is available; for our team to enter a property, when a person has pressed their carecall pendant asking for help/assistance. And often just having a paramedic/firefighter on duty is just brilliant.
- Is there extra provision for safe Safe and Well visits in other areas e.g Congleton
- Well though out and again you have my support
- Very good proposals.
- I can't see how knowing our sexual orientation helps with fire safety. My religious beliefs have nothing to do with fighting fires.
- Spend less money on Vanity,virtue signalling documents and use it to maintain safe cover for the rate payers
- No. Everyone should be treated fairly and equally, without and need to spend money assessing this.
- waste of time, treat everyone fairly and your doing the right thing anyway.
- What does 'equality' have to do with safety?
- More woke rubbish
- You have considered more than enough. Emergency needs must come first despite the above.
- No - feel these factors are irrelevant to the provision of service and should not be allowed to compromise potentially maximum service provision.
- Woke BS, do not ever ask me any questions on conforming to madness
- Don't understand the question..equalities in what?
- Yes, leave Stonewall, stop all the E&D waste and simply go back to treating everyone as individuals rather than targets

Staff comments

- You can't even adhere to the Equality Act when running your internal promotion process maybe start there?
- Thorough consideration of impacts.

Partner comments

- Treat staff with respect instead of the presumption that all ffs are no good liars

Additional comments

Question: Finally, do you have any other comments on our draft CRMP that you would like us to consider?

Public comments

- Being a retired merchant navy officer i understand seconds not minutes make a big difference in the outcome of any event. The southern section of the area you cover is sparse on fully crewed stations. Consideration must be given to many more fully crewed stations. The workforce do an amazing job but numbers need to be increased.
- Demand predictions seem like a ""finger in the wind"" in the absence of any detail / justification (""sophisticated software"" means different things to different people!) Given drowning and RTAs exceed deaths from fire one can't help but think the title of Fire Service should be changed.
- Paramount importance: Fully trained firefighters; quick response times.
- information on attendance and role in road traffic accidents and consideration of how this could reduce availability to attend other call outs
- We would just like to thank all firefighters who attend fires, serious accidents and who risk their lives to help save ours.
- I would like to see more work being done on mitigating climate impacts and the CRMP response.
- I am in Birchwood. I may be biased.
- Please revise.
- Fireman should be given more powers to handle people who cause trouble etc whilst carrying their work.
- The summary booklet was verbose. ""Never use one word when ten will do". The proposals need to be concise, the reason why the change was necessary, the specifc and measured success criteria to satisfy the proposal. For example Proposal 2 One and a half pages of summary, largely duplicated on the following two pages by referencing a numbered fire engine. Why not a brief overall introduction followed by a paragraph headed with the location of the specific fire station. This would contain the details of the proposed changes, the reasons for this, the result required and how this will be assessed and measured.
- You already know about the difficulties in providing enough and appropriate cover so it's up to you to make best efforts to improve.
- Welcome the chance to understand and comment on the proposals. Fortunately, I have never needed to call on the Service but i have great respect for the dedication of the fire service and firefighters.

- Equal the rights for 'young white males'/females to join the fire service (same as any other applicants)
- just be honest about the costs as I believe these are not thought out correctly. what are the limitations of these new changes that you currently experience with the same shifts?
- Another issue: The home alarm system installed for my elderly dad is very good. The only thing is supplying some information/instructions to carers/family to make resetting easier and not waste your time if the toast should burn. I do aprpecaite that a simple no user setting system is best for the elderly themselves. Thanks for all that you do.
- No. The detail of the RM plan should be considered by those working in the industry, particularly those working at "ground level"
- Given the current state of the economy I would hope that this review will not lead to an increase in council tax. The proposals outlined should be cost neutral or make savings. Given the range of rescues that are undertaken by the service is the name still appropriate e.g. some areas are now fire and rescue service. I would also suggest that you are very clear on your areas of responsibility eg. which calls are responded to.
- What about Congleton Fire Station? I might have missed it but i couldn't see anything about it in the book?
- Only to re-state that the new arrangements will need proving, out in the real world.
- I think it is very difficult for the ordinary person to evaluate the proposals you put forward. Given the crucial nature of the subject it is surely up to those with the necessary expertise to ensure the service provided is absolutely fit for purpose and at the same time cost effective. People will orinarily concentrate on those proposals that affect the location nearest to them. Some therefore will perceive improvements whilst others will not. So long as the response times are improved or at least maintained at their current level that is all that matters.
- Considering that this was given with a free bag outside Tesco's i am sure i am not the only member of the public who cannot really get their heads round all this. However, saving money and selling houses does seem to be a big motivating factor.
- No but I would like to say thank you to the fire service.
- Appreciate the opportunity to have a say.
- Only just heard about this -needs to be more visible to the public before the consultation and any decision
- I'd like to reiterate how important it is to provide a full set of data when asking the general public to make an assessment of any proposal you make. If you don't, your proposals will seem biased, and could sway public opinion against what it might otherwise decide.
- Has there been a meeting with the impacted fire stations and the local MPs? I would expect that to happen as a minimum
- speaking to staff at a Christmas community event i was shocked to learn how rude, authoritarian, hostile and combative the new senior management team are to the rank and file and to the representative bodies - a recipe for disaster and totally unnecessary
- My friend from nursery is married to a fire fighter, she says the approach my the new senior management team to staff and the union is negative and aggressive, and that the language and behaviours or senior managers is a step backwards
- Hold fire authority members to account

- Speaking to my local neighbours who are fire fighters, i am concerned that the new senior management team appear to be anti trade union recognition - this will lead to disputes
- It would seem having spoken to a number of staff that industrial relations are at rock bottom with the new SLT reversing years of progress and goodwill between the Service and trade unions
- "I was left feeling this document was to support pre determined approaches and that some targets were little more than making it easier for the authority to claim success and senior management to claim added remuneration.
- I fully support all front line emergency staff,they do a great job and are in sufficiently rewarded or resourced."
- Loss of staff, locations and numbers of appliances will impact safety of the public and your staff. Do not do this due to cash.
- I understand this proposal and the survey have been months in the making. However, I have just found out on facebook on Northwich Life, someone hurrying people to participate to the survey because the deadline is soon weeks ago. Next time, do get in touch with all the parish councils, they will vehiculate the information and ensure most of the people are informed on time and in a more formal manner. Most villages have newsletters delivered by volunteers directly to people's mailboxes. I am sure you launched this
- Dont reduce the service it will cost lives.
- However you go forward, don't loose trained staff or engines. There seem to be so many more fires in our locality recently
- There should be more fire service personnel not less, more fire engines. Cheshire is growing with all the new housing estates how can a reduction of staff match these increases in possible fires?
- Please don't reduce engines and staffing covering of the Northwich area which has had massive development of extra housing in the area.
- I do not believe less firemen or fire engines gives us more cover or a safer Town . We need the current service of firemen 🚒 and engines yo stay as is . It's what we pay a precipice for. Fire service cover not a maybe service but a fire service
- Night time cover.
- Stockton Heath should not close
- Leave Stockton heath fire station maned
- Consider the optics of displacing families that have served Cheshire as On Call firefighters for years.
- What will happen to the fire engines at night when there's no cover? Just sit there when they could be saving lives?
- Cutting viral services such the second engine is very short sighted. The community needs them both. You are risking lives
- I think this idea is shameful and people will lose their lives because of it
- NO I think the CRMP is very comprehensive. Possibly too much for "Joe Soap" like me to digest in one go - so perhaps a focussed review by some specialist focussed group might be a beter way to get constructive feedback.
- No looks like a very comprehensive piece of work but you must take the workforce with you
- Overall I consider the proposals to be a fantastic realisation of what is needed to be sufficient and a good standard.

- I was impressed with the depth of the CRMP draft and the depth you have given to each area of the county and risk. Well done.
- We think you are doing a first class job in a difficult changing world and that the community risk plan will be a success, you know the job better than anyone so full trust in you. Thank you.
- I should say people like myself a 'pensioner', my peers and I place our trsut in bodies like the police and fire and ambulance services. We are glad to see you in action.
- Keep up the good work!
- No - I am encouraged by what I have read.
- A well thought out and effective plan. Thank you to the Cheshire Fire Authority and Fire and Rescue Service for all your hard work and dedication.
- Very pleased with the proactive nature of your proposals.
- I would just like to take the opportunity to thank all people involved in the Cheshire Fire Authority for the work that they do. Especially to the firefighters who often put their lives on the line for others. May the Lord protect them and bless them for a job well done!
- I am too old to take all this in, but from what i can see all your proposals seem strong and sound. I hope you have enough resources to carry them all out, helping to keep Cheshire and all your men safe. I particularly like the Knutsford proposals. It will be reassuring to drive past and see it alive again. Can i thank you all for the wonderful job you do. We all know you and other emergency services are there, but we never get the opportunity to say thank you. So thank you, everyone.
- I think you deserve better support and it shames the country that you don't get it. The plan is ok as far as i can see, but your firefighting personnel should NEVER have to be disadvantaged just because the funding may not be ideal - the fact that they are willing to do the job should be enough.
- I appreciate that it is good, and often demanded, that plans like this go out for consultation. However, as an ordinary, educated Warrington citizen i have found ti difficult to comment on an area in which i have no expertise. I have read and re-read the document. It all sounds very good and thorough but i really don't feel qualified enough to comment. I do wonder what this has cost to print and circulate! I would be surprised if you ahve had much feedback from the general population. I do feel i have to trust the fire service to do the best job they can within their financial constraints. I'm sorry I can't be of more help and wish you well.
- An excellent article, well thoight out. I could not find any specific mention of training in Risk Assessment, for staff or operatives. I may have missed it.
- No it seems OK. The performance results at the end of a year should be analyzed and compared.
- I strongly support the efforst of the Service to increase community awareness of safety issues both by home viists to check alarms and at their dedicated facility safety central. The latter is excellently thought out provision supportd by an enthusiastic team. I just hope the facility is well supported by the community. Hopefully it will make a significant impact on reducing the numbers of callout incidents so that what resources are available are used efficiently and effectively.
- Within the realistic financial options, it is a good plan.
- Thanks for the information and consultation
- Very sound set of plans

- An impressive document. Glad to see no mention of a possible merger with the Police as has happened in neighbouring Staffordshire.
- Seems well thought out/sensible proposals.
- The proposal table shows an increase on every provision you plan to change. This is a deinite positive move for Cheshire. It's nice to see no cut-backs.
- The report appears to be very inclusive and takes a strong proactive approach.
- Would like to thank you all for the work that you do.
- It seems balanced and written by the Fire Service so based on genuine experience and with best intentions (not cost contented)
- All you lads and girls do a great job in my opinion, you all do your utmost regardless.
- Nothing to add, it all seems very comprehensive and sensible.
- Firefighters do a superb job and are undervalued by government.
- Disgusted how retired members are not receiving all of the pension that they have earned during their career, especially through the immediate detriment process. Recognition by completing the process can only improve reputations of senior managers and politiicians
- The unacceptable non payment of pensions in full to retired personnel. Cheshire could calculate and pay out pensions to already retired personnel, but choose not to. What happened to 'doing the right thing'....after all isn't this a Service core value...?
- think it will be a good idea to open a cadet program for 18 and above to give people with additional needs as I find come 18 barsices princes trust. Some people find difficult to in role with us program
  Car fires especially the new battery ones can be a cause for concern in the future. An ageing population, people getting trapped by falling. Cliamte change, wetter and higher temperatures. Pedestrians being knocked over by cars, getting trapped.
- If you have extra crew available maybe they could work together more with other emergency services on first responding more to cardiac arrests etc.
- Most people live in wooden timber houses/cottages. Good on safety check.
- Prevention is always better, cheaper and easier than complex reactive services.
- Would like to see more home visits where fire alarms are checked.
- Work with schools and community groups.
- Offer training (ideally free of charge if possible) in the correct selection and use of fire extinguishers in public premises. I support our local parish church and would appreciate access to this kind of training
- The Ellesmere Port fire station (and maybe others) is currently used by Wirral Heartbeat, for phase 4 cardiac rehabilitation, except that it's been mostly closed for the last couple of years. The CRMP doesn't address community uses of fire station facilities. Can this be considered as well, and in particular what will happen at Ellesmere Port?
- Build stations that are fit for purpose by involving staff at design phase not just once plans have been passed, all of the modern stations aren't fit for purpose and are more like poor office blocks with a garage space attached

Staff comments

- Start again. Make it simple. You have so many different types of crewing system. This is confusing and unnecessary.
- Provide Pensions that staff are entitled to once retired. Currently numerous staff retired without their full pension and CFRS have done nothing to solve this issue

- the fire cover provision for warrington is far too political rather than covering risk, why accept 10 + response time for Stockton Heath responding from a station surrounded by fields when there's a station in the middle of a residential area that will be crewed for 28% of the time...... madness
- Overall a positive package of proposals for Cheshire
- In the Service we have several RRRU's that are not being used at on-call stations and most days the crewing isn't sufficient, but the crewing would be sufficient to crew the RRU. However the RRU's wont respond to fires and firefighters may not want to turn out to Red 1 calls. Kill two birds with one stone, train the on-call crews up to a more medical capacity and have them respond to Red 1 calls for NWAS in the RRRU's . Or have the RRRU's move to a wholetime station and provide an extra person to crew it, leaving sufficient fire cover across Cheshire.

Partner comments

- Hold the senior managers and fire authority members more to account. Finally the highest priority in going forward is to publish and identify how councillors vote in all meetings. It is the right of every constituent to know how their councillors vote.
- More Prevention work in communities

Profile of Survey Respondents

The following section provides a profile of survey respondents by a range of demographic characteristics. The section is split between public responses and staff responses. Please note that some respondents chose not to provide certain demographic details therefore the number of responses for each question may differ.

Public respondents
Responses by unitary area (376 responses)
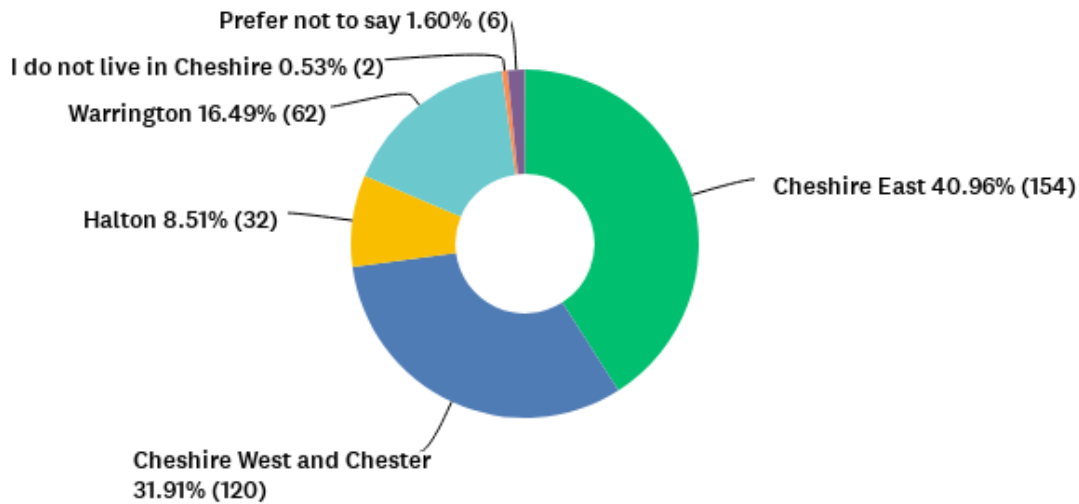
Responses by postcode (270 responses)

2024-2028 Draft CRMP Consultation Responses January 2024

© Crown copyright and database rights 2013 Ordnance Survey 1000240064
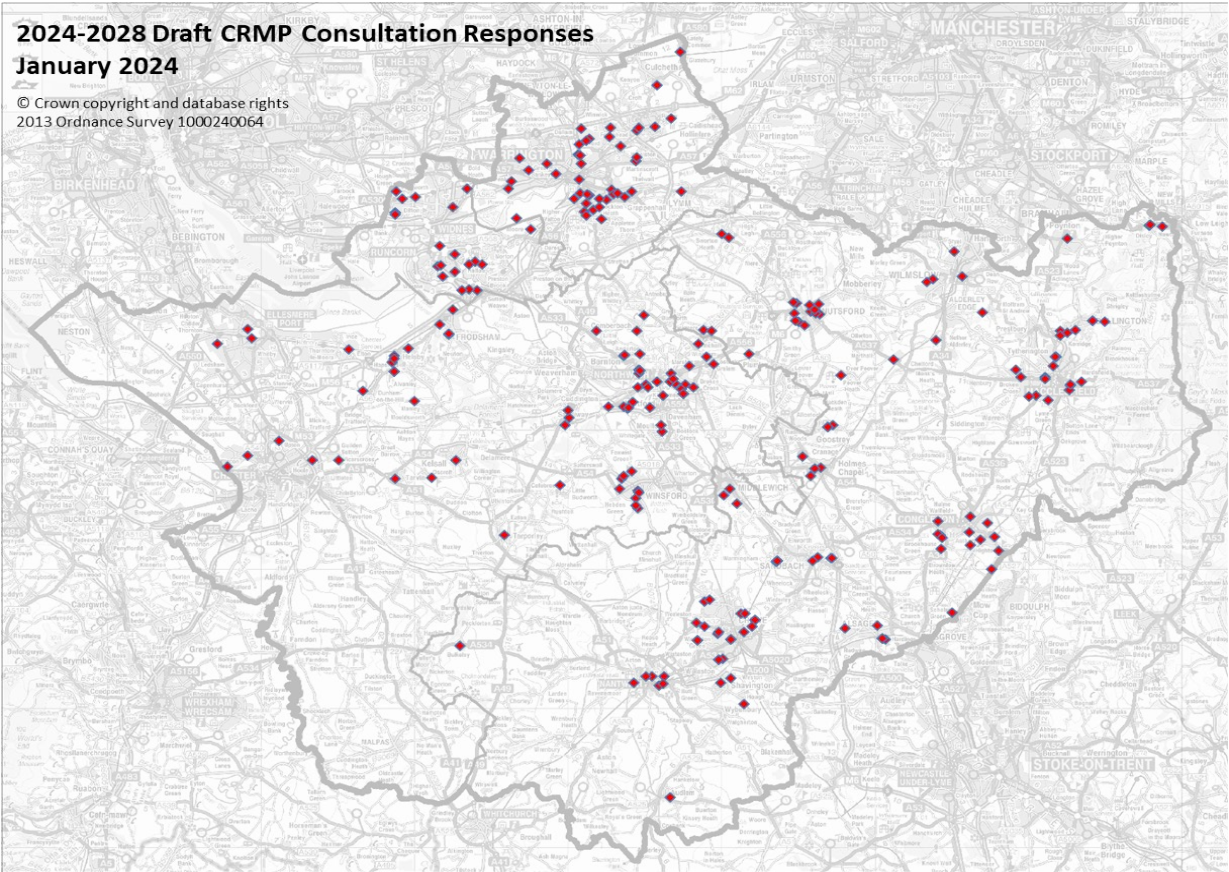
Socio-economic profile of respondents

The Authority uses a range of tools to analyse socio-demographic data, which is typically done to target its safety interventions to those most at risk. A socio-economic profile of respondents has been developed using Mosaic software, which classifies households into distinct socioeconomic groupings.

This has been done using the postcode provided by the respondent.

Mosaic Group	Number of survey respondents	Number of households in Cheshire	Index Score
A	0	0	0
B	43	67589	121
C	0	33006	127
D	28	11369	134
E	29	50627	120
F	35	45626	75
G	10	42672	178
H	30	52901	119
I	2	42874	75
J	3	36640	52
K	11	21563	53
L	14	31525	72
M	15	29541	64

N	9	4922	77
O	7	21065	54

The index score adjusts the number of respondents for the number of households to see relatively which mosaic groups have responded. The average index score is 100, so group G have 1.78x more respondents relative the overall numbers in Cheshire. Groups I, J, K and L are the most deprived mosaic groups.

Description of MOSAIC groups (from Experian)

A - City Prosperity

High status city dwellers living in central locations and pursuing careers with high rewards. City Prosperity are high-income residents who have expensive homes in desirable metropolitan locations. Households range in type from successful young professionals to wealthy families.

Their homes are located in upmarket city streets and are priced at a significant premium due to the quality of housing, the status of the neighbourhoods and the accessibility of the locations. Their properties include executive apartments and luxurious houses. Some people own their expensive homes, others pay high rents for the privilege of living there. They have all the benefits of the city at their fingertips, with career options, business opportunities, culture and entertainment either nearby or easily accessible via good public transport links.

B - Prestige Positions

Established families in large, detached homes living upmarket lifestyles. Prestige Positions are affluent families who live in spacious homes within sought-after neighbourhoods. Most householders are married couples – some are older and no longer have dependants, others have children or young adults to support. Many have lived in their high-status homes for many years.

They own large, detached homes that have a substantial market value situated in attractive streets. Four or five bedrooms are the norm and houses are surrounded by pleasant gardens. They are often located in suburbs at the outer edges of cities or in nearby small towns and villages that have good connections to cities.

C - Country Living

Well-off owners in rural locations enjoying the benefits of country life. Country Living are owners of rural homes who enjoy a comfortable lifestyle. Many are of an older generation, aged in their fifties or beyond, who appreciate the quiet atmosphere of the countryside. Some are families who have made an active choice to raise their children in a rural environment. Most are settled and have been living at their address for some time.

They own attractive homes that are priced well above the average and are situated in rural landscapes or within small villages. Many houses are detached and are often identified by names rather than street numbers. There is a mix of traditional properties and more modern buildings, and the accommodation is usually spacious with four or more bedrooms and gardens outside.

D - Rural Reality

Householders living in less expensive homes in village communities. Rural Reality are households who live in affordable properties in village and countryside settings. Some communities are within reach of larger centres, but most are situated a distance from towns and cities. Many residents are mature in age, but families with children are also included.

Those of working age are employed in the local economy in roles usually found close to home. Their intermediate and lower-level occupations earn below-average wages that don't leave a great deal to spare at the end of the month. Older residents are retired and rely on modest pension incomes.

They live in the more affordable properties within these rural locations, that are valued below the national average. Homes are a mix of building types including semi-detached, terraced and detached houses. These are less likely to be traditional cottages. Around two-thirds of residents own their homes and the others rent from either social or private landlords.

E - Senior Security

Elderly people with assets who are enjoying a comfortable retirement. Senior Security are retired homeowners with good pension incomes who live in pleasant suburbs. Aged in their late sixties, seventies and eighties, some are married but many more now live alone. They have been settled in their current homes for many years.

With pension incomes in addition to the basic state provision, most have a comfortable financial situation that leaves some money available for extras. They also have a good amount of savings that they can draw on when necessary. These are invested in ISAs, Premium Bonds and sometimes in shares. These financially cautious elders always pay off credit card bills in full and are highly likely to have made a will. They usually run a sensible car purchased with savings.

Their mid-range homes may be semi-detached or detached houses or bungalows and typically have three bedrooms. Many homeowners enjoy taking care of their gardens. The mortgage was paid off some years ago.

F - Suburban Stability

Mature suburban owners living settled lives in mid-range housing. Suburban Stability are owners of traditional suburban houses. They are in the second half of their working lives, typically aged between forty-five and sixty-five. Many are married couples, some are single. Most parents have reached the stage where their children are adults, but a good number still provide them with a home.

Their homes are priced below the average and found in established residential suburbs. Most are semi-detached, some are detached or terraced, and they usually have gardens. These residents have been paying the mortgage for many years while the property has grown in value, and they are now likely to have a good amount of equity in the property.

G - Domestic Success

Thriving families who are busy bringing up children and following careers. Domestic Success are householders in their middle years who have made progress in their careers and own comfortable family homes. Most are couples aged in their thirties and forties. These families usually have children who are moving through the stages of schooling. Other households consist of single people living alone in family-sized properties.

Their good-quality houses are detached or semi-detached and usually have three or four bedrooms. These often have an above-average market value, and many families have high mortgage payments to make each month.

H - Aspiring Homemakers

Established families in large, detached homes living upmarket lifestyles. Aspiring Homemakers are young people in their twenties and thirties who are putting down roots in pleasant homes. Many have moved in recently; others have lived there for a few years and are beginning to settle. Households are a mix of young couples and single people. Around two-thirds have started families and have young children.

Most have bought homes that are attractive to younger buyers. They are sensibly priced below the national average, but mortgage payments still make a significant dent in these owners' monthly finances. A smaller number of residents rent from private landlords. Housing is modestly sized and a mix of styles, some modern and some dating from older eras.

I - Family Basics

Families with limited resources who budget to make ends meet. Family Basics are households bringing up children, who have limited incomes and budget carefully. Most adults are aged in their twenties, thirties and forties. Many live as couples, others are single. Children are aged from pre-school years to adulthood.

Residents live in low-cost family homes that are terraced or semi-detached houses, typically with three or fewer bedrooms. Many of these affordable homes are rented from local authorities or housing associations; others have been purchased with a mortgage. Housing typically dates from the middle part of the twentieth century and is often found within estates of similar properties.

J - Transient Renters

Single people renting low cost homes for the short term. Transient Renters are young single people in their twenties and thirties who rent affordable living spaces. Levels of movement are high, and most residents have only been living at their address for a few years or less. Some live alone while others share with housemates or partners. A minority of households include a young child.

Accommodation is rented in low-value properties, usually terraced houses or flats. They are often found in locations close to urban centres, while some are situated in inexpensive neighbourhoods around cities and towns. Most are rented from private landlords; smaller numbers are rented from local authorities or housing associations.

K - Municipal Tenants

Urban residents renting high density housing from social landlords. Municipal Tenants are residents who rent inexpensive city homes in central locations. A relatively high proportion are in the latter half of their working lives, but people from all generations live in these budget housing options. Many live alone but some share their living space, and the group also includes some families with young or adult children.

These tenants rent high-density accommodation from local authorities or housing associations. Most homes are purpose-built flats located in blocks built during the middle part of the twentieth century. A minority are small houses. Living spaces are compact and often have one or two bedrooms. These properties usually have a very low market value, with the exception of those located in expensive regions. In both cases they represent some of the most affordable housing options for residents on a budget in the area.

L - Vintage Value

Elderly people with limited pension income, mostly living alone. Vintage Value are retired people aged over sixty-five who live in accommodation that is modestly sized. The majority now live alone.

Some live in low-value houses that have been their homes for a long time. Others have moved in more recent years to compact flats or bungalows that are suited to the needs of later life. These properties are small and often have one or two bedrooms. Many rent their homes from local authorities or housing associations, and a smaller number own their homes outright.

M - Modest Traditions

Mature homeowners of value homes enjoying stable lifestyles. Modest Traditions are older homeowners, often aged in their fifties and sixties, who own affordably priced houses. These households include couples whose children have left home, parents supporting adult children with

accommodation, and mature singles who are living alone. Most have been living in their homes for many years.

They live in suburban neighbourhoods where property prices offer value for money. Their terraced and semi-detached houses are older buildings that tend to have three bedrooms. These homes were bought many years ago and residents have now paid off the mortgage or have only a small amount outstanding.

N - Urban Cohesion

Residents of settled urban communities with a strong sense of identity. Urban Cohesion are households living in residential city suburbs. These urban communities are comprised of people at different stages of life, including families and retired people. Many are settled in their homes and have lived there for many years. These neighbourhoods are often multinational in character.

House values in these accessible locations vary by city. Some properties are expensive for their size due to high regional prices, and others provide inexpensive accommodation. Around two-thirds of homes are owned, the others are usually rented from private landlords. Situated in high-density areas, these terraces, semi-detached houses and flats tend to be relatively small in size. Many were built before 1945.

O - Rental Hubs

Educated young people privately renting in urban neighbourhoods. Rental Hubs are young people enjoying city lifestyles in accessible locations. Usually aged in their twenties and thirties, they moved to their current addresses relatively recently. Many live alone and others share with housemates or partners, but few are thinking about children yet.

Most are well educated and either have university degrees or are in the process of gaining them. Some are making an excellent start in their careers – these people often work in service industries earning good salaries and they enjoy having money to spare. Some haven't yet found their dream job and make do with interim roles that pay the bills. Others are full-time students who survive on limited funds. Most haven't yet earned enough to build up savings.

Accommodation is usually rented from private landlords. Homes are typically apartments, sometimes terraced houses, and they are often small in size with one or two bedrooms. Buildings tend to be either quite old or very modern. With excellent public transport services in the neighbourhood and few parking spaces, residents are less likely to own a car. They can walk to many destinations including local shops.

Responses by nearest fire station (286 responses)

Nearest Fire Station	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Alsager Fire Station	9	3.15%
Audlem Fire Station	2	0.70%
Birchwood Fire Station	8	2.80%
Bollington Fire Station	5	1.75%
Chester Fire Station	9	3.15%
Congleton Fire Station	16	5.59%
Crewe Fire Station	21	7.34%
Ellesmere Port Fire Station	4	1.40%
Frodsham Fire Station	17	5.94%
Holmes Chapel Fire Station	6	2.10%
Knutsford Fire Station	15	5.24%
Lymm Fire Station	4	1.40%
Macclesfield Fire Station	16	5.59%

Malpas Fire Station	1	0.35%
Middlewich Fire Station	4	1.40%
Nantwich Fire Station	5	1.75%
Northwich Fire Station	55	19.23%
Penketh Fire Station	5	1.75%
Powey Lane Fire Station	0	0.00%
Poynton Fire Station	4	1.40%
Runcorn Fire Station	14	4.90%
Sandbach Fire Station	8	2.80%
Stockton Heath Fire Station	17	5.94%
Tarporley Fire Station	4	1.40%
Warrington Fire Station	13	4.55%
Widnes Fire Station	5	1.75%
Wilmslow Fire Station	6	2.10%
Winsford Fire Station	13	4.55%

Responses by gender (360 responses)
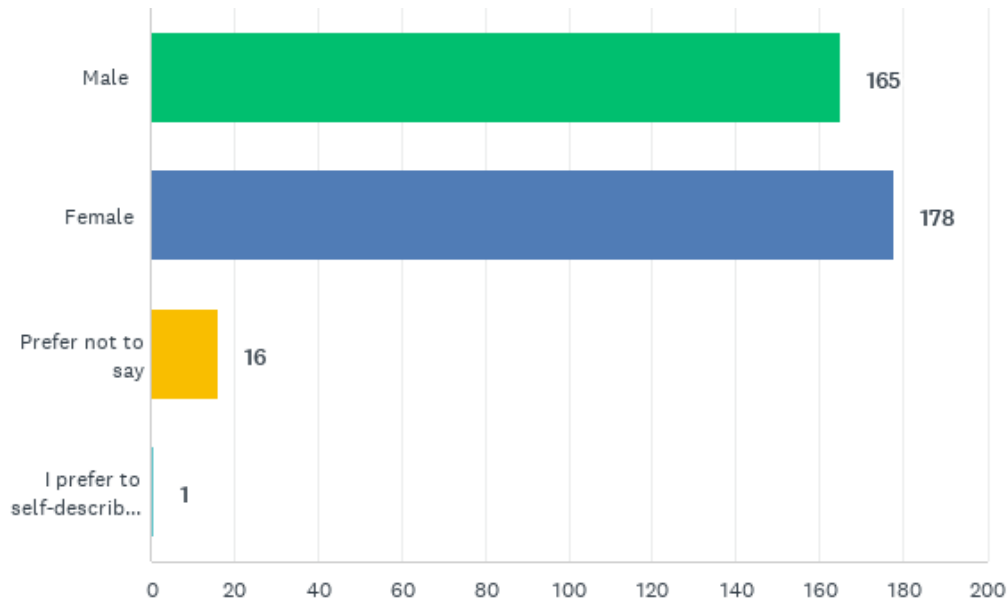
Gender	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Male	165	45.83%
Female	178	49.44%
Prefer not to say	16	4.44%
Prefer to self-describe	1	0.28%

Responses by whether respondent identifies as transgender (279 responses)
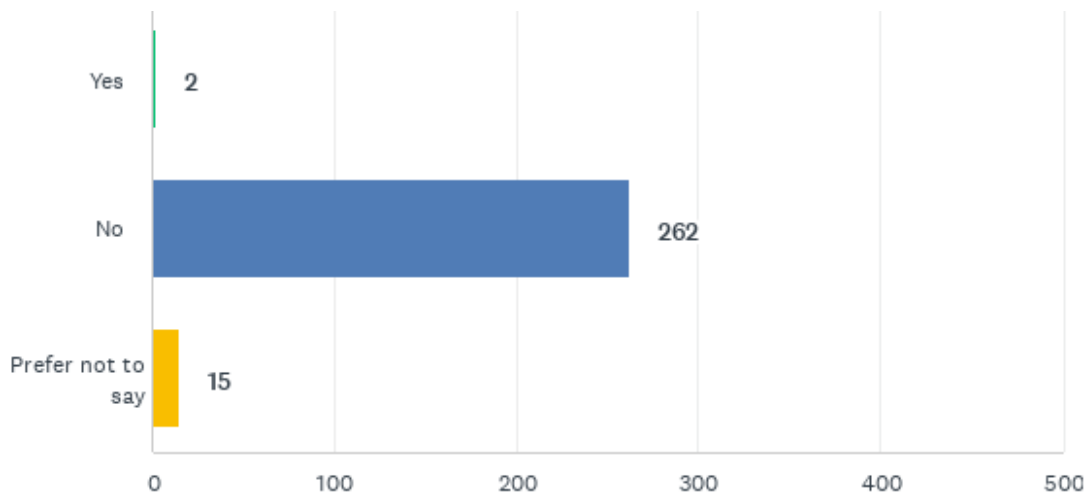
Transgender identity	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Yes	0	0.72%
No	7	93.91%
Prefer not to say	13	5.38%

Cheshire Fire Authority Draft 2024-2028 Community Risk Management Plan
Consultation Feedback: Additional Resources

Responses by age (354 responses)

Age	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Under 18	0	0.00%
18-24	7	1.98%
25-34	13	3.67%
35-44	40	11.30%
45-54	41	11.58%
55-64	58	16.38%
65-74	111	31.36%
75 and over	74	20.90%
Prefer not to say	10	2.82%

Responses by ethnicity (349 responses)

Ethnicity	Number of responses	Percentage of total
White British	319	91.40%
White Irish	5	1.43%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0	0.00%
Any other White background	2	0.57%
White and Black British	6	1.72%
White and Black African	0	0.00%
White and Black Caribbean	1	0.29%
White and Asian	0	0.00%
Any other mixed or multiple ethnic background	2	0.57%
Asian British	1	0.29%
Indian	3	0.86%
Pakistani	0	0.00%
Chinese	1	0.29%
Any other Asian background	0	0.00%
Black British	0	0.00%
Black African	0	0.00%
Black Caribbean	0	0.00%
Any other Black background	0	0.00%
Arab	0	0.00%
Any other ethnic group	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	9	2.58%
Prefer to self-describe	0	0.00%

Responses by religion (309 responses)
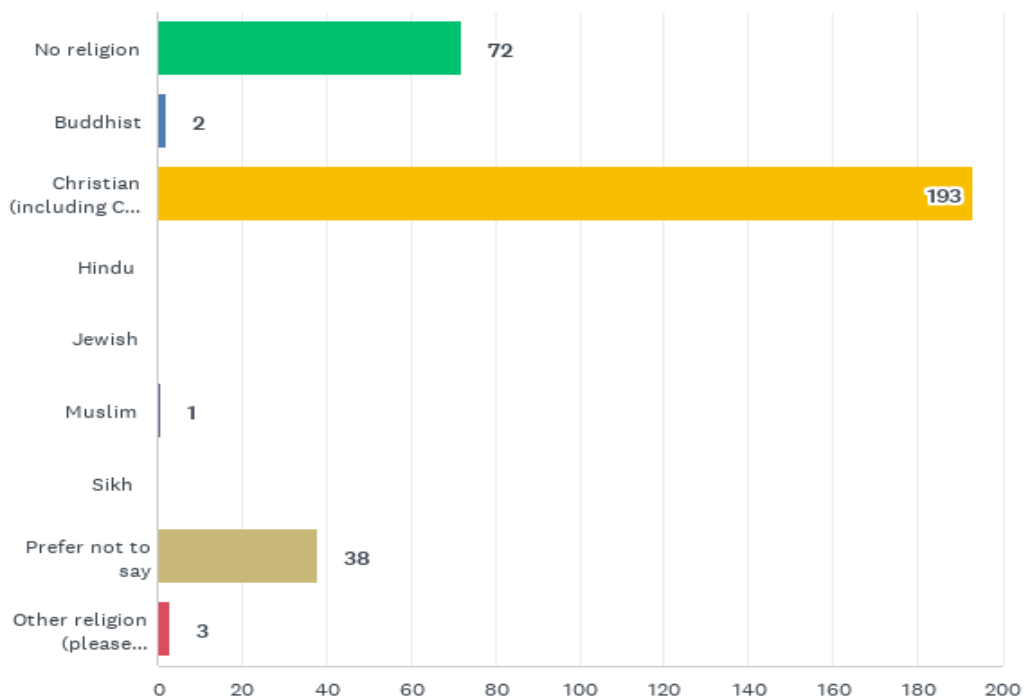
Religion	Number of responses	Percentage of total
No religion	72	23.30%
Buddhist	2	0.65%
Christian	193	62.46%
Hindu	0	0.00%
Jewish	0	0.00%
Muslim	1	0.32%
Sikh	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	38	12.30%
Other	3	0.97%

Responses by disability status (346 responses)

Prefer not to say 5.78% (20)

Yes 18.21% (63)

No 76.01% (263)
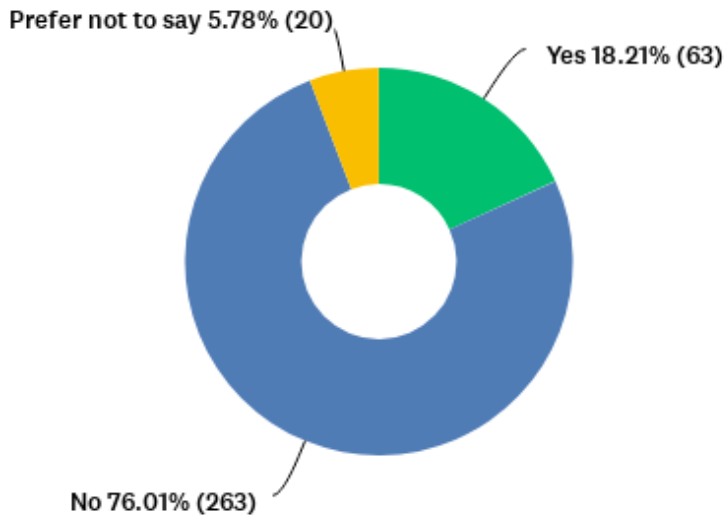
Responses by sexual orientation (333 responses)

Other (please specify) 0.90% (3)

Prefer not to say 10.51% (35)

Bisexual 1.50% (5)

Gay or lesbian 1.80% (6)

Heterosexual or straight 85.29% (284)
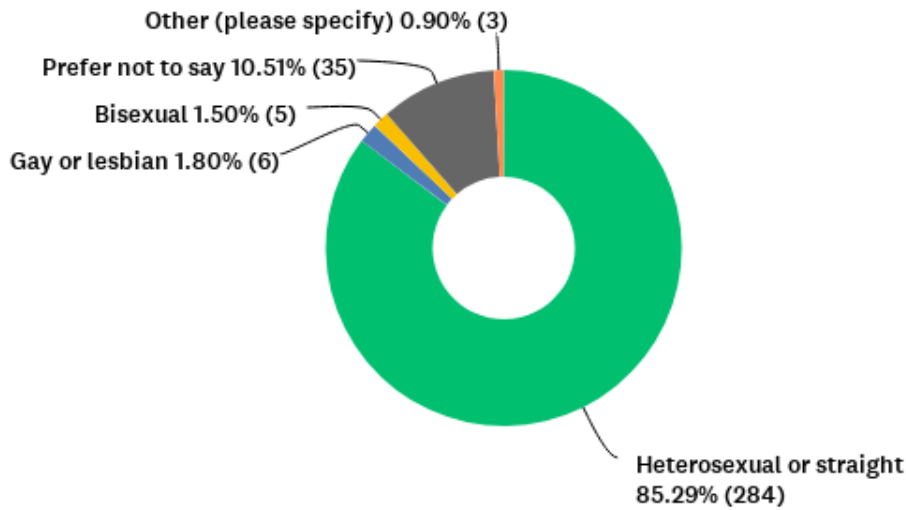
Responses by method of engagement (358 responses)
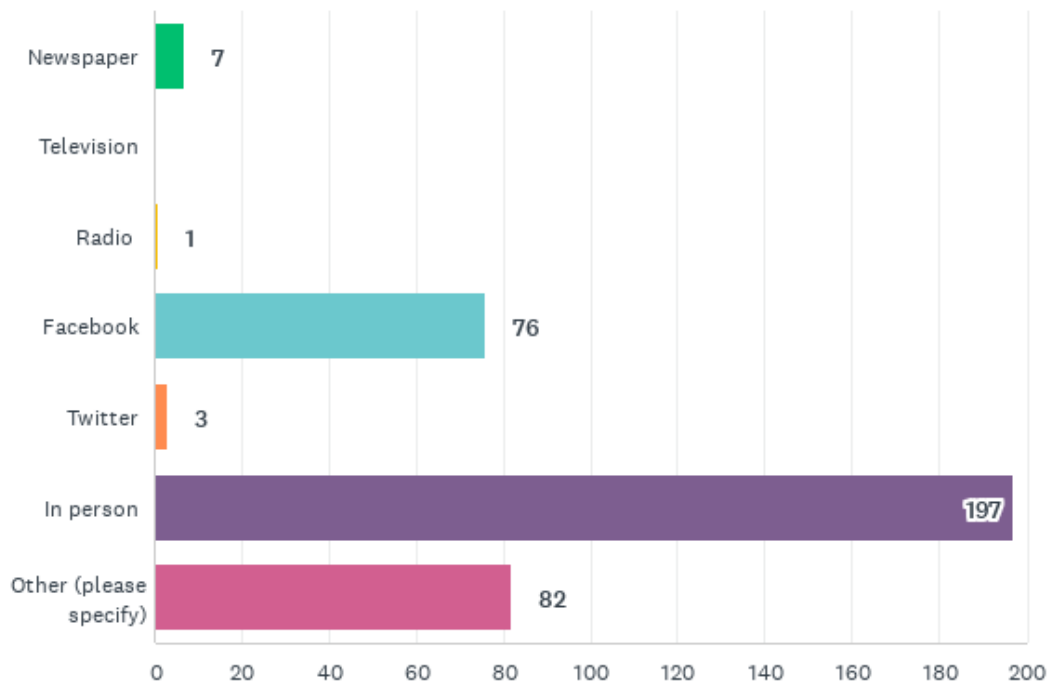
Method of engagement	Responses	Percentage
Newspaper	7	1.96%
Television	0	0.00%
Radio	1	0.28%
Facebook	76	21.23%
Twitter	3	0.84%
In person	197	55.03%
Other*	82	22.91%

* Main response channels via "Other" was through consultation roadshows (in person); Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's neighbourhood alert and through the consultation panels in Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester councils.

Staff respondents

Responses by role (20 responses)
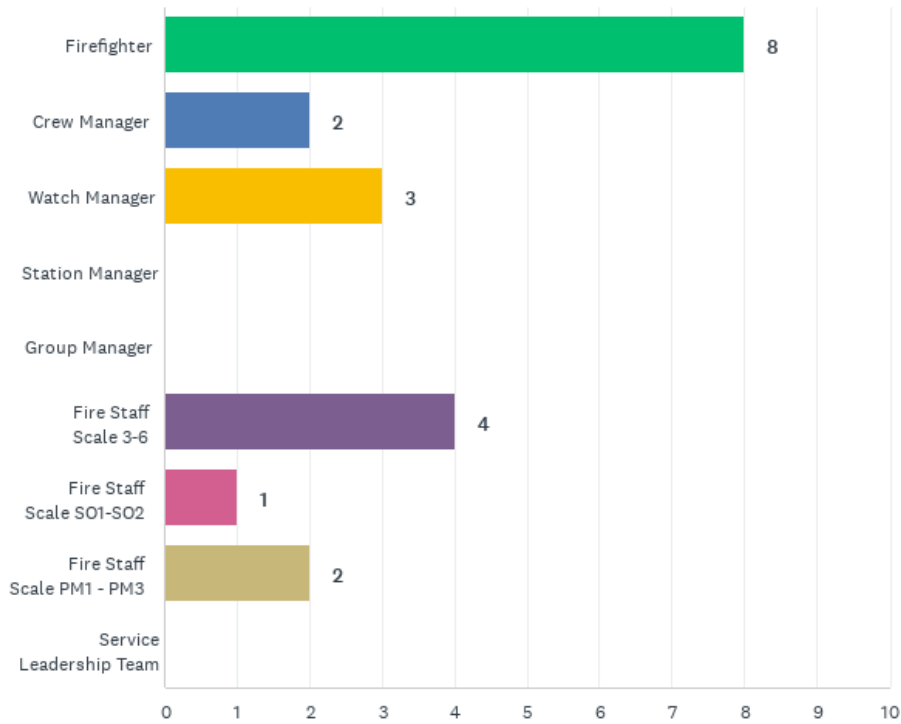
Responses by department (15 responses)

Cheshire Fire Authority Draft 2024-2028 Community Risk Management Plan
Consultation Feedback: Additional Resources
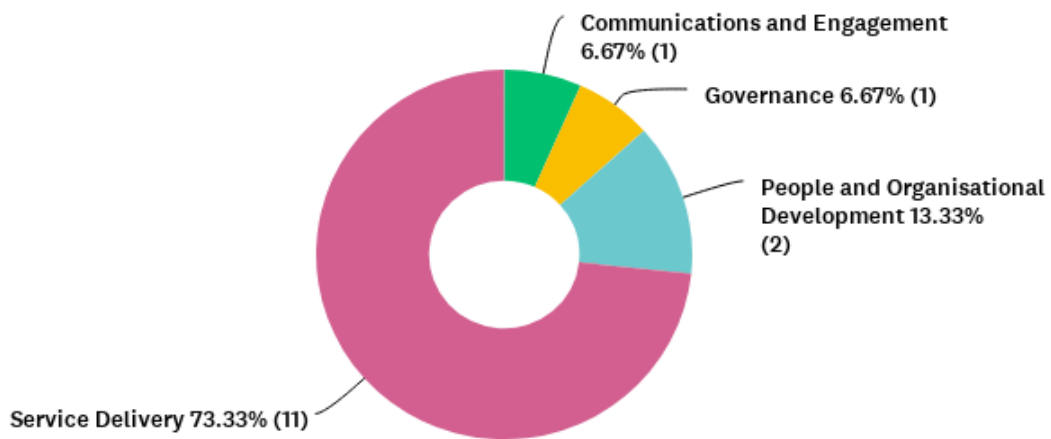
Responses by primary workplace (11 responses)

Please note that only workplaces which include a respondent have been listed.

Workplace	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Holmes Chapel Fire Station	1	9.09%
Nantwich Fire Station	1	9.09%
Powey Lane Fire Station	1	9.09%
Runcorn Fire Station	1	9.09%
Sadler Road	5	45.45%
Stockton Heath Fire Station	1	9.09%
Tarporley Fire Station	1	9.09%

Responses by gender (17 responses)
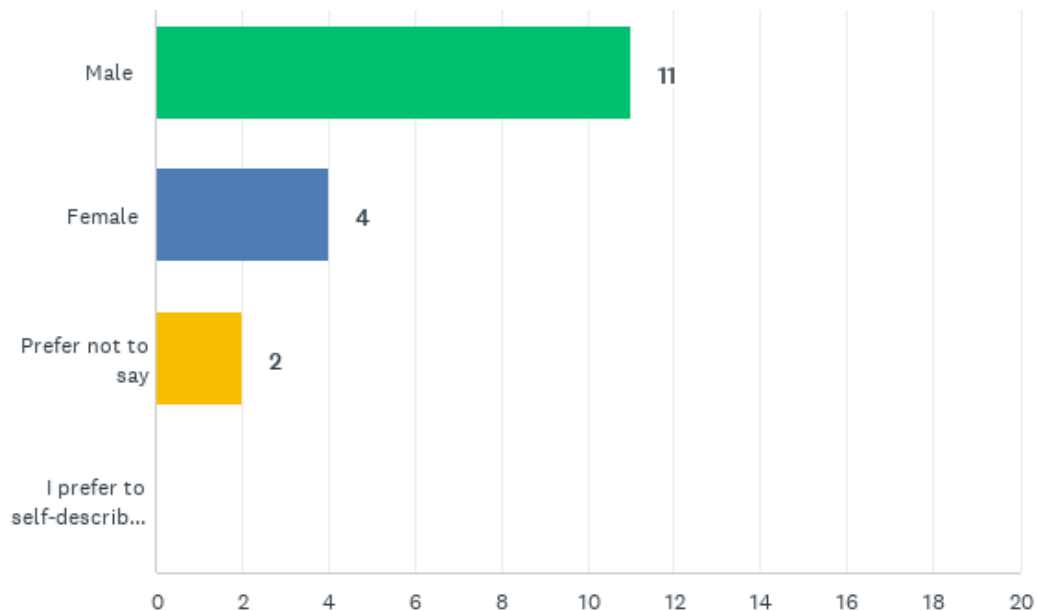
Respondents by transgender identity (18 responses)

Prefer not to say 11.11% (2)

No 88.89% (16)
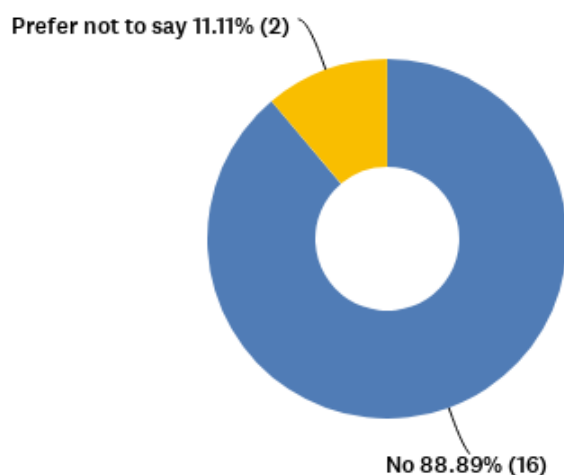
Respondents by age (14 responses)
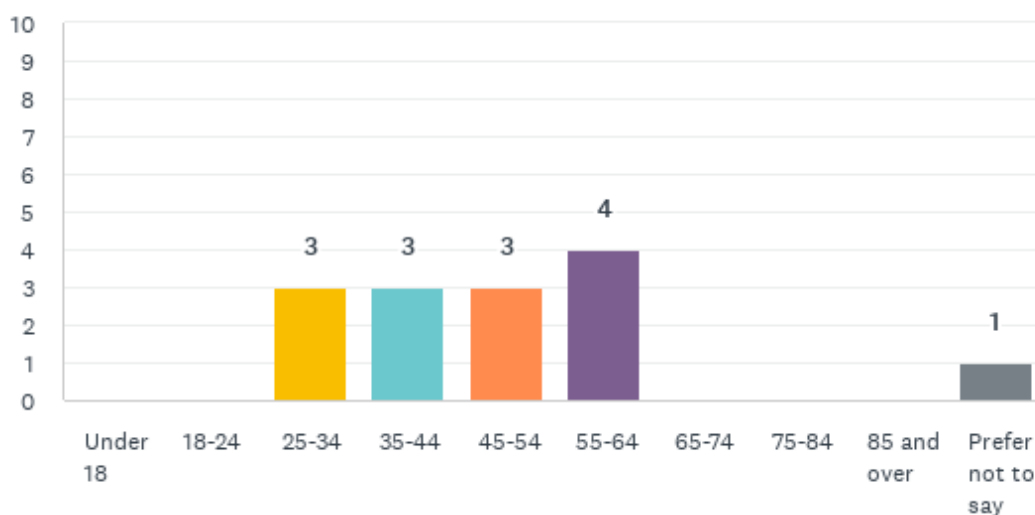
Respondents by ethnicity (12 responses)

Ethnicity	Number of responses
White British	11
White Irish	0
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0
Any other White background	0
White and Black British	0
White and Black African	0
White and Black Caribbean	0
White and Asian	0
Any other mixed or multiple ethnic background	0
Asian British	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Chinese	0
Any other Asian background	0
Black British	0
Black African	0
Black Caribbean	0

Cheshire Fire Authority Draft 2024-2028 Community Risk Management Plan
Consultation Feedback: Additional Resources

Any other Black background	0
Arab	0
Any other ethnic group	0
Prefer not to say	1
Prefer to self-describe	0

Respondents by religion (14 responses)
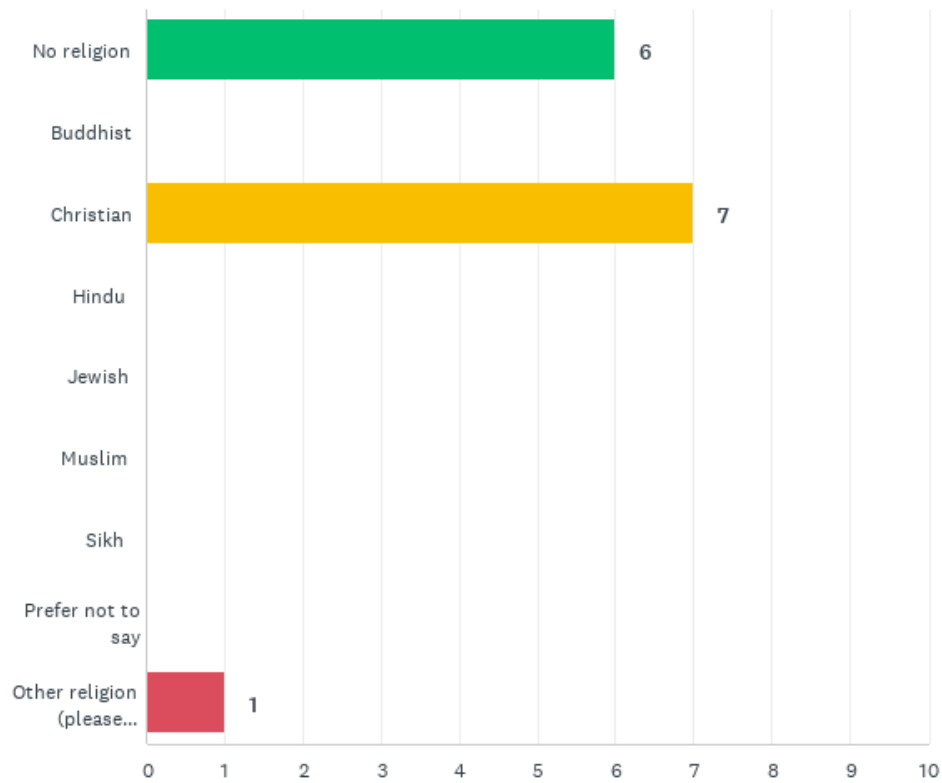
Respondents by sexual orientation (17 responses)
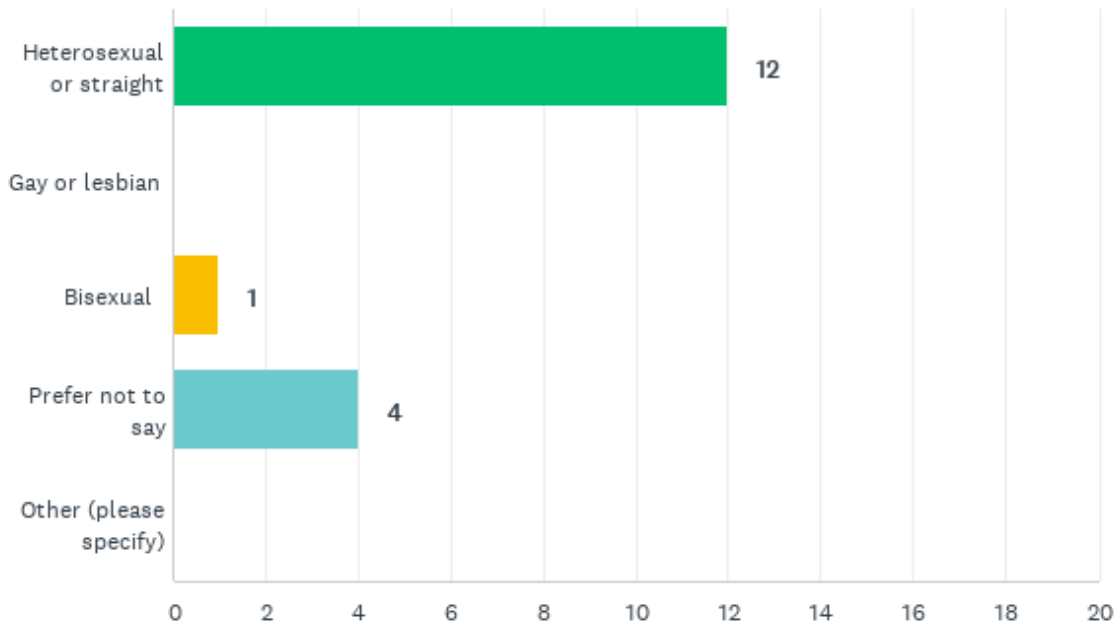
Respondents by disability status (18 responses)
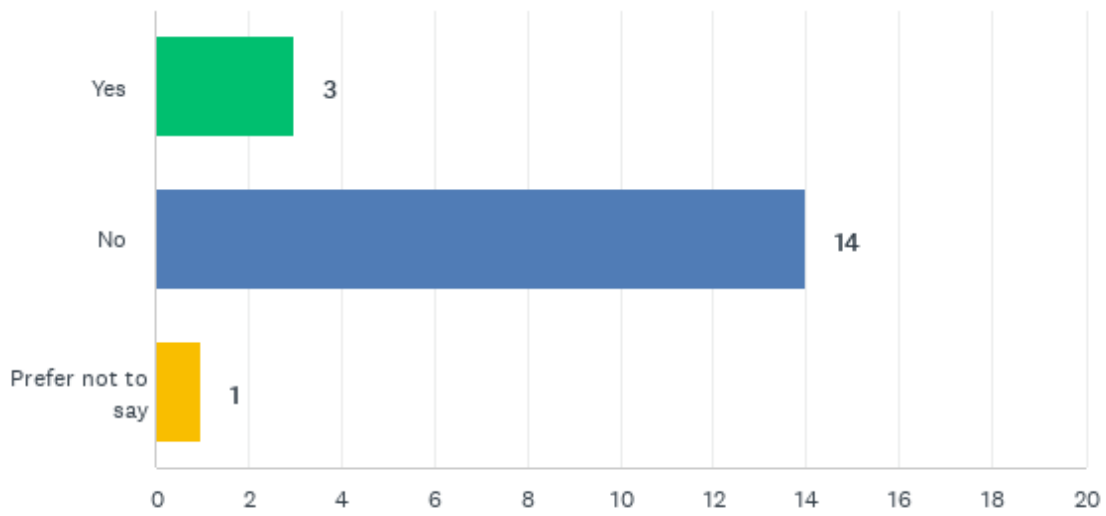
Public non-survey responses

Email response (received 13 October 2023)

Hi

Overall, I thought that the document was reasoned and detailed. I am generally supportive of the proposals with two concerns.

Firstly, I was surprised that the summary of risks made no mention of tower blocks. The most significant fire in the UK in recent years was the Grenfell Tower disaster. While Cheshire has relatively few such blocks, there are some in Blacon and Warrington. What lessons have been drawn by Cheshire Fire Service from the public inquiry into Grenfell and what are the implications for the risks and responses of Cheshire Fire Authority?

Secondly, while I agree with the 'behind the scenes' proposals to change the way you measure and report performance, I think you need to report on more than the average (median? mean?) response times. Even the GCSE maths syllabus requires students to learn both measures of (1) central tendency and (2) spread. One technique for 'spread' that 80% of students are taught is the box and whisker plot. Or a sorted bar chart of response times could be a more visual option? There are other ways of showing 'spread' but the principle is important here, especially concerning outliers in (rural) areas.

Regards,

(Name and address supplied)

Partner responses

The following section provides responses from partners which were received via email. The response from the Fire Brigades Union is provided as a separate appendix to this document due to the size and formatting of the document.

Response from Holmes Chapel Parish Council (received 8 November 2023)

Holmes Chapel Parish Council was very grateful to Neil Griffiths for attending our recent Parish Council meeting to talk through the consultation on the CRMP. It was a very helpful and clear presentation.

The Parish Council is supportive of the proposals and appreciate the additional benefit to our community at no extra budgetary cost.

Kind regards

Tina Cartlidge

Clerk to the Council

Response from Northwich Town Council (received 20 December 2023)

Dear Sir/Madam,

Following the presentation from both Cheshire Fire and Rescue, Deputy Chief Officer, Lee Shears and Matt Bostock, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Firefighter and also by reading the data within the reports, we would like to raise the following concerns.

Residents and council members have serious concerns about the reduction in service, particularly during the night and weekends when most fatalities occur. Having another engine 20 minutes away is more likely to result in loss of life.

The loss of the second fire engine is likely increase the likelihood of fires causing more damage as there may be delays in waiting for the second engine to arrive. This will result in an increased likelihood of more severe damage to properties and disruption to businesses and travel as the scale of the damage will be greater.

It appears that the second engine is not manned due to ongoing recruitment freeze.

The changes are going to result in redundancies and the loss experienced, dedicated, trained firefighters who are only able to work on an on-call basis due to having other work commitments.

We are unable to offer our full support for the proposed changes, especially the withdrawal of the second engine in Northwich and the reduction in availability of services at nights and on weekends. We would hope that this aspect of the restructuring could be reconsidered.

As you will be aware Northwich has suffered from several major events in the last few years, which have heightened concerns for residents and local businesses.

- Roberts Bakery

- Winnington Hill (Sunday 17th December)

- Market (at night)

- In addition the work completed during the floods.

As locally elected representatives we hope that you can fully address the points that we have raised.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Jane Thomas

Northwich Town Mayor

Response from Bollington Town Council (received 21 December 2023)

Bollington Town Council supports the Cheshire Fire Authority 2024-2028 Draft Community Risk Management Plan for the following reasons:

- Improved incident response for Bollington by virtue of the Macclesfield roving appliance being based in Bollington at times when the Bollington service is depleted.
- Better provision for community safety work in Bollington such as home fire safety assessments, fire protection visits and inspections of sites at risk such as larger businesses and hotels.

It is understood that an improvement to response times can only be assessed once the new plan is put in place but that the senior management team has conducted modelling and is confident that response times will improve. No doubt following implementation of these proposals the fire service will be monitoring performance and particularly response times, to verify the modelling. The Council would like to receive performance data on a regular basis, so that we can reassure the public of continued good service.

We understand from our local fire service team in Bollington that views have been sought from front line staff and that the consultation process was constructive and effective.

Bollington Town Council would like to take this opportunity to comment that the current availability of the Bollington appliance is recorded at 85%, with the fire station one of the highest performing in the country. This is testament to the dedication of the crew, who are balancing work and life commitments with providing an emergency service. The Council extends its gratitude to those men and women. Bollington residents really value the presence of the Fire Service in the local community.

Thank you.

Response from Birchwood Town Council (received 21 December 2023)

Following a short presentation from Neil Griffiths, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, on the evening of 19th December 2023 at our Town Council Meeting, Birchwood Town Council would like to give its feedback to the main consultation of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

One of the proposals set out in the CRMP is to reorganise daytime fire cover in Warrington, and to relocate a full-time fire engine from Birchwood to be used in Stockton Heath for four out of eight days, given the level of resource available. We have been assured that response time is still anticipated to be within 10 minutes and that we would still have the support of Warrington, Lymm and Stockton Heath Fire Stations when a full-time engine is not available in Birchwood.

At the presentation, and in the CRMP document, it is highlighted that the proposed changes would see an increase in prevention and protection work such as 'Safe and Well Visits' and safety inspections. Birchwood Town Council see this as an added benefit to the local community.

Councillors would appreciate assurances that the additional prevention and protection work will be carried out in all areas, including Birchwood.

With all things noted above and Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's operational constraints being considered, Birchwood Town Council does not have anything further to add.

Signed on behalf of Birchwood Town Council

Response from Councillor Sam Naylor (received 28 December 2023)

I write as a lifelong Northwich resident and in my capacity as the CWAC Councillor for Northwich Witton and also as a councillor on Northwich Town Council.

I have received presentations from the Deputy Chief Fire Officer; from a retained Fire Officer from Northwich and I have also had several conversations with a representative of the Cheshire FBU.

It is my view that the removal of the retained engine from Northwich could have a detrimental effect on both fire officers and the residents of Northwich, particularly at night and weekends and in a worst-case scenario could place lives at risk.

I understand the poor performance in availability of the retained engine but consider that this is a direct result of a failure to attract and recruit enough retained officers.

Please place on record my objection to the proposal to remove the second retained engine at Northwich Fire Station.

Response from Warrington District Trades Union Council (received 31 December 2023)

We represent trade unionists in Warrington and have concerns on proposals to change daytime cover at Birchwood and Stockton Heath.

Reducing Birchwood fulltime crews by 50% would have a significant risk not only for the local community but also for the wider area given the network of motorways, local industries and potential environmental issues.

The proposal to remove on call at Stockton Heath would be detrimental to the local community as they would have to wait for the arrival of the next available appliance.

The proposals don't appear to have taken into consideration a risk profile.

Accordingly we strongly believe that the current manning arrangements should remain.

 Kind regards

Andy Warnock-Smith

Secretary

Warrington District Trades Union Council

Response from West Cheshire Trades Union Council (received 2 January 2024)

I am writing on behalf of West Cheshire Trades Union Council (TUC) in response to your consultation on the Community Risk Management Plan (Cheshire) 2024 – 28.

As the local body of the TUC we are tasked with organising trade union members on a community basis, focusing on campaigns such as defending public services, combating discrimination and fighting for the Living Wage. As such we have responded in the past to some of your consultations. This Plan obviously represents one of the more significant changes to the organisation of the local Fire & Rescue Service for some time.

In the past we have been concerned about the reduction in the number of full-time fire-fighters and the reduction in cover, often facilitated by developing new stations (in the Green Belt) to enable a reduction in the number of engines available. We expressed concerns about the failure to record the time when 2nd and 3rd engines arrive at fires – noting the impact this can have on fire-fighters faced with tackling dangerous situations without adequate back-up. We have also high-lighted our concerns about the past emphasis on using retained fire fighters to replace full-time fire-fighters to (as we perceived it) reduce costs. We have urged a clear evaluation of that policy and its cost effectiveness.

OUR RESPONSE

The first point I would make, having read the Cheshire FBU Branch response to your proposals, is that we would want to endorse the fundamentals of that response, particularly those that relate to the potential direct impact on the service to the public. Their response contains some significant research and technical detail, which are beyond our remit – but we fully endorse the thrust of their case – which as with past responses is designed to maintain and improve the quality of the service provided by their members, while also safeguarding the interests of those members.

In terms of our own comments, building on past responses, we would indicate:

1.   We generally welcome the proposal to increase the number of full-time fire-fighters, and to reduce to a degree the reliance on retained fire-fighters. That is not a criticism of the role of retained fire-fighters or the work they do, but rather recognition of your own research and analysis regarding the role they are effectively able to play given many societal changes. We would endorse the comments of the FBU that the retention of retained fire fighters and their effective role is at least partly about the remuneration on offer. We support the FBU comments about the inadequacy of the reward pack on offer to those that fulfil what continues to be an important role in their community.

2.   We are largely agnostic about your proposed changes to the method of recording the time taken for the first fire engine to attend an incident, and thus how you calculate whether performance against a set target is "adequately" meet or exceeded. Neither your existing measure nor proposed measure seem to do more than give a comparison from year to year, which may or may not reflect on performance – given the other factors involved. As previously indicated, neither method records the time of arrival of a second or subsequent engines, which may be crucial factors in successfully and safely tackling a fire.

From our view point if average attendance time reaches some arbitrary target, or if the first engine arrives at a fire within a set time on 80% of occasions, this still tells the public very little – other than a crude comparison with the previous year or years. From our viewpoint the issue is the impact on individual events of attendance not meeting a required standard, or of a second or third engine not arriving in a timely manner.   There can be no satisfaction in meeting an 80% target if the 20% where the target is not met are the incidents that lead to injury or loss of life. No doubt the Government insists on some easily comparable measure, but we would suggest the need for some narrative recording relating to any delayed attendance, or delayed attendance of subsequent engines, such that any adverse impact is recorded alongside any information relevant to why a delay occurred. This might give Members of the Fire Authority a better basis for oversight, and perhaps even an explanation of any variations in performance. Annual analysis of such (anonymised) information might facilitate learning any lessons and feed into future planning.

We support the position of the FBU that the time targets for responding to Primary Fires should be broadened to other life threatening incidents involving water and height.

3.   We would add our support to other issues high-lighted by the FBU, including:

The need for each attending crew to consist of 5 fire-fighters in all but the most exceptional circumstances

The need for the overall remuneration package for Cheshire Fire-fighters, in relation to payments like Overtime, to reflect the commitment of staff and the quality of service provided by staff, and to match best practice nationally

The need for modern facilities in terms of rest and toilets in all Fire Stations, which meet the diverse needs of the workforce

The need for PPE that is tailored to the diverse needs of the workforce

Finally we note concerns expressed to us by the FBU about "facilities" arrangements for the union, including the apparent reneging on a commitment to provide a secure and separate office for union officers, and also difficulties they have had in arranging to meet with their members on CF&RS premises.

We hope our representations will be given due consideration.

I would welcome an acknowledgement of receipt of this consultation response.

Sincerely

Ray McHale – Secretary

Response from Chester Retired Firefighters (received 2 January 2024)

Dear Sirs,

Chester Retired Firefighters in responding to your Public consultation have decided to present an overview rather than follow the prescribed method of commenting. We hope that you find those points raised helpful, as we both try to move the service forward whilst retaining and enhancing core values and meeting statutory responsibilities.

Having read the complete document with it's various attachments and comments by both public and staff, it is worrying that the general public have many misconceptions as to the availability of Fire Cover.

Whilst we would all like to see a situation where everyone living in every area receives the same timely response in an emergency, it's just not possible, essentially due to budgetary constraints. Constraints which appear to go unchallenged Nationally by CFOs and CEOs who by and large are compliant toward whatever is handed down by Central/Devolved Government.

If only the UKs 49 or so CFOs would stand as one and send a strong message to those in Central Government, That Enough is Enough !

A Government that continually erode funding to FAs in the misguided belief they can still maintain an acceptable level of Fire Cover.

The undoubted intense effort that FRS put into preparing each CRMP is to be commended, yet trying to prove we can achieve more at a lesser cost is just not working ! Available Fire Cover is being constantly eroded.

To be fair, the On-Call system which once worked well, has been decimated by society/life style changes which FRS Nationally have not kept pace with. Whilst compounded by budgetary constraints, it's also directly effected the Services own Migration Policy.

I find it difficult to understand how the Migration process from PT to WT has not raised alarm bells before, given the obvious difficulty in PT recruitment. It's like robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Equally, a point raised by studying the Breach Report shows that Compensatory Leave was granted to a FF who performed On-call duties at a station close to where he lives, only for him to then be allowed to report for shift at his home Full Time Station, two hours later than normal, necessitating the Pump being off the run.

Clearly work patterns and life styles have changed drastically over the past 25 yrs or so.

To this end Recruits to the On Call System need to be attracted by improved incentives. I'm not sure, given the fact that the likes of Malpas and Tarporley, as examples, which are now "dormitory towns" where daytime availability is sparse, will ever regain the levels of part time cover once enjoyed. That said incentives must be sought as the more expensive alternative would be a WT station being established to cover a number of former PT stations.

The Breach Report, hitherto not generally available, makes disturbing reading. We understand that Service staffing levels should be around

50 WT Firefighters minimum at any one time, compared with 96/100 in 2006/7 and yet the service struggles to maintain the lower figure !

Clearly there are not enough FFs in the system and this, we understand, has been raised previously by HMICFRS.

A system that once ran on a ridership factor of 1.5:1 for each WT riding position with 5 riders on each first pump, Establishments were previously maintained at agreed levels.

The decision by the FBU to rescind the Shift Overtime Ban has had a detrimental effect on Establishment Levels, as whilst in place it forced Authorities to regularly recruit in order to maintain staffing levels. As much as some will take advantage of this situation we feel that a rethink by the FBU would help improve matters.

Equally disturbing, and again making reference to the Breach Report, are the number of occasions, that the second WT Pumps at Crewe and Chester are not available. You will be well aware that each were saved and successfully reinstated after much public campaigning which lasted

around 4 years. The cases and evidence put forward at the time were irrefutable and common sense eventually prevailed.

The unavailability of these second pumps is predominately due to staff shortages across the County and each appear to have become a general runabout plugging gaps elsewhere.

Equally, the Aerial Appliance at Chester, considered Primary since 1938, is rendered alternate with the Second and often the First Pump ! Where reverting to it's safe double crewing would ensure it's constant availability and avoid the reliance of a Support Pump when responding.

This in turn would enhance resilience.

Minimum riders on first pump should be 5. This should apply also to Crewe and Chester where the second pump currently appears to be the general runabout for the County. That said, there is a very good case for all pumps to ride 5 as minimum, as when these second pumps are standing by elsewhere, they are in fact the first on that station ground.

Obviously, if the overall establishment was increased to sensible levels then the regular movement of these second pumps would be lessened dramatically.

BROS and CAST assume a first crew of 5 riders with 9 to safely resolve a simply house fire.

At present it would appear CFRS often falls short of this requirement which is fundamental to safety.

This is important because when considering tasks, a crew of five arriving at a fire after 4 minutes might be assumed to be enough to bring the fire under control. However a crew of five arriving at a fire after 8 minutes will have more tasks to perform – that will take longer – and they might NOT be able to bring the much larger fire under control.

Politicians should be reminded of the " Avoidance of situations which could motivate or pressurise..........etc".

Again referring to The Breach Report it is disturbing to see reference to Pumps becoming an SIU and responding with just 3 riders. Not only does this raise H&S issues but further impacts on resilience due to the need of a properly crewed backup.

Due to the very real reduction in FF and Appliance numbers SOPS need to be reviewed to take this

into account. Not that this will become a permanent measure but one that is viewed as interim pending

return to proper staffing and Appliance availability.

Credit to the Service for the number of Safe and Well visits but reference to " Motivational Interviewing Techniques"

in preference to greater Operational Awareness and Intelligence is naive to say the least, particularly as the former has no direct H&S implications for the Operational Staff.

Centralised Training. Cheshire are to be applauded on creating such a wonderful facility which cannot help but enhance the skills of it's FFs. However the practice of taking Pumps effectively OTR in order to facilitate this is a backward step. Previously when Establishments were at sensible levels, Centralised Training would never be to the detriment of Fire Cover.

Lobby the FA as to why England is devoid of funding for Flood Risks and Water Rescue whilst our neighbours Wales, Scotland and NI received funding.

BA, again fundamental to safety and successful firefighting. Why has it's upgrading taken a back seat in recent times?

NW Fire Control. No Scrutiny ? Not withstanding it was a bad move in the first place then surely Scrutiny and Accountability should be a basic requirement. The proposal to include the call handling time within the Service Response Time is welcomed as a true indication of the level of service being delivered.

The Response Standard must apply to all categories of Life Risk and whilst you appear to be lauding the Blanket 10 min Attendance Standard it may be worth referring to some historical facts** rather than adopting a Lowest Common Denominator across the County.

**As an example; Chester City in 1973, the station received all 999 calls, AFAs and PWs. The Control Room operator or a Firefighter standing in had local knowledge. Once the first line of the address was written, the bells were dropped. This alarm was timed to sound for 45 secs. If each machine was not mobile before they stopped ringing questions were asked !

If riding the first Pump one could not even go for a toilet break unless you swapped with another FF riding the second or Special. Equally on drill, the first pump crew would never go up the tower. Attendance times for the City Centre were generally 3 minutes with any of the surrounding housing estates receiving a response within 5/6 exceptionally 7/8 minutes, with two machines and 8/9 FFs. All within Time of Call !

I've no doubt Warrington CB and many Cheshire Stations would have been equally proud having delivered the same standard.

Moving Rope Rescue back to Knutsford. Requires a 5 qualified crew members. Without the need to be supplemented from elsewhere which in turn reduces overall Fire Cover. This reinforces the need to upgrade all pumps to 5.

I'm sure we all welcome "The Clean Cab Policy" introduced to reduce cross contamination after much valuable research. We do however, wonder, how often a pump returning from an incident is rendered " Not Available" due to it's implementation. Don't think for one minute that this is criticism, moreover another reason to state the case for more pumps to maintain Resilience.

We fully support Regular Health Screening, the provision of Extra Duty Rig and the provision of Washing Machines on all Stations allowing Duty Rig along with Fire Kit to be washed on Station in order to avoid domestic contamination.

Also we fully support that All station Appliance Rooms should be fitted with Exhaust Gas Control Systems. Frankly, we're very surprised that this has not yet been implemented as a standard feature.

MTA Incidents. Clearly the disparity between Policies adopted (or not adopted) by neighbouring Services when planning for dealing with incidents involving Marauding Terrorists needs to be addressed, with either the training of and suitably rewarding those Cheshire personnel who become qualified, OR striking a legally binding agreement with a neighbouring service (notably GMFRS) who can then respond over the border. We must confess, that the current disparity is typical of each service "doing their own thing" following the erosion of National Standards.

Finally, it is with some concern that we note, a long standing agreement between the Service and the FBU which provided basic yet exclusive office accommodation, appears to have been withdrawn. This, along with the refusal to allow an FBU Meeting on Station premises being attended by a local MP unless a Senior Manager (possibly Non FBU) was in attendance. Clearly such action is not conducive to good Industrial Relations, neither is it expected of a Labour lead Authority.

Sincerely.

Tony Jones.

Secretary.

Chester Retired Firefighters.

Response from Stockton Heath Parish Council (received 2 January 2024)

Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2024-2028 consultation

Thank you for recently visiting Stockton Heath Parish Council to present the proposed Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service Plan (CRMP) for April 2024 to April 2028.

The Council supports the Plan's objectives.

In particular, the Council welcomes the proposals to increase the number of fire engines available to respond to emergencies. It also welcomes the proposed increase in the number of 'safe and well' visits compared to the current Plan and is impressed by the

number (24,310) you plan to do. Preventing emergencies is far better than having to deal with them.

Specifically, in Stockton Heath, we understand the rationale to change the village fire station from on-call to full-time crews, to remedy the current poor response availability at this location, sharing response to emergencies with Birchwood. We recognise the difficulties in recruiting sufficient on-call fire fighters.

We were pleased that the Service understands the potential disruption to the individual lives of the current on-call employees and is committed to finding equitable solutions.

We are also pleased that the new proposed arrangements will allow for a better distribution of the 'safe and well' visits, so that more will be available in our village.

APPENDIX 4

CHESHIRE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

RESPONSE TO CFRS COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2028: A BLUEPRINT FOR A BETTER SERVICE AND BETTER FUTURE

CHESHIRE

Written and compiled by Cheshire Fire Brigades Union

Overall public spending

Central government expenditure as set out by the Treasury	**£500bn**
Central and local government spending on public services	**£1tn**
National income – Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the UK	**£2.2tn**

Costs of fire and rescue

Cost of the UK fire and rescue service per person per year	**£50**
Cost of the UK fire and rescue service as proportion of central government spending	**0.6%**
Cost of the UK fire and rescue service as proportion of spending on public services	**0.3%**

Value of the fire and rescue service in England (lives saved, property, protection) | £13bn

Value of the fire and rescue service relative to its cost | 6 times

Foreword:

The fire and rescue service is an essential public service and a national strategic asset. Firefighters tackle every kind of emergency, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Firefighters receive the first call people make when it matters most and are the first line of defence when things go wrong. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is proud to represent the vast majority of firefighters across the UK. The UK fire and rescue service can mobilise ten thousand firefighters in a matter of minutes to tackle almost every emergency imaginable. Specially trained firefighters are on duty at all times, ready for deployment to incidents, large and small. The arrival of professional firefighters, swiftly and with appropriate numbers and adequate resources, is of tremendous value, both to those immediate victims who need our help and politicians who are accountable when things go wrong.

The FBU firmly believes in and supports the process of Risk Management Planning as described in all of the current national guidance documents. The FBU wants to work with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority and the service to implement and to further develop the CRMP process.

Fire and Rescue Services are fortunate in that the majority of their employees are members of a single representative body, the FBU. By involving the FBU in the CRMP planning cycle, CFRS has the opportunity to draw on the combined experiences of the majority of its workforce when considering the health and safety implications of potential systems of service delivery work.

It is with this collaborative approach that we have managed to work closely with the service recently on a number of areas of success:

Emergency Medical Response:

The FBU worked alongside the service to successfully launch a pilot scheme, whereby our members respond to members of the community that suffer a Cardiac arrest (Red 1), and provide emergency intervention and basic life support. We jointly worked on creating the agreement with CFRS and NWAS, and on the Standard Operating Procedures.

Operational Training Duty System:

We jointly designed a new duty system for Operational and Command Training Officers that have achieved efficiency savings whilst increasing the capacity to deliver more training to the workforce whilst negotiating acceptable terms and conditions that accompanied the changes to the delivery output our members provide.

New Maternity Policy:

The FBU approached the service with policies from other FRS around the country that evidenced the need to overhaul our existing policies. Together we have worked hard to create a maternity policy which we believe is the one of the best of the country, and one that will help attract more female applicants, thus enabling our service to more diverse and representative of our communities.

Changes to the Wholetime Shift Duty System:

The FBU recently provided proposals on changes to how leave was facilitated – these have been subject to a 'pilot' and the Service have undertaken a review which has evidenced that the service were able to better plan for staffing deficiencies, more leave was taken without impacting on the global establishment and more staff were able to get the annual leave they wanted.

The IRMP definition endorsed by the IRMP steering group is:

Integrated Risk Management Planning is a holistic, modern and flexible process, supported by legislation and guidance, to identify, measure and mitigate the social and economic impact that fire and other emergencies can be expected to have on individuals, communities, commerce, Industry, the environment and heritage. FRA's when establishing local options for risk reduction and management within annual action plans, must take account of the duties and responsibilities outlined in the national framework, the emergency services order, the civil contingencies Act and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order.

This places emphasis on flexibility and partnership, working on local, cross border and regional planning for prevention and intervention activities to save and protect life and reduce the economic and environmental impact of fire to the community. Through this partnership approach IRMP should deliver a proportionate response, that is evidenced based, which will ensure efficiency.

It is with this in mind that Cheshire Fire Brigades Union has produced its response to the services 2024-2028 Plan.

The Response Model

As a result of the loss of such large numbers of whole-time frontline fire fighters, the FBU strongly urges the Service to review each and every operating procedure and response standard to take into account the loss of that emergency frontline first response.

The review must take into account the revised safe working practises that would mitigate as best as is possible against increased risk resulting from the loss of immediate and adequate response to fire and other emergencies. It is one thing to declare that a fire appliance or appliances will be sent immediately to incidents it is another thing to apply that in practise. The low levels of retained availability compounds this issue.

The FBU have previously tabled a proposal which is a key risk and task analysis of all identified operational scenarios to the fire and rescue service, which sets out the minimum safe number of firefighters for a number of known operational scenarios (33 in total). It is referred to as the Critical Attendance Standard, more commonly known as the CAST methodology.

The CAST methodology allows for a tightly-controlled phased arrival of fire appliances at emergency incidents. It takes into account of the effect of this phased arrival on both the incident and on the ability of firefighters to carry out Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) without increasing the risk to themselves above a level which they would normally expect and facing situations which are themselves inherently risky. Determining what is an acceptable phased arrival – or **LAG** – in fire appliance attendance times i.e. the time between the arrival of the first fire appliance and the second fire appliance sent as part of the initial emergency response to an incident, is critical.

For example, one of the most commonly attended categories of incident for the Fire and Rescue Service is for a dwelling house fire and rescues are regularly and often successfully carried out in such incidents by crews. The risk and task analysis provided within the CAST scenario for such an incident identifies that a minimum of **9** firefighters are required to successfully resolve this type of incident safely. For clarity the CAST scenarios are wholly based on risk and task analyses undertaken by Government as part of the Pathfinder Review, it is effectively a Government scenario replicated and supported by the FBU.

The FBU have identified that one of the main issues of concern with the unprecedented loss of such significant emergency frontline fire cover is the amount of time it will now take for a second (or third) appliance to arrive on scene enabling the effective and safe working practises previously referred to. This LAG time not only informs how operational procedures can commence or continue, but it also is the very essence of the *'speed and weight of attack'* rationale often referred to by professional firefighters.

To underpin how important the speed and weight of attack is considered by Government as well as the professional firefighters the FBU refer the reader to the comments made by the former Prime Minister, Mr. D Cameron MP, in response to a question put to him in the House of Commons at Prime Ministers Question Time. Mr. Cameron stated at the time that *'Hon. Members must recognise that the most important thing is the time it takes the emergency services to get to an incident. As constituency MPs, we are naturally focused on the bricks and mortar items— whether ambulance or fire stations, or other facilities—but what really matters for our constituents is how quickly the emergency services get to them and how good the service is when they do so.'*

The Fire Brigades Union agrees completely with this comment made by the former Prime Minister.

Therefore the speed and weight of attack is crucial for both firefighter and community safety with the timely and appropriate provision of adequate numbers of firefighters. In its absence, safe systems of work are compromised and alternative less desirable strategies must be considered and implemented.

However, when someone is screaming at firefighters to act, to rescue their parent, their partner or their child, and you are there as part of the fire service response, it does not matter how *'self-disciplined to work within accepted systems of work'* you may be, as a firefighter coerced into responding.

These are not individual decisions. Such is the frequency of this event that they have become accepted group decisions amongst firefighters throughout the service. In short - they are given no alternative.

The Review of Standards of Emergency Cover undertaken by Government in 1999 recognised this problem, and the 'Pathfinder' report is crystal clear on this point. In any planning decisions relating to **when** the required firefighters and equipment should arrive at an emergency incident, it warns against placing firefighters in a position where they have no option but to act – even when there are insufficient resources available:

"… it is essential to avoid situations which could motivate or pressurise firefighters to act unsafely in the interests of saving life."
(Review of Standards of Emergency Cover - Technical Paper C – Response & Resource Requirements)

This is the very situation the FBU are referring to and potentially the very real danger facing CF&RS personnel unless dealt with appropriately.

To delay the speed and weight of attack has known effects in relation to fatality rates. It is now a regrettable fact that response standards within the UK F&RS's, including Cheshire, have become slower.

The following graph displays the rapid rise in attendance times, remembering that to safely conduct most operational activities a minimum of nine firefighters are required as demonstrated by the CAST scenarios. So a first attendance while useful does not

stop the clock ticking as the safe systems of work identified by CAST requires the full resource provision of 9 firefighters as a minimum.

First appliance response times in England, 1994-95 to 2022-23
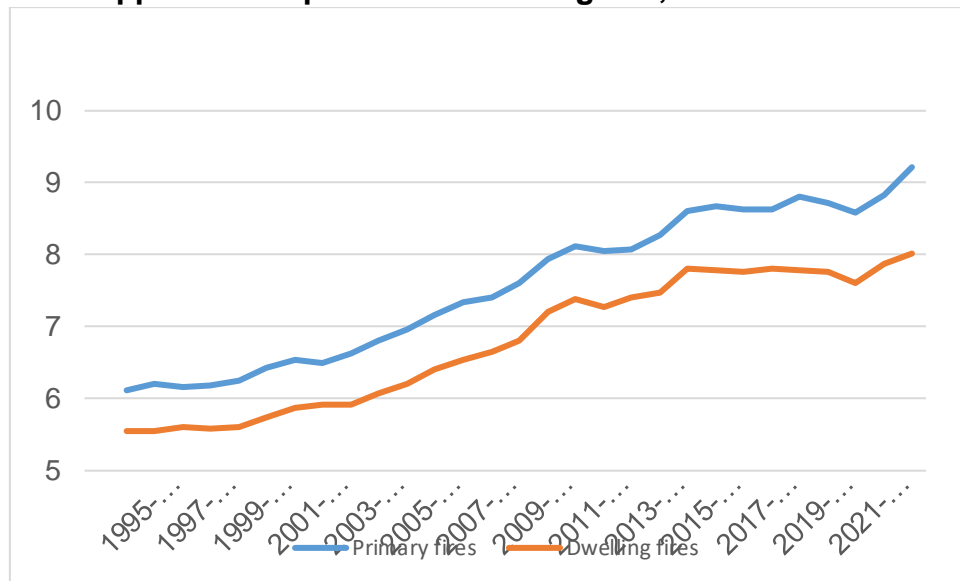
The current system does not record the arrival of **second or other appliances**. There is now a postcode lottery of attendance standards, meaning a slower response to emergencies than our communities are entitled to expect and firefighters want to deliver.

The Westminster devolved governments should increase UK-wide planning and cooperation, devise UK-wide response standards in consultation with fire sector stakeholders. These should include:

- a maximum response time standard of five minutes from the time of call to arrival of the first pumping appliance
- a maximum response time standard for the second pumping appliance
- a minimum of five riders on all pumping appliances
- permanently (primary) crewed aerial ladder appliances.

A new approach to attendance planning

For the last half of the 20th Century, the minimum level of fire service attendance at fires in the UK was defined by national standards of fire cover. These standards defined the number of appliances, the crew size and the attendance time.

At the beginning of the 21st Century, national standards of fire cover were abolished, and it was left up to each fire and rescue service to set its own standards. The type of fire appliances, the crew sizes and the attendance times could all be set locally.

It was believed that the old national standards of fire cover did not reflect the modern fire and rescue service and did not address the true risk within the community. Setting

attendance parameters at the local level was intended to deliver a better service to the public.

However a *method* was required that would analyse modern fire and rescue service capabilities so that the effect of changes to attendance standards could be examined and assessed prior to implementation.

The *method* that was developed by government scientists was called the Brigade Response Options System (BROS).

Brigade Response Options System (BROS)

Although it is called a *system*, BROS is essentially a *process*. Computer software has been created to make the BROS process easier to put into practice, but it can just as easily be worked out on paper.

BROS is a timeline based task analysis process.

The available firefighers are listed down the left hand side of a table, and the passage of time is represented across the width of the table. See Figure 1.

	1 minute	2 minutes	3 minutes	
Officer in charge				
Firefighter 1				
Firefighter 2				
Firefighter 3				
Firefighter 4				

Figure 1. Task analysis table

The idea is that the activities undertaken by firefighters at an incident can be 'blocked in' to the table to show what each person is doing at any moment. This process is known as *task analysis*

This is not a process that produces results that are of 'engineering accuracy', but if the skill and judgement of a large number of professional firefighters is used to fill in the table, a realistic and justifiable outcome is obtained.

The BROS process is particularly useful for a number of reasons:

- BROS is not limited to attendance at fires. It can be used to assess the effect of attendance standards at any emergency incident.

- BROS can be applied to a 'typical' incident or it can be applied to a very specific case.

- BROS can be applied using 'typical' fire and rescue service resources or it can be applied using the known resources of a particular service or fire station.

- There are only as many rows on the table as there are firefighters. This avoids incorrect assumptions being made about the activities that can actually be carried out by the number of firefighters in attendance.

- The timeline encourages users to remember that certain activities cannot be started until other activities have been completed.

- The timeline makes it possible to work out the effect of actual attendance times of second and subsequent appliances just by adding more rows to the table at different times.

In very simple form, a table might look something like Figure 2 as it is completed:

	2 minute			4 minutes		6 minutes	
First appliance:							
Officer in charge	Risk assessment			Supervision		Briefing	Supervision
Firefighter 1	Pump operation						
Firefighter 2				BA rescue			
Firefighter 3				BA rescue			
Firefighter 4	Supplying water			Managing hose			1st aid
Second appliance: (arrival time 5 minutes after 1st appliance)							
Officer in charge						Briefing	Com support
Firefighter 1							Firefighting
Firefighter 2							Firefighting
Firefighter 3							1st aid

Figure 2. Task analysis table being completed.
Lag between 1st and 2nd appliance arrival is 5 minutes

A number of points must be considered at this stage:

- **Firefighter safety**

   BROS enables an analysis of firefighter safety to be undertaken in the earliest planning stages of attendance planning.

   As the rows in the table are filled in by professional firefighters, they will easily be able to identify issues of firefighter safety that place a demand on resources. For example, at a motorway incident, it may be necessary to allocate the activity of 'scene safety' to one person for the duration of the incident. This fills in one line of the table, and all of the other activities at the incident must be distributed amongst the remaining lines.

- **Firefighter physiology**

  Firefighter physiology must be taken into account when using the timeline approach of BROS.

  For example, if it is assumed that firefighters will be wearing breathing apparatus in arduous conditions, a period for recovery must be blocked into their timeline afterwards.

- **Resilience**

  If the table shows every single firefighters to be engaged in risk critical activity and/or activity critical to firefighter safety, it must be realised that the task being described is 100% reliant on all equipment working, and on all firefighters being uninjured and not distracted.

  If a hose needs replacing, or a firefighter is injured or forced to control bystanders, other important tasks will be delayed.

  It is therefore not a bad thing that there will be periods of time when some firefighters will not be allocated tasks within the table. This provides built-in resilience to ensure that an incident can be concluded successfully even if unplanned events occur.

- **Starting position and incident development**

  The initial scale of the incident and its growth or decline must constantly be kept in mind.

  The BROS process does not consider the attendance time of the first appliance. (It would be possible to consider 'driving to the incident' as an activity, but attendance time should really be considered in a different way).

  The important question is, exactly what will the first appliance in attendance be faced with?

  If it is assumed that the attendance time of the first appliance will be 4 minutes, a fire will be a certain size. If it is assumed that the attendance time of the first appliance will be 8 minutes, a fire will be four times as big.

  This is important because when considering tasks, a crew of five arriving at a fire after 4 minutes might be assumed to be enough to bring the fire under control. However a crew of five arriving at a fire after 8 minutes will have more tasks to perform – that will take longer – and they might NOT be able to bring the much larger fire under control.

In 2003/04, the FBU was concerned about the way in which fire and rescue services might apply the principles of task analysis and attendance planning.

The FBU therefore took a range of 'typical' emergency incidents and put them through the BROS process to identify the *critical* attendance standard that was required to deliver a satisfactory outcome.

The meaning of the word 'critical' is that fewer resources (firefighters) in the attendance standard would deliver a worse outcome, but additional resources (while beneficial) would not have a proportionately improved effect on the outcome.

For example, at a 'typical house fire', two appliances comprising 9 crew are able to safely commit two breathing apparatus teams to search for casualties and extinguish a fire. A single appliance crew would take twice as long to search a smoke filled house and would be unlikely to do so in compliance with a safe system of work. But equally, three crews and 13 or 14 firefighters would not be able to search a 'typical' house that much more quickly because – apart from anything else - three or four breathing apparatus teams in a 'typical' house fire could get in each other's way and slow each other down. Thus, the 'critical' attendance at a typical house fire is 9 firefighters.

Note: Not all houses are typical and not all fires are typical so in some circumstances more than 9 firefighters would be critical to delivering a satisfactory outcome at a house fire.

The FBU's *critical attendance standards* are therefore nothing more than the results of FBU members carrying out incident ground task analysis using BROS, the Brigade Response Options System.

Within an Integrated, or Community Risk Management Plan (IRMP), local fire & rescue authorities are required to set out how they intend to make adequate provision for prevention and emergency intervention to meet efficiently and safely all normal requirements.

The nationally circulated guide 'The Dynamic Management of Risk at Operational Incidents, A Fire Service Pamphlet' states:-

"Legal Fire Authorities, in common with other employers, have many legal duties in respect of safety. The most relevant to this document are those imposed by sections 2 and 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and regulations 3 and 4 of the Management of Health and Safety at work Regulations (MHSAW), 1992. These require employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees and others affected by their work activities.

In order to achieve this, they must carry out and record suitable and sufficient risk assessments, then implement the control measures necessary to ensure an acceptable level of safety. Both the risk assessments and the control measures must be regularly monitored and reviewed to confirm their continuing validity."

Ultimately the Service cannot consult the public on a matter that will potentially put the health and safety of firefighters at risk. Matters that potentially put firefighter's

safety at risk must be addressed and resolved through the health and safety committee. Just because the public do not raise any objections to a proposal that will put firefighters at risk, does not mean that the Service can implement that proposal.

The FBU propose that all single pump stations have a mimimum ridership of 5 fire fighters as its response crew.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue 2024-2028 Proposals:

What CFRS plan to do?

Implement the recommendations from a review of our Prevention Department in 2023, ensuring all our community safety programmes continue to have the greatest possible impact in reducing harm, injuries and deaths.

Continue to improve the way we target our Safe and Well visits, ensuring we see the people who are most at risk of fire. Gradually increase the number of Safe and Visits we carry out year on year during the lifespan of this CRMP, so that as many people as possible benefit from this life-saving scheme.

Improve the way we work with our partners in health, social care, housing and the police so that people are safeguarded and get the support they need.

Train our prevention teams and firefighters in motivational interviewing techniques, which should help to increase the number of homes we get into and deliver safety messages effectively.

Include safety information about new and emerging technologies, such as lithium-ion batteries and battery energy storage systems (BESS), in our Safe and Well visits.

FBU position

The FBU support the work we do in communities in raising awareness of fire in the home. The role of the modern day fire fighter is now much more varied however the core work is defined within the agreed national role map as detailed by the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services.

Expanding work streams as pushed by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) often seeks to expand the role beyond what is agreed and this causes friction and opposition from the workforce and our members. Work that sits under the National Health Service, Social Services and the Police should not and cannot be put on to fire services simply because those critical agencies face similar funding pressures.

Cheshire fire fighters already undertake more safe and well visits than any other fire and rescue service, alongside juggling maintenance of competence of many operational disciplines – firefighting, the use and command of Breathing Apparatus, Road traffic collisions, swift water rescue, rescue from height, animal rescue, chemical incidents and flooding response. In addition fire fighters undertake thematic inspections of local businesses and provide safety awareness in local authority schools.

Further increasing safe and well targets without accepting that other areas of work will be impacted must be considered.

The proposal *"Train our prevention teams and firefighters in motivational interviewing techniques"* needs a major re-think – our members are not salespersons and this will be seen an more aggressive cold calling which leaves our members angry due to the negative reaction they have from the community when attempting to give advice to those that respond that they don't want it. The recent blurring of the lines between the fire and rescue service and the police who are agents of law enforcement has in the eyes of fire fighters and Union, damaged the neutrality and reputation of the services which has always been crucial in getting the fire service in people's homes as a result of mutual trust.

Interestingly, the pre CRMP consultation highlighted that the public we serve wanted the service to focus on training, response and fire protection and not the safe and well agenda. Here we have the workforce and the local community reporting the same opinion to the Authority.

What the service plan to do?

Implement the new Road Safety Strategic Plan with our partners and increase the number of road safety events we deliver.

Expand our water safety programme to reduce the occurrence of accidental drowning.

The FBU Position

The FBU support these initiatives

What Service plan to do?

Review its Protection Department to ensure it remains efficient and effective. Evaluate the effectiveness of our RBIP to ensure we target inspection activity at the right premises.

Provide accredited training for operational managers, to improve their knowledge and understanding when inspecting premises.

Continue to campaign for the installation of sprinklers in new and existing commercial premises. We will work with the NFCC to improve the planning process for BESSs, to ensure planning authorities consider the implications of fire and firefighter safety when approving new installations. This will include the appointment of a specialist officer in Protection.

The FBU position

The FBU support this work. Providing our members with the training and resources is crucial, as our response in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy laid bare.

High rise residential buildings across the UK are still clad with flammable materials, but still the fire and rescue service has yet to research and seek to develop an effective evacuation strategy, let alone implement such a strategy with training and equipment and embed it into firefighting practice. The FBU believes that the terrible loss of life at Grenfell Tower was ultimately caused by political decisions made at the highest level. For at least 40 years, policies relating to housing, local government, the fire and rescue service, research and other areas have been driven by the agenda of cuts, deregulation and privatisation with a devastating impact on our communities.

The FBU believes the fire and rescue service has been weakened in its ability to plan and prepare for the range of risks that it might need to address. In particular, there has been a reduction in the importance attached to planning and preparation for emergency incidents. Since 2003-04 the fire and rescue service has become increasingly fragmented. This has weakened the ability to identify, plan for and train for the variety of risks that might be faced at emergency incidents – which should be part of a collaborative work as required under the civil contingencies act.

In particular, we draw attention to the scrapping of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC) and the abolition of most national standards within the fire and rescue service that previously informed strategic decision making in the service. This includes decisions about standards, the inspection and enforcement of fi re safety, planning for operational incidents and the training that arises from such planning.

By way of illustration, residents and firefighters present on the night of Grenfell faced a severe multi-storey, multi-compartment fire in a building with manifest failures of fire protection measures, which meant fire and smoke penetrated the building at several levels. Expert reports identify numerous failures:

- The rainscreen cladding system covering the outside of the building

- The lining materials around the windows

- The fire resistance of flat fire doors

- Flat fire doors that did not self-close

- Lack of provision for people who needed assistance

- A lower standard of stair doors

- Heating system and gas pipes in the protected stair

- A single stair 1.04 metres wide

- Firefighting lifts not provided

- Dry fire main instead of a wet riser for water supplies [A dry fire main is an empty pipe that can be connected to a water source from outside a building by firefighters. In a wet riser system pipes are kept full of water for automatic or manual firefighting]

- Failure of the lobby smoke control system.

When considering the general lack of capacity awareness and training of fire and rescue service personnel to highlight and report the above, it stresses the need to focus on these risk critical and statutory areas rather than spend time and money on 'motivational interviewing techniques' to further increase targets on safe and well visits to aid other agencies.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 was a significant legislative failure by the Westminster government. It ignored many warnings from a range of expert stakeholders when it introduced the Order. In particular, it scrapped the fire certification process, which gave fire authorities considerable leverage to bring about improved safety standards across a range of premises. The government introduced a self-compliance regime without providing the necessary safeguards for those carrying out risk assessments, particularly for complex buildings governed by multiple regulations – such as high-rise residential buildings.

The FBU raised these concerns with the ODPM, Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Home Office. Before the Fire Safety Order came into force, the union wrote to the fire minister Nick Raynsford on 1 March 2005, criticising the transitional arrangements for handling fire certificates and the advice provided by the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) – now the NFCC.

The FBU repeated warnings about the consequences of scrapping national standards, the CFBAC and the inspectorate, the hands-off localist approach of central government, as well as the continued central funding cuts. Central

government and Chief Fire Officers ignored these warnings – we call on CFRS Authority to invest in the protection department and re-align its focus to provide protection and response staff with the tools it needs to carry out this vital work – that the FBU believe requires a review of some of its priorities within this Community Risk Management Plan

What Service plan to do?

Continue to review its flood and water response provision across Cheshire to ensure that it meets emerging needs.

We will support national and local campaigns to raise awareness of staying safe outdoors and during periods of extreme weather

We will undertake a major programme to replace and upgrade breathing apparatus. We will continue to review our operational kit and equipment to ensure our staff have the appropriate resources to carry out their roles safely and effectively.

We will review our procedures for learning from operational incidents and ensure that it maximises the safety of our firefighters.

We will continue to work with representative bodies, partners such as the NFCC and others on any developments affecting the health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce.

What is the FBU Position?

We support the review of the flood water response provision. We have already recommended previously that the plan to have a large number of staff trained in Swift Water response was unsuitable due to locations of water response teams being in the north of the county.

Instead we propose that all WT, DC1/Nucleus stations are trained to DEFRA MOD2 – this allows for crews to enter limited height still water to rescue people trapped in flooding, and crucially trained to self-rescue in the event of an unforeseen event with the correct equipment/PPE along with providing more resilient Yellow coverage.

(CFRS currently trains all non-swift water staff a basic wading skill for entering non flowing water to knee height. Crews have been issued two piece wading suits but HAVE NOT been issued any thermal under suits. ((When these where previously issued a number of years ago they came with the under suits)). MOD 2 skilled teams can enter deeper water ((as long as they can touch the bottom)) and evacuate casualties by putting them on a rescue sledge and the crew wade the raft back to

safety along with being issued proper dry-suits, thermal under suits and correct water boots. This is a more realistic and likely scenario for Cheshire Crews to attend eg wide area flooding's requiring mass evacuations or searching))

Only 5 stations should be trained to Swift Water Technician level to provide rescue capability. *(Warrington, Powey ((both boat)) Penketh, Chester & Crewe as MOD3 swift water then all WT DC1/Nucleus MOD 2, On Call wading with updated PPE)*

The above approach ensures compliance with the health and safety provisions directed on the service.

But again, the Authority and the service need to recognise that there is still no statutory duty – or funding for flooding or water rescue in England.

The Fire Brigades Union responded to the National Audit Office report into flooding resilience in England, calling for a statutory duty for fire and rescue services to respond to floods and the resources to match – as it is in Wales, Scotland and N Ireland.

The report finds that approximately 5.7 million properties at risk of flooding in England in 2022-23, and that key infrastructure is at risk, including up to:

- 77% of rail infrastructure

- 51% of water supply infrastructure

- 25% of gas infrastructure

The NAO highlights a lack of long-term planning, concluding that "the government wants to achieve greater resilience to flooding in the long term but has no measure for resilience and no target for the level of flood resilience it expects to achieve."

We urgently need a statutory duty on the fire and rescue service to respond to flooding in England, and resources to match – and we call on the service and the chair of the Authority to write to the Prime Minister and the Fire Minister to echo this call in light of this Community Risk Management Plan.

Turning to the review and upgrade of the services Breathing Apparatus – this is supported by the FBU, and has been a core demand of the FBU since 2018. It is frankly shocking that after 20 years of telemetry technology being widely utilised by Fire and Rescue Services that Cheshire Fire and Rescue still doesn't have this capability. Instead the Authority had repeatedly extended the life span of the current sets, and we have seen an increasing number of set malfunctions prompting the Union to table a number of papers to the Joint Safety Committee.

The Union should be fully involved in the decision to trial and purchase new Breathing Apparatus sets for our members to operate safely.

CFRS PROPOSAL 1: change the way we measure response times

1. Start measuring our response time from the moment a 999 call is answered in our control room, not from the time the control operator alerts the fire station.

2. Instead of measuring the response times to life-risk incidents, we would measure the response times to fires involving homes, businesses and vehicles (known as 'primary fires').

3. We would report our average response time rather than the percentage of incidents we respond to in 10 minutes.

What is the current experience with North West Fire Control?

The provision for mobilising the fire appliances and resources rest with the individual Fire and Rescue Authorities, which is then contracted out to North West Fire Control Ltd, and arrangements made through service level agreements. But these arrangements are not subject to public scrutiny nor are they contained within the Cheshire CRMP, and North West Fire control Ltd do not produce an Integrated or Community Risk Management Plan. It would also appear that the scrutiny process applied to local authority fire and rescue services by His Majesty's Inspectorate does also not extend to North West Fire Control.

None of the arrangements are available to the FBU, there is no consultation nor are they available for public Scrutiny. For example, the arrangements for dealing with a critical loss of infrastructure, IT systems, flu pandemic or Industrial action have not been subject to this scrutiny process. This lack of transparency is a serious concern. Elected members should recall that the performance, capability and preparedness was recently robustly criticised as part of the Manchester Arena Inquiry, and similar concerns were expressed in part of phase 1 of the Grenfell Inquiry.

Let us remember that North West Fire Control Ltd is supposed to be a Local Authority Controlled Company (LACC).

As the mobilisation of appliances and resources is absolutely pivotal in terms of our statutory duty, response and safety, the process of examining the existing arrangements allowing for evaluation and a continuing cycle for improvement is clearly absent under the current constitutional and operating arrangements – and that is something the Authority should move to change.

Staffing issues within NWFC continues to impact on performance and wellbeing of our members with the control room regularly running under minimum staffing and critical IT software failures combining to make for a dangerous operation.

Additionally we believe that the people of Cheshire have a right to know that the Local Authority Controlled Company is financially viable or underwritten.

What is the position of the FBU?

The FBU fully support the proposal to change to standard to be met on 100% of occasions and one that commences from the time of call received. Indeed this is something we have campaigned for and recommended to the fire authority on the last 2 IRMP cycles.

As set out above, a change to the democratic governance model needs to be implemented to ensure accountability and transparency. Equally, access to information needs to be put in place.

We do however believe a national standard should be re-introduced for services.

There are, as set above however, some concerns with the ability of North West Fire Control to deliver what is essentially a contracted out service, where the Authority – and the public you serve, have little democratic oversight or say in this critical area of the services operations.

Onc area of this proposal where we differ is that the Union believes the 10 minutes standard should apply to all life critical incidents – Fire, Road, Water and Height.

During the winter of 2019 all four unitary councils in Cheshire – Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington all wrote to Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service calling for an improved Cheshire attendance standard including an expansion to include all life risk incidents, having passed resolutions and motions at full general meetings of the respective councils.

Why we wouldn't set our response and interventions to all categories of life risk – and measure and report on these is beyond our understanding, which would only serve to improve our service to communities and the chances of survival of those in need.

CFRS PROPOSAL 2: convert four on-call fire engines to full-time crewing during weekdays

The FBU give qualified support to this proposal. Whilst we welcome the proposal to increase the number of full time fire fighters and full time pumps, we do have some concerns that need to be addressed.

1. A clear assessment of the anticipated lag times of a secondary appliance in the areas where the second retained (On Call) appliance is being removed, specifically on evenings and weekends. Given that on average, three of the six pumps affected are available at any one time on weekday evenings and weekends, the proposed removal will impact on the attendance time of the second appliance – which is fundamentally critical in providing safe systems of work to enable a rescue or intervention to the public, but also in implemented safety procedures for fire fighters.

2. A clear explanation on how the overall resilience of the service will be impacted on weekday evenings and weekends given that the service will have four less appliances to call upon. Put simply, where incidents require supplementary appliances (assistance make up) how will this impact the rest of the fire cover in the county based on risk modelling, and how will the service mitigate the impact on fire fighters required to attend these incidents that require periods of arduous work activity and manage the rest and welfare of the workforce.

3. The proposal of 'roaming pumps' needs further detail. The FBU require each team of fire fighters (pump crew) to start and finish their shift at the same station – to do otherwise would incur forced overtime which is unacceptable and a breach of our members contract.

4. The facilities available to the crews should be the exact same as any other full time station. If this requires capital investment to bring stations up to the same standard then this needs to be costed and agreed within the CRMP. Retained staff should never be viewed as second class citizens.

5. For those members impacted by these proposals (removal of their On-call post), the FBU require that;
   (i) The individual be offered a wholetime position within the service
   (ii) Where the individual cannot be offered a full time post (already full time in Cheshire or another FRS) or they decline the offer then a relocation support package to another Retained/On Call station be offered
   (iii) Where relocation is not practical or declined then a severance package be put in place. The current position in the absence of a policy, of statutory minimum redundancy terms should be revised to provide enhanced exit payments that adequately and appropriately recognise

the individuals service and commitment to the communities of Cheshire, and the loss of income where no other like for like position exists on the open labour market that works around ones primary employment or utilises the skillset of a fire fighter.

CFRS PROPOSAL 3: convert Knutsford's fire engine from on-call to day crewing

What is the FBU position?

We support this proposal having opposed the downgrading of the station which was approved by the authority back in 2014.

Given the lack of guaranteed Cheshire Fire cover in the corridor between the Cheshire and Greater Manchester border, this will ensure we meet our statutory obligations to keep the residents and properties of Cheshire safe without the over reliance on support from neighbouring Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service. We should also see as a consequence greater prevention and protection activity.

The CRMP proposes to revert Knutsford back to Day Crewing (which the FBU support), however with this is also a aspiration to move the Rope Rescue capabilities – currently based at Lymm Fire Station and mobilised with a crew of 5 – to Knutsford with a crew of 4. This would represent a reduction in safety standards and this element is opposed by the Fire Brigades Union.

Minimum requirements for a level 3 team like Lymm are 5 trained operators, one being a supervisor. This is nationally recognised and adopted for the techniques we use. The most common rescue the crew carries out is an embankment rescue, not necessarily very technical but requires a minimum of five operators to complete. Like an IC the supervisor shouldn't get hands on as they are responsible for the sector, as mentioned earlier, and should form part of a risk and task analysis.

A further requirement is confined space response.. This takes a minimum of 5 technical operators to manage the incident safely and that's using the HART teams and fire crews as well for other roles to meet the legislative requirements.

In Cheshire we aim to deploy from Lymm with a Animal rescue team of 5 to include an AR3 (Supervisor) and 4 AR2 operators., The response is generally supported by Bollington & Knutsford on-call if they are available. Our external training provider BARTA which covers most Fire & Rescue Services in the UK, delivers the training which uses the model of a team of 6 for the various roles and responsibilities.

Not only do the national pathfinder and Critical Attendance Standards support the FBU position of crewing the asset and response with a minimum of 5 fire fighters, but also the National Chief Fire Councils technical working group have issued the same

guidance:

TEAM TYPE LEVEL 3 – ROPE RESCUE TEAM Capability	Logistics (Minimum requirements)	Team Structure (Minimum 5 persons)	Competencies of personnel (Minimum number required)	Incident Command System
Knowledge skills & equipment to rig complex rope access and rescue systems, to include rope access work in suspension, lowering, descending, raising, ascending and traversing non-vertically by deviation / cableway.	Be available 24 hours a day Facility for financing supplies and consumables when mobile or on scene (e.g. credit card or Team Manager)	5 team members including team leader 1 Welfare and liaison officer ** Welfare and liaison officer is for support and welfare considerations at protracted incidents not for tactical command as required by the agency.	SWaH – All Level 3 technician (All) First Aid Qualified (All)* Update of training – current and refreshed within the previous 3 year period. All skill practiced with in previous 3 Months	All team members to be trained to the current ICS in operation for Rope incidents
Equipment				
Transport Vehicle(s) suitable to carry personnel and equipment	Communications Handheld communications for all team members. spare batteries and charger. Waterproofed. Smart phone with team leader and manager	Medical Basic Life Support IEC Pack Oxygen cylinder x2 and resuscitation equipment Spinal long board/ scoop stretcher Blankets Basket stretcher	Decontamination Anti-bacterial hand gel Anti-bacterial Face wipes Anti-bacterial equipment spray Full cleaning facilities available at base station	Navigation Handheld GPS system with street mapping facility
Equipment Ancillary equipment. lighting, marker boards, mapping, aide memoirs. Scene lighting Search lighting		PPE Full PPE for all team members + redundancy helmet, footwear, gloves, personal lighting.	Technical Equipment Low stretch Kernmantle rope minimum 100m x 5. Rope access equipment to allow access at height and work in suspension. This may require equipment including dynamic rope, Tripod / Quadpod / frame, Stretcher.	Testing All equipment should be suitably tested, maintained and certified in accordance with manufacturers' guidelines and relevant regulations

NFCC NATIONAL SAFE WORK AT HEIGHT WORKING GROUP

SAFE WORK AT HEIGHT / ROPE RESCUE TEAM TYPING & COMPENTENCY FRAMEWORK GUIDANCE V2

General

This guidance has been developed by Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) personnel and provides recommended minimum requirements for each identified level of operational response for working at height; from an individual's working safely at height through to teams conducting complex rescue operations. The overall objective of "team typing" and the work at height competency framework is to improve firefighter safety and enable better utilisation of scarce assets.

These documents are intended to:

• Provide a standard framework of competencies for operations at height to support integrated risk management

• Provide a framework against which assessment and assurance can be undertaken

• Create greater standardisation

• Improve responder safety

• Improve the time taken to resolve incidents

• Provide a framework of standards to support the ability to develop work at height assets as a national / regional resource

• Provide guidance for FRSs that wish to request a resource of this nature to assist in the resolution of an incident.

It is believed that by classifying and declaring safe work at height / rope rescue "typed" assets then UK FRS resilience and cross border working can be improved.

A national team typing system details standard resource packages according to their capabilities. Whilst not intended to be definitive, the following outlines the potential range of capabilities available for resolving operation incidents. It provides the basis for robust and safe systems of work across all FRSs.

1. Methodology

1.1 The NFCC National Safe Work at Height Group commissioned a task and finish group to develop safe work at height / rope rescue team typing guidance for FRS Incident Commanders on the capability of rope rescue teams to meet the specific needs of an incident.

Level 3 Rope Rescue Technician		
Description		
A rope team at this level of skill would be capable of meeting complex access, rescue and casualty movement requirements. With the rope capability the team can implement a safe system of work to access casualties for stabilisation, vertical and horizontal rescue in a wide range of environment's		
Training	**Requisite**	**Recommended**
Level 3 – Rope Technician Course.	×	
Basic First Aid	×	
Advanced First Aid		×
Confined Space Awareness	×	
Confined Space Operator		×
Incident Command and Co-ordination Awareness	×	
Basic Health and Safety Awareness.	×	
Medical Criteria		
Individual FRS will determine the levels of fitness required for responders	×	
Personal Protective Equipment		
Work Positioning harness, work restraint system, fall arrest plus rope rescue equipment appropriate to the level of the operative.	×	
Clothing appropriate to the environment and task	×	
Personal lighting		
Personal issue head torch	×	

We must ensure that our specialist rescue response is crewed with the minimum safe number of personnel.

Much like our animal response, which requires 6 responders.

The method of spreading the response over 2 or even 3 appliances is ineffective and inefficient – it takes appliances out of communities unnecessarily, reducing fire cover in those areas and increases attendance times.

Equally the method of training is ineffective and inefficient – rather than a dedicated rope and animal rescue crew able to prepare, train and respond together, alongside being assessed, instead we have multiple crews having to train, often in isolation.

PROPOSAL 4:

Reorganise daytime fire cover in Warrington. CFRS want to spread the daytime fire cover and prevention and protection activity across Birchwood and Stockton Heath, two of the five fire stations in the borough of Warrington. This would mean changes to the way the service operate both these fire stations.

What is the situation at present?

Birchwood
This is currently a nucleus fire station, which means it is crewed by full-time firefighters between 7am and 7pm every day and at night by on-call firefighters who live or work within five minutes of the fire station and respond by pager when on-call.

Stockton Heath
This is currently an on-call fire station, which means the fire engine is crewed solely by on-call firefighters who live or work within five minutes of the fire station and respond by pager when on-call.

The two unique and separate towns of Birchwood and Stockton Heath, located in within the unitary area of Warrington, Cheshire, presents a nuanced risk profile shaped by various factors including environmental risks, economic stability, local challenges, and crime statistics. Examining these aspects would offer a comprehensive understanding of the community's vulnerability and resilience and how these quite dramatic proposals for responding to fire and other emergencies are going to impact on the two towns and those communities – yet it does not appear from the Risk Management Plan that robust profiling has been undertaken.

Environmental risks in these towns are influenced by its geographical location, land use, and susceptibility to natural disasters. Coastal areas may face risks associated with flooding or erosion, while urban areas might contend with air and noise pollution. Additionally, climate change impacts could pose challenges like extreme weather events. Assessing these factors requires collaboration between local authorities, environmental agencies, and the community to develop sustainable practices and resilience measures.

Economic stability plays a crucial role in both towns risk landscape. Dependency on a single industry can make the community vulnerable to economic downturns. Conversely, economic diversification and a robust local business environment contribute to stability.

Local challenges, such as infrastructure development, transportation networks, and access to essential services, further shape the risk profile. Insufficient Infrastructure can impede emergency response and exacerbate the impact of disasters. Community engagement and strategic urban planning are essential to address these challenges and enhance the overall preparedness of the pan Warrington region.

Crime statistics are a key component of the risk profiles, reflecting the safety and security of the community. Analysing crime rates, types of offenses, and trends provides insights into areas that may require targeted interventions including from a fire prevention, protection and response. Community policing, neighbourhood watch programs, and collaboration between agencies and residents contribute to a safer environment.

The risk profile of these two distinct towns is multifaceted, encompassing environmental, economic, local, and crime-related factors.

Understanding the Risks and the impact of these CRMP proposals:

Warrington lies at the Centre of the North West's communication network, with the M56, M6 and M62 motorways all intersecting here. Two significant waterways serve the urban area, the River Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal. The role as a crossing point of both river and canal is an essential part of the town's character. Warrington has historically enjoyed high levels of employment, growth and prosperity driven by a strong manufacturing base and its key location in the region. Recently a shift from manufacturing to a service based economy has resulted in financial services being the largest sector providing employment in Warrington followed by distribution.

Although Warrington/Cheshire does not have any main airports within its boundary, Manchester is on the border and Liverpool is also extremely close, both having flight paths over Cheshire.

Cheshire has one of the highest number of Chemical and Industrial sites that come under the COMAH regulations in the Country. These are mainly based around Ellesmere Port, Widnes and Runcorn, although there are several sites in other areas.

Cheshire Resilience Forum has identified the following as the top risks within Cheshire:
• Pandemic flu
• Flooding
• Severe Weather
• Loss of Critical National Infrastructure
• Animal Diseases
• Environmental Incidents
• Industrial Incidents
• Transport Incidents
• Terrorist Threats

Cheshire is at risk from tidal/coastal, river and surface water flooding. The River Dane and the River Bollin are rapid response catchments, these areas are expected to flood rapidly in response to extreme rainfall and there may be little or no warning due to the sudden onset of flooding. History

December 2013 saw some Flooding in Parkgate, Chester and Warrington, and in the summer of 2012 areas of Warrington suffered from both surface water and river flooding. In 1946, 2000 and 2012 Northwich was affected by flooding from the rivers Weaver and Dane.

As climate change proceeds, so we are likely to see an increasing threat from extreme weather events, be it disruptive rainfall/wind during the winter, or an increased frequency of intense rainfall events in the summer.

Despite its relatively low altitude, its exposure to winds from between west and northwest means that it can on occasion receive the full force of severe winter gales such as those which affected much of central and northern England on 18th January 2007. When combined with high astronomical tides this can result in significant coastal flooding. The high ground of the south Pennines in the eastern end of the county is often affected by disruptive snowfall during colder spells in winter.

Cheshire has one of the largest motorway networks in the country and we regularly deal with minor spillages of fuel and chemicals as a result of collisions. Occasionally there are larger spills. The emergency services, Environment Agency, Highways England and landowners all work together to minimise the impact of such incidents.

Cheshire has around 50 Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) sites, one of the highest in the country. COMAH regulations apply to businesses that have the potential to cause major accidents because they manufacture, store or use large quantities of dangerous substances such as oil products, natural gas, chemicals or explosives.

There are major rail hubs at Chester, Crewe, Warrington and Wilmslow with numerous Passenger Train Operating Companies and Freight Operating Companies operating within the County. There are also plans in the future for a major transport North development following the collapse of the HS2 project.

The UK faces a real threat from terrorism and crowded places remain an attractive target. There are a number of iconic targets within the county which could hold significance to a terrorist.

What is the Fire Brigades Union Positon?

The FBU oppose this proposal to disband the Retained (On Call) team at Stockton Heath and have the cover at the station only guaranteed 50% of the time, provided for by the Birchwood team of fire fighters.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority has a policy of 'No Fire Station Closures', yet this proposal would see the Stockton Heath station closed for upto 50% of the time, and the fire service response to the communities of Stockton Heath potentially delayed, awaiting the arrival of the next nearest appliance, whilst at the same time, would see a reduction in the fire cover at Birchwood on the occasions they are sent to cover at Stockton Heath.

It must be stressed that whilst the proposal to create four new appliances is welcomed and supported by the FBU, these pumps are not proposed to be available at night or at weekends, and moreover, the overall total number of fire appliances available to respond will be reduced by four – this creates a lack of response capacity when the County experiences large or major incidents.

As we have set out in the understanding the risk section – the risk profile doesn't warrant a removal of fire cover at Birchwood, Stockton Heath or the pan Warrington area, and the cost of keeping the appliance and crew is a mere circ £150,000 from a total 51.7 Million pounds budget. In simple terms the benefit (cost savings) doesn't outweigh the risk. The current response provision at Stockton Heath should be maintained.
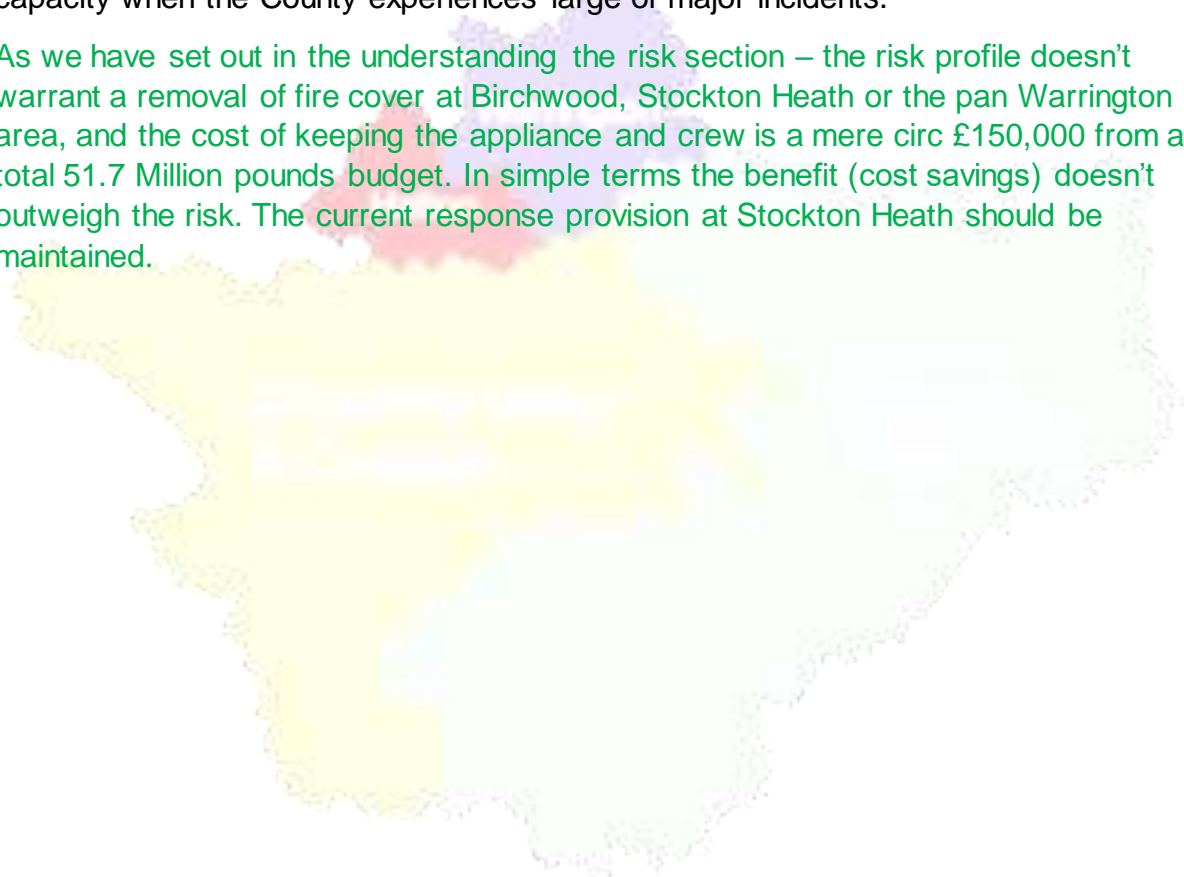
PROPOSAL 5: Strengthen the on-call system

Fire engines that operate in the more rural and less populated areas of Cheshire are usually crewed by on-call firefighters. On-call firefighters live or work within five minutes of the fire station and are alerted by pager to respond to incidents.

In most cases they have fewer incidents to deal with compared with full-time firefighters. Fire engines operated by full-time firefighters are available 24/7 whereas our on-call firefighters undertake their role as a part-time job, often in addition to demanding full-time employment and jugging this with a personal and social life. They are highly committed and work extremely hard to maintain the availability of the fire engine so they can respond to emergency incidents and support their communities.

<u>What is the national and local picture with the retained duty system?</u>

The Retained Duty System of the Fire and Rescue Service, as we know it today, was created after World War II. The Fire Services Act of 1947 returned the Service to Local Authorities and created, through the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council and the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire Brigades, standard practices and Conditions of Service.

The part time fire fighter model (also known as the Retained Duty System or On call model)

Due largely to the changing nature of society, one of the main problems we encounter is that many people simply do not live and work in the same areas. Therefore many Retained Fire Stations are well crewed during the weekends and evenings, but not during the day.

Most people are probably unaware that their local Fire Station may be staffed by Firefighters who, most of their time, work as teachers, business people, factory workers, hospital porters or bricklayers. Self-employed and unemployed people are involved too. But all they see are Firefighters, in their uniforms, with their appliances, on their way to or from a fire or road traffic incident or perhaps at the school fete giving tips on fire safety.

Some may even have read of Firefighters on the Retained system as 'part-time' Firefighters. What they almost certainly won't know about is the chronic shortage of Firefighters working the Retained Duty System, the effect that has on the Service, public or the Firefighters themselves. They won't know that Retained Firefighters commit themselves to be 'on call' night and day for over 100 hours a week, or that they do it for a Retaining Fee of £2,700 per year or less plus pay for the hours that they actually attend and work.

29

The Government, Fire Authorities and Brigades know that there is a shortage of Retained staff – it's a long-standing problem, but yet the payment model has not changed in over 30 years, whilst the demand and expectation on the firefighters has grown exponentially over this period.

The Retained Duty System is a highly cost-effective component of our modern Fire and Rescue Service. It does not suffer from a lack of 'flexibility' – modern or otherwise. What it suffers from is a lack of investment. There is just not enough money going into the system to pay for adequate fees for Retained staff, advertising to attract new recruits and training those that are willing to 'put something in' for their community. The recruitment problem is – and must be – the focus of new national initiatives. Changes and 'modernisation' aimed simply at 'making do' with inadequate resources – trading on the good will of the existing over-stretched workforce – will only store up problems for the future.

If the Fire Service is to continue to benefit from the contribution of Retained Firefighters, substantial additional funding will be vital to overcome recruitment and retention problems. The idea, advanced recently by the Local Government Association (LGA) that some remedies to the problem can be at low or no cost – a view apparently shared by some other organisations involved in the debate about recruitment and retention – is a fantasy.

What is the FBU position on this proposal?

Cheshire FBU fully support a 'strengthening' of the Retained/On call Duty system – it plays a vital part of the Cheshire team ethos and our response to communities. But we must be clear that part of the solution to solving the recruitment and retention problem is investment in the reward and recognition a retained fire fighter receives for investing such large parts of their lives to remain available and ready to respond.

The FBU believes strongly that without a long-term investment in funding, we will see the gradual demise of the Retained Duty System. Fire Authorities are and will be unable to protect the public, unable to meet the challenges and expectations of the communities we serve. There are a number of reasons for this. They include:

● Public and employers' lack of awareness of the Retained Duty System. Most people are aware of the presence of a Fire Station in their community but few appreciate how it is staffed.

● An increasing reluctance by primary employers to release employees from their place of work to attend incidents, due to economic pressure.

● Changing patterns of employment requiring more and more people to travel further to places of work and therefore away from the locality of their Fire Station.

● Fewer self-employed people seem to be available to work as Retained Firefighters, again due to economic pressures and low levels of remuneration in the Fire and Rescue Service.

● The need to make the Duty system more 'family friendly' and reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.

● Lack of investment in Retained Station buildings/facilities.

● Poor remuneration for commitment to availability.

● Lack of management training of Station personnel on all levels/roles: 'people management' skills, public relations, fairness at work, diversity.

● Very limited scope for personal and career development within the Retained Duty System of the Fire and Rescue Service.

● The perception of the work of Firefighters on the Retained Duty System is not always matched by the reality.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has, for a number of years, committed large sums of money on various initiatives (OCARS, On call Crew and Station Manager support officers) that merely tinker around the edges, whilst at the same time failed to implement FBU recommendations for increases in terms and conditions linked to availability reward.

Not enough is being done to promote the Retained Duty System to the public in general, to employers and to employees, self-employed and unemployed as potential recruits. The FBU believes that national initiatives are needed to overcome this, and we offer to work with the service on this issue.

A lot of Retained Firefighters have the co-operation of their employers but more can and should be done to promote the Retained Duty System and Fire Service. It's ironic that the Government talks about community initiatives but when it comes to employers releasing Firefighters for the community there is no incentive for them to do it whatsoever. There will be costs involved in any promotion of the Service, but the long term cost of under-recruitment is greater.

We should consider offering inducements through financial incentives (tax/business rate benefits, insurance discounts) and/or local recognition for rendering service to the community. This could be either nationally through employers' organisations or on a more local basis, or both, to be conducted through the National Joint Council.

The development of career forums, as used in other branches of the public services (nurses, special constables, teachers and also the territorial army) would help the Service attract more employed applicants.

Another area that the service needs to address is the impact of 'migration' programmes. The FBU support the pathway into the full time service for those who have the skills and reward for those who have spent years protecting their local communities as a part time firefighter, however every time the service 'migrates' 10 On Call staff, 500 hours of availability is removed from the system. The services

needs a proactive working strategy to workforce planning that replaces these hours when migrating on call staff – as the pressure and burden is simply transferred on to those On Call staff left to pick up the gaps in cover which in turn negatively impacts on the morale of the station.

Aside from the required investment in reward and recognition to move the system forward, changes to mobilising protocols such as skills based mobilising – utilising the on line staffing systems will result in more intelligence led mobilising, more appliances available to be called upon, more staff satisfaction from utilisation and it will improve safety at the same time.

FBU Proposal 1: Standard of Workplace Facilities and Personal Protective Equipment

The FBU recognise that some constructive joint work has taken place to improve some facilities over the past 12 months since the last IRMP, such as implementing the FBU recommendation of providing sanitary products on fire engines, and clean area's on stations to reduce contamination exposure through the excellent contaminants group.

That being said however, the standard of workplace facilities for our members has over recent years become unacceptable and do not provide dignity in the workplace. Whether this be the outdated fire stations some of which are in a state of disrepair, the day crewing houses at Congleton, Northwich or Winsford, or even the new build fire stations - the needs of fire fighters are not being adequately and appropriately addressed.

Specific information regarding minimum welfare facilities for personnel, in particular sanitary conveniences, washing, showering, changing and resting, is contained in the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992.
The workplace health safety and welfare Approved Code of Practice supplies further advice and guidance regarding workplace provisions and has special legal status.

Regulation 20, 21 and 24 of the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations states that **facilities shall not be suitable unless they include separate facilities for men and women for reasons of propriety.**

Our members have opposed the creation of 'unisex pods' or unisex changing facilities since they were first proposed, and common issues have been found at each station where they have been installed. The service can no longer dismiss the views of its staff.

Therefore the FBU require the following to be implemented on all Fire Stations and service premises:

Toilet Facilities
All toilets must be situated within designated separate rooms for men and women.
- Any toilets situated within or off a communal area (Not a corridor) are not appropriate and are not acceptable
- All toilets and the rooms containing them must be kept in a clean and orderly fashion
- All rooms containing toilets must be adequately ventilated and lit
- A machine providing hygienic sanitary provision with the choice of tampons and towels must be provided within each Women's toilet facility

- A sanitary disposal bin must be provided within each Women's toilet facility
- FRS' must contract the collection and cleaning of sanitary receptacles
- Bags and wipes for disposing sanitary wear must be provided within each Women's toilet facility
- All toilets must be fully enclosed with floor to ceiling walls and doors with a lock on the inside
- All windows must be obscured by frosted glass and blinds or curtains

Washing Facilities

All shower/washing facilities must be situated within designated separate rooms for men and women. Individual shower cubicles with floor to ceiling partitions and doors for privacy must be located within each designated room. The shower facility should include a wet and dry area to ensure that the wash area is in the vicinity of a changing room. Doors to be capable of being secured from the inside and the facilities in each such room are intended to be used by only one person at a time.

Wet area must include:
- A supply of hot and cold running water
- Shower with a non slip tray and fully enclosed cubicle, not shower curtains.
- Non slip flooring
- Shelf to place personal toiletries on
- Shower gel dispenser with gel in it
- Sufficient lighting and ventilation
- All windows will be obscured by frosted glass and blinds or curtains
- Doors to be capable of being secured from the inside and the facilities in each such room are intended to be used by only one person at a time

Dry area to include:
- Sink, with a mirror and a shaving point provided for both genders
- Soap dispenser
- Hand dryer
- Non slip flooring
- Hooks for clothing, towel, underwear and wash bag
- Bench or pull down seat
- Hairdryer
- Windows must be obscured glass and include blinds
- Signage – clearly labelled women or men
- Bin for refuse
- Personal locker
- All windows will be obscured by frosted glass, blinds or windows
- Doors to be capable of being secured from the inside and the facilities in each such room are intended to be used by only one person at a time

Lockers/personal storage areas

All lockers/personal storage areas must be situated within designated separate rooms for men and women.
Lockers can either be situated within washing/changing facilities or within rest facilities. It is not acceptable to situate lockers within communal areas.

Fire and Rescue Service Training Venues

As detailed above under Permanent Workplace. It is vital that prior to any training exercise carried out within a Fire and Rescue Service Training venue that an assessment is carried out in terms of distances of travel required to ensure that sanitary facilities are located nearby and that no staff are disadvantaged by gender. Hot showers, toilets and changing facilities must be available to staff in addition to a suitable area for rest breaks.

PPE

Personal Protective Equipment should be gender specific. Our female members are upset and angry that they continue to be expected to attend work in duty rig uniform or structural fire-kit that is designed for a man, this is undignified and unsafe.

Under the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations when health and safety risks cannot be adequately controlled by other means, employers must provide employees with suitable PPE. PPE is not suitable if it is badly fitted, uncomfortable, puts a strain on wearers or makes the work unnecessarily difficult.

This unisex approach to PPE can lead to significant problems. Items such as fall-arrest harnesses need to fit well but differences in chest hips and thighs can affect the way that the straps fit. Another example is safety boots as a typical women's foot is both shorter and narrower than a typical man's foot, so a smaller boot may be the right length but not the right width.

All staff must have size and gender specific clothing.

Pregnancy and Nursing
A private rest area designed for pregnant women and nursing mothers must be developed in every workplace.

The area must be quiet, clean, and lockable from the inside, have a sink with hot and cold running water and should include a draining area. The cold water supply is to be drinking water and marked as such.
The area should be conveniently situated in relation to sanitary facilities and provide:
- A multi purpose chair that would include the facility for pregnant and nursing mothers to lie down
- A large paper towel dispenser
- Isolated bells that can be turned on and off
- Dimmer lighting

- A lockable refrigerator
- Baby changing facilities
- Wipes and disposal bags for Nappies
- Engaged sign when locked
- Drinking utensils
- Blinds on windows

The room will hold a priority use for pregnancy and nursing mothers. At all other times the room could be used for quiet/prayer time.

Rest Facilities

Fire fighters should be afforded decent and fit for purpose resting facilities, as opposed to the current Calcott Chairs. This service and Authority made the political and ideological decision in 2008 to remove the resting facilities that cost nothing in maintenance and replaced them with the current resting chairs which are dirty and have the potential to cause musculoskeletal injuries to fire fighters - as highlighted in the services own health and safety report.

We have pointed the Service and Authority to the facilities or arrangements in neighbouring services such as Greater Manchester FRS, Merseyside FRS, Lancashire FRS, Staffordshire FRS and North Wales FRS which are new and bespoke.
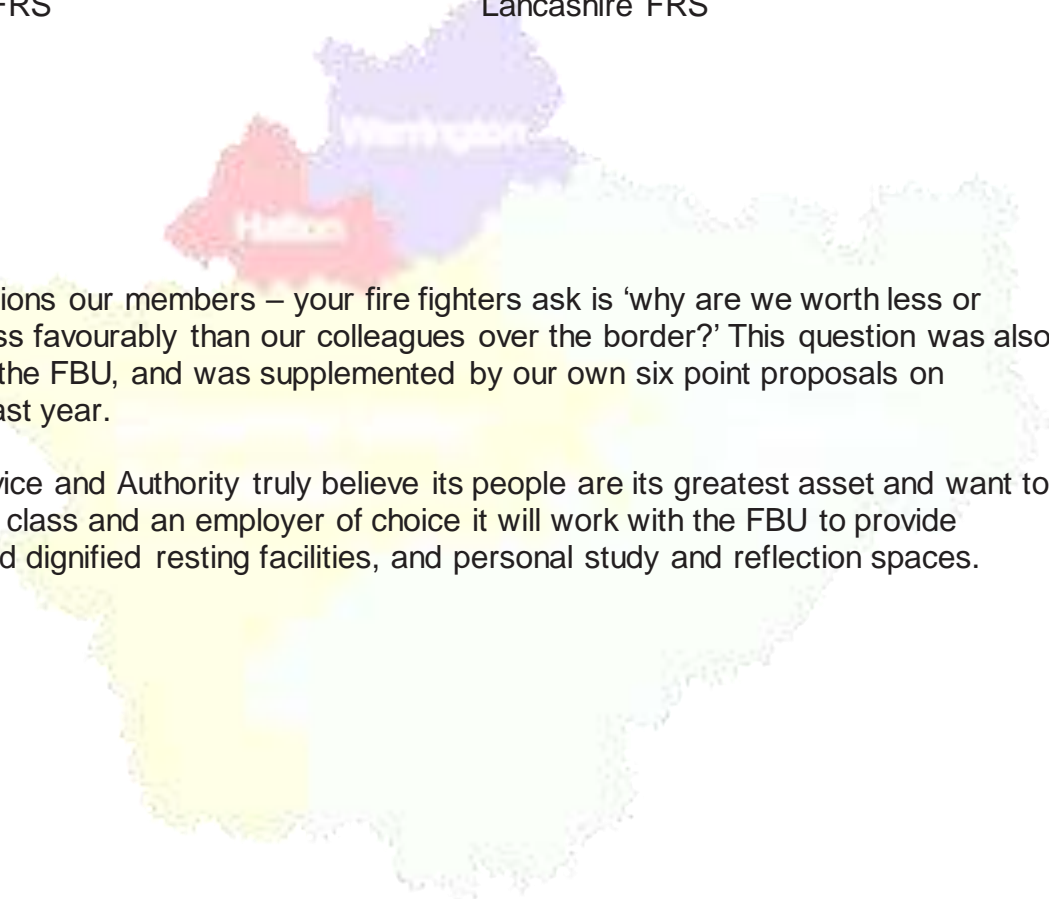
Greater Manchester FRS

N Wales FRS

Lancashire FRS

The questions our members – your fire fighters ask is 'why are we worth less or treated less favourably than our colleagues over the border?' This question was also asked by the FBU, and was supplemented by our own six point proposals on facilities last year.

If this service and Authority truly believe its people are its greatest asset and want to be best in class and an employer of choice it will work with the FBU to provide decent and dignified resting facilities, and personal study and reflection spaces.

FBU Proposal 2 Reward and Recognition

Our members hear or read the positve comments from Authority members such as 'Chehsire Fire and Recue Service is the best service in the country', or 'highest performing Fire and Rescue Service', yet this Authority does not appropriately reward its staff – its greatest asset.

Other Fire and Rescue services have better terms, conditions and facilities and this Authority and service needs to address this fact if it wants to keep its staff and stem the numbers leaving Cheshire for other fire and rescue services.

The Chief Fire Officer and Chair of the Authority have both been on record as stating that 'Fire fighters need and deserve a pay rise' – yet this service does not even have in place duty system agreements that adhere to the basic national agreements on pay such as the nationally agreed rates for overtime for example, which leads our members to conclude this is not a genuine belief.

If the organisation wants to enact the transformative culture it seeks and to establish a team cheshire where all its staff are happy, motivated and working in the same direction, we believe it could achieve this by two simple acts – re-instating the time and a half payment for overtime on all operational duty systems, made explicit in the agreements, and providing decent and fit for purpose resting and welfare facilities.

FBU Proposal 3 Contaminants

As firefighters, we all know of a colleague or former colleague that has been diagnosed with cancer or another serious illness – and many will have lost their lives. But here in the UK, there is a frightening lack of research into the effects of the firefighting job on the long term health of those on the front line.

That is what led the Fire Brigades Union to commission independent, ground-breaking research, led by Professor Anna Stec from the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), into the link between firefighters' occupational exposure to toxic fire effluents, and cancer and other diseases.

Since the FBU approached the service we are pleased to say we have formed a collaborative approach to Contaminants, creating a working group and have delivered a number of recommendations arising from the groups work. However the FBU popose the following be approved and implimented going forward:

- Regular health screening and recording attendance at fire incidents over the course of a firefighter's career is strongly advised and will be key to the longer-term monitoring and management of health

- Soiled or contaminated clothing or PPE must not be transported in cars (or personally owned vehicles), it should be bagged or stored in an airtight container thus keeping the PPE gassing-off away from passengers.

- After exposure to fire debris or fire effluent, fire investigators must return to a FRS venue with showering facilities to have a shower as soon as is reasonably possible (this will allow them to remove contamination as well as stop spreading toxic chemicals in their vehicle and home, potentially exposing family members)

- Health screening should be provided to any staff who have or have previously had regular exposure to fire effluent.

- Getting an annual health screening and evaluation is essential, as early detection is the key to survival.

- Regular lung function screening should be provided for personnel who are regularly exposed to smoke, such as training instructors or personnel working within live fire training facilities.

- Training on the potential long-term health effects of exposure to fire debris and fire effluent should also be provided to all personnel on a regular basis.

- It is important that firefighters get an annual physical and make sure their healthcare provider is informed of their increased cancer risks.

- The installation and implementation of domestic washing machines on all fire stations. This was a key recommendation in the UCLan interim best practice report and means firefighters don't have to continue to contaminate their own washing machines. Fire fighters wouldn't wash their fire kit at home, so why should our members be expected to wash contaminated duty rig at home?

- The installation of diesel exhaust control systems at all Cheshire fire stations. Human studies suggest an association between occupational exposure to whole diesel exhaust emissions and lung cancer, whilst studies of rats and mice exposed to whole diesel exhaust (especially the particulate portion) confirm as association with lung tumours. In addition to the potential carcinogenic effects, eye irritation and reversible lung function have been experienced by workers to diesel exhaust, which itself is a complex mixture of gases and particulate including carbon monoxide, nitrogen, sulphur and hydrocarbons. The majority of Fire and Rescue Services have installed exhaust extraction systems on all new build fire stations and Cheshire should follow suit. Cheshire Fire fighters should not be standing next to a HGV emitting diesel fumes whilst getting donned into their PPE ready to respond to emergencies.

- That the Chair of the Authority and the Chief Fire Officer write to the Fire Minister to request that presumtive legislation is laid to protect fire fighters and their families – similar to that already in place is the United States, Canada, Austrailia and New Zealand.

FBU Proposal 4 – Cheshire response to Marauding Terrorist Incidents

The Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service Standard Operating Procedure (SOP /JOINT EMERGENCY SERVICE RESPONSE- Response to a Marauding Terrorist or suspected Terrorist Attack (MTA)) states that:

'Responders within Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service (CFRS) may be deployed to MTA incidents but should normally only work in the Cold Zones. However, in order to rescue saveable life at an Incident the incident Commander (IC) may, subject to conducting a Joint Understanding of Risk (JUR) and an appropriate risk assessment, deploy non- specialist personnel into the Warm and Hot Zones.

Definitions at a declared MTA

Hot Zone: An area assessed to contain a credible and continuing threat to life, including the presence of attackers with weapons.

Warm Zone: An area where the attackers are not believed to be present at this time, but an identified threat remains.'

In light of the agreements reached under the auspices of the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (NJC) in London Fire Brigade and Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, the *CFRS proposed response to MTA incidents, which was opposed locally by the Fire Brigades Union in Cheshire, needs to be withdrawn. It has now been established that a collective agreement is required for Level 1 and Level 2 MTA response capability.

The FBU does not accept that responding to declared MTA incidents, participating in MTA training other than an awareness of, and managing MTA operations is within the role of a firefighter (Firefighter to Area Manager). In the London Fire Brigade (LFB) and the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS), collective agreements have been reached between the employer and the FBU. These agreements extend the role of a firefighter (FF-AM) to the roles and responsibilities associated with an MTA response. These agreements have seen an uplift in pay as well as setting out conditions for training, a concept of operations, and protections for the financial rights of those who are killed or seriously injured whist attending an MTA incident. The guiding principles of the concept of operations within the LFB and GMFRS collective agreements are built on the JOPs 2 model. Therefore, in only those two services has the FBU agreed to the implementation of JOPs 2.

The Authority may not be aware that as a result of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Services intended policy a live dispute has been registered between the service and the FBU.

We need to be clear – any attempts at requiring or requesting Cheshire Fire Fighters to operate in a warm or hot zone will be met with an urgent recall of Cheshire FBU members to consider Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act.

Section 44. provides workers with the means to contest the adequacy and/or suitability of safety arrangements without fear of recriminations (e.g. getting sacked or transferred) or suffering detriment (e.g. loss of wages) in terms of serious or imminent danger.

Section 44. provides workers with the 'right' to withdraw from and to refuse to return to a workplace that is unsafe. Workers are entitled to remain away from the workplace (e.g. stay at home) if – in their opinion – the prevailing circumstances represent a real risk of serious and imminent danger which they could not be expected to avert.

FBU Position

The FBU require the Authority to either approach the National Joint Council with a request to be encompassed within the NJC agreement on Marauding Terrorism, or approach another service who does have the agreement in place to seek over the border assistance in order to provide a response to MTA incidents within the Cheshire borders. Failure to undertake either of these options will result in the Authority failing to have any provisions in place.

Summary

It is recommended that members note the information presented in this response and request further detail on any matter if required.

This response proposes that:

Recommendation 1

That the Authority support the FBU requirement that all single pump stations have a ridership of 5 fire fighters as its response crew.

Recommendation 2

That Considering the general lack of capacity, awareness and training of fire and rescue personnel in Fire Safety protection matters, to inspect, highlight and report issues there is a clear need to focus on these risk critical and statutory areas rather than focussing on safe and well visits to aid other agencies.

Recommendation 3

That the Authority agree that we urgently need a statutory duty on the fire service to respond to flooding in England, and resources to match – and we call on the service and the chair of the Authority to write to the Prime Minister and the Fire Minister to echo this call in light of this Community Risk Management Plan.

Recommendation 4

Fully involve the FBU in the decision to trial and purchase new Breathing Apparatus sets for our members to operate safely as required by the Health and Safety legislation.

Recommendation 5

That the Authority agree to set our Cheshire response standard and interventions to all categories of life risk – a proposal supported by all four Cheshire Unitary Councils who have passed motions.

Recommendation 6

That the Authority Implement our core requirements in response to the proposal to convert four on-call fire engines to full-time crewing during weekdays

Recommendation 7

That the Authority commit to continue to ensure the Cheshire Level 3 Rope Rescue response in crewed with a minimum of 5 trained operators in accordance with the FBU and NFCC system of works.

Recommendation 8

That the Authority continue to provide a dedicated On Call watch and response at Stockton Heath Fire Station

Recommendation 9

That the Authority implement the FBU recommendations for the On Call Duty System

Recommendation 10

That the Authority finally agree, after previous support, to implement the FBU recommendations on the Standard of Workplace Facilities and Personal Protective Equipment.

Recommendation 11

That the Authority implement the FBU recommendations for Reward and Recognition.

Recommendation 12

That the Authority implement the number of FBU recommendations on Contaminants to protect all members who serve Cheshire Fire and Rescue.

Recommendation 13

That The FBU require the Authority to either approach the National Joint Council with a request to be encompassed within the NJC agreement on Marauding Terrorism, or approach another service who does have the agreement in place to seek over the border assistance in order to provide a response to MTA incidents within the Cheshire borders. Failure to undertake either of these options will result in the Authority failing to have any provisions in place.

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: **CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY**
DATE: **14 FEBRUARY 2024**
REPORT OF: **HEAD OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
AUTHOR: **CARMINE RABHANI**

_____

SUBJECT: **PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024-25**

_____

Purpose of Report

1.   This report seeks approval to publish the Pay Policy Statement for 2024-25. The publishing of a Pay Policy Statement is an annual requirement which must take place by 31st March immediately preceding the financial year to which it relates.

Recommended: That Members

[1]   Approve the Pay Policy Statement; and

[2]   Authorise the Head of People and Organisational Development in conjunction with the Director of Governance, to make any in-year changes to the Pay Policy Statement necessitated by new legislation, guidance or organisational change.

Background

2.   As a result of the Localism Act 2011 all local authorities are required to publish a pay policy statement on an annual basis. This sets out the Authority's policies for the financial year relating to the remuneration of its Chief Officers, the remuneration of its lowest paid employees and the relationship between the pay of Chief Officers and that of other employees.

3.   This requirement was introduced in order to:

- Increase the accountability, transparency and fairness of the setting of local pay;
- To give local people access to information to allow them to determine whether pay is appropriate;
- To ensure the pay of senior staff is fair in the context of the pay of the rest of the workforce;

4.   The information within a pay policy statement must include the policies relating to the level and elements of remuneration for each Chief Officer, including salary, bonuses and any benefits in kind.

5. The definition of "Chief Officer" for purposes of this Authority and the pay policy statement means Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer and the two Statutory Officers, i.e. the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer (Treasurer).

6. In terms of transparency, this Authority already publishes information on its website relating to the pay of senior officers including the salaries, allowances and benefits in kind, paid to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, and the two Statutory Officers.

7. In addition to this, the Authority also publishes the number of other employees whose salaries exceed £50,000 within certain pay bands which is in compliance with the guidance in the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 which recommends that all salaries of senior post holders over £50,000 are published. The Minutes of the Brigade Managers' Pay and Performance Committee are also accessible via the Service's website.

8. As the Pay Policy Statement has a number of prerequisites in relation to content and information, there have not been significant changes to the version that was approved last year.

Information

9. The Pay Policy Statement 2024-25 is attached to this report as Appendix 1. The paragraphs below describe the changes that have been made since the last version was published. They also provide some additional context associated with the Statement.

10. Lowest paid employees: A decision was made by Members during the 2018-19 financial year to make the minimum rate of pay for all Service employees no less than the Living Wage (LW). The LW is reviewed and adjusted every October. The current rate is £12.00 per hour and is intended to be payable to all those over 18. The Pay Policy Statement has been updated with the new rate. All staff are paid more than the LW.

11. Re-engagement: This section has been updated to reflect the current position outlined in the Authority's 'Re-employment and Pension Abatement Policy' which was approved by Members in 2021. It outlines the circumstances where re-employment will be allowed subject to key criteria being met along with compliance with pension and tax rules. The Service has recently recruited a number of retired operational staff to roles where their previous skills and experience have been deemed critical to current business needs. Importantly, it also makes it clear where re-engagement cannot take place.

12. <u>Relationship between the remuneration of Chief Officers and other employees:</u> The pay multiple between the highest paid Officer and the lowest paid employee should not exceed 1:20. The current calculation for this is a multiple of 1:7.43, compared with 1:7.9 last year.

Financial Implications

13. The Pay Policy Statement is intended to provide transparency and a clear rationale to explain the Authority's approach to pay.

Legal Implications

14. The requirements under the Localism Act to produce and publish the Pay Policy Statement supplement the existing duties and responsibilities of the Authority as an employer, particularly it's responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to avoid discrimination and provide equal pay. Since the Statement contains policies concerned with remuneration rather than information relating to individuals, the provisions of the Data Protection Act are not engaged. Where the salary of senior post holders is published, outside the Pay Policy Statement, it is done so in order to comply with the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency.

Equality and Diversity Implications

15. The Pay Policy Statement will assist the Authority to: monitor remuneration across the Service; and provide a fair system of remuneration which avoids discrimination.

16. The Service seeks to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Pay Gender Gap reporting by publishing it's annual Gender Pay Gap Report.

Environmental Implications

17. There are no environmental implications.

CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, CLEMONDS HEY, WINSFORD
TEL [01606] 868804

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

This page is intentionally left blank

Cheshire Fire Authority

Annual Pay Policy Statement 2024-2025

Introduction

This statement has been prepared in accordance with Chapter 8 of the Localism Act 2011 and guidance issued by the Government and has been approved by the Fire Authority.

Cheshire Fire Authority is committed to:-

- Seeking to ensure that all staff are valued and receive proper recognition for their work and contribution to the Service.

- Working within available resources and financial constraints.

- Recognising the importance of pay in recruiting, retaining, motivating and rewarding staff.

- Ensuring the application of open, objective, fair and consistent criteria in all decisions on staff pay.

- Ensuring that pay and staffing decisions are in line with the Service's duties and legal obligations under all relevant employment legislation including the Equality Act 2010.

All staff employed by the Authority are paid in accordance with nationally agreed pay scale and terms and conditions. Full details of all matters relating to pay for all staff is contained within the Pay and Recognition Policy, which is reviewed formally every three years, although annual interim reviews are undertaken to update pay scales and other national changes that impact pay.

Highest Paid Employees

Brigade Managers

The terms and conditions of service of Brigade Managers e.g. Chief Fire Officers, Deputy Chief Fire Officers and Assistant Chief Fire Officers are in accordance with the NJC for Brigade Managers of the Fire and Rescue Services Scheme of Conditions of Service ("the Gold Book") as varied locally under the 'twin track approach'.

Under the twin track approach the NJC publishes, annually, recommended minimum levels of salary applicable to chief fire officers. The NJC reviews the level of pay increase, having given consideration to affordability and the rate of inflation. This increase is communicated to fire authorities by circular and fire authorities are able to determine locally all other decisions about the level of pay and remuneration.

The Pay and Performance Committee meets annually in January to review that pay. This Committee determines salary levels and salary reviews for the three Brigade Manager posts.

In addition to basic salary, each Brigade Manager receives:

1. A non-consolidated uniform allowance, paid on an annual basis in April.
2. Removal assistance if required to move home, at the discretion of the Authority.

The Chief Fire Officer also receives an appropriate car in order to provide emergency cover.

In setting the salary of the Chief Fire Officer, both on appointment and when in post, the Committee considers the national picture and the salary of Chief Fire Officers (mean, median, upper and lower quartile) in comparable Fire Authorities.

When reviewing pay the Committee will also consider whether any additional payments should be made. When agreeing additional payments, such as recognition awards, the Committee will take into consideration:

- Excellent performance both individually and as an organisation
- Additional regional and national roles.

The maximum amount payable as a recognition award should not exceed 7.5% of salary and the payment of anything in excess of 5% should be exceptional.

Brigade Managers are eligible to join the Firefighters' Pension Scheme. The employee contribution rates are between 11% and 14.5% of pensionable pay and the employer contribution rate is 37.3% of pensionable pay in the 1992 scheme or 28.8%.

The salaries of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer are calculated as a percentage of the Chief Fire Officers salary (known as the 'gearing'). A gearing of 80% applies to Deputy Chief Fire Officer posts and a gearing of 75% applies to the post of Assistant Chief Fire Officer.

Any new post at Brigade Manager or Director level, with a salary package in excess of £100,000, will be subject to the approval of the Fire Authority prior to advertisement.

The details of the salaries, allowances and benefits in kind of Brigade Managers, Directors, Statutory Officers and Heads of Department are published each year on the Authority's website, within the Notes to the Financial Statements within the Annual Accounts. The Authority also publishes the pay of the three Brigade Managers within its Publication Scheme.

Directors, Statutory Officers, and Heads of Department

In addition to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, there are two additional Statutory Officers within Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service. These are the Director of Governance, who acts as Monitoring Officer to the Authority, and the Section 151 Officer (Treasurer). Both posts report directly to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive. The other non-statutory role of Director of Transformation was removed from the Services' establishment in July 2023.

The terms and conditions of service of these three posts are in accordance with the National Joint Council for Local Government Services Officers ("Green Book").

There are also a number of Heads of Department within the structure, some of whom are uniformed officers, who are paid in accordance with the NJC for Local Authorities Fire Brigades (the "Grey Book") and some of whom are paid in accordance with the National Joint Council for Local Government Services Officers ("Green Book").

The Localism Act requires the Authority to provide details of the policies relating to the remuneration of all of the Directors, Statutory Officers and Heads of Department.

The grading of these posts is determined following the application of the Hay Job Evaluation scheme. New employees are normally appointed to the minimum pay level for the relevant grade and progression within the grade is by way of annual increment. The normal increment date is 1st April.

The annual pay award is normally from 1st April each year and is negotiated nationally, not locally.

In addition to their basic salary, a recognition payment can be made to individuals who are required to undertake duties outside the scope of their normal duties over an extended period. Such payments are made in accordance with the criteria contained in Section 5 of the Pay and Recognition Policy, "Recognition Award Scheme".

"Grey Book" Heads of Department are eligible to join the Firefighters' Pension Scheme. The employee contribution rates for the 2015 scheme are between 11% and 14.5% of pensionable pay and the employer contribution rate is 28.8%.

"Green Book" Directors and Heads of Department are eligible to join the Local Government Pension Scheme ("LGPS"). Under the LGPS the employee contribution rates are between 5.5% and 12.5 % and the employer's contribution rate is 19.6%.

The Authority's annual statement of accounts includes details of the pay of Heads of Department with an annual salary of over £50,000.

Lowest paid employees

Support staff below the level of Head of Department are paid in accordance with the National Joint Council for Local Government Services Officers ("Green Book").

The basic pay for each Green Book employee consists of a salary scale containing a number of spinal column points on the NJC pay spine.

An increment within the spinal column range is awarded on an annual basis and recognises satisfactory performance up to the maximum salary scale. The normal increment date is the 1st April. The annual pay award is applicable from 1st April each year and is negotiated nationally.

As with all other staff, support staff are eligible for recognition awards, in accordance with the criteria contained in Section 5 of the Pay and Recognition Policy.

The lowest level of pay for employees of Cheshire Fire and Rescue is aligned to the Living Wage (LW). The LW is an hourly rate of pay set independently and updated annually by the Living Wage Foundation. The Foundation says that the LW is calculated to reflect the basic cost of living and is based on the principle that work should pay enough to provide for the essentials of life. The Foundation also states that the LW is intended to recognise the dignity of work and the importance of individuals and families being able to earn a living and spend time together, bringing wider social benefits.

The LW is adjusted every November and the current rate is £12.00 per hour. It is payable to all those over 18. Currently all staff within Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service are paid above the LW.

The Service continues to employ Apprentices and as Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has a total employee salary bill of above £3m a year, there is a requirement to pay a Government levy. This levy is charged at a rate of 0.5% of the total annual pay bill but the Service incurs a levy allowance of approximately £15,000 per year to offset against the apprentice levy payment. The levy is paid to HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) monthly through the Pay as You Earn (PAYE) process.

Payments on Termination of Employment

There are a number of circumstances where early retirement or voluntary redundancy payments may be paid to employees on ceasing to hold office. This can relate to individual circumstances, for example ill health, or can be the result of organisational change or in the interests of the efficiency of the Service. In making such payments the Service will exercise its' discretion reasonably and objectively and in accordance with its Reorganisation and Redeployment Policy and the Redundancy Policy.

For employees in the Local Government Pension Scheme with at least 104 weeks service the redundancy payment is enhanced and is based upon the statutory redundancy payments scale, multiplied by a factor of 2.2 and based upon an actual weeks pay rather than the statutory maximum.

For all other staff redundancy payments are not enhanced and payments are calculated in accordance with the statutory redundancy provisions.

The payment of any early pension benefits where redundancy occurs will be made in accordance with the regulations as detailed within the relevant pension scheme and the Service's Statement of policy on making discretionary payments on early termination of employment.

All severance payments made to staff on termination of employment are calculated in accordance with our policies and any statutory guidance issued by the Audit Commission that remains relevant. Any severance payments in excess of £100,000 will need to be approved by the Fire Authority (and it will receive full details as required by guidance issued under the Localism Act 2011).

Re-engagement

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, published in May 2018, stated that fire and rescue authorities must not re-appoint principal fire officers (at Brigade or Area Manager level or those with comparable responsibilities to those roles) after their retirement to their previous, or similar, post save for in exceptional circumstances when such a decision is necessary in the interests of public safety. Any such appointment must be transparent, justifiable and time limited. Such a decision should be subject to agreement by public vote of the elected members of the fire authority. The reason for the decision must be published and their pension abated until the new employment ends.

CFA policy on **re-employment** is as follows:

Re-employment can take place provided that:

- An open recruitment exercise has taken place; and
- The applicant is the best candidate at the end of the recruitment exercise; and
- The candidate accepts all terms of employment, e.g. abatement of pension; and
- The candidate has had the required break in service; and
- The post is not an Area Manager or Brigade Manager (or equivalent level)

The relationship between the remuneration of Chief Officers and other employees

The ratio between the highest paid employee and the mean (average) earnings across the Authority is recommended as the best way of illustrating the relationship between the two. This is called the pay multiple, and for this Authority the pay multiple for these purposes is 1:6.48

The Hutton Review conducted in 2012 asked for a pay multiple between the highest paid and the lowest paid employee not to exceed 1:20. The current calculation for this is a multiple of 1:7.43.

Publishing of Gender Pay Gap Information

As an organisation that is fully committed to the principles of equal pay, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service publishes an annual Gender Pay Gap Report containing information relating to pay inequalities in line with gender pay gap reporting requirements. The data published includes the pay and bonus figures between men and women and provides an annual snapshot based on a set date in March each year which will highlight any equal pay risks.

Where required an action plan is also be published to address any gender pay discrepancies and equal pay risks. All of this information is accessible via the Service's internet.

Annual Review

This Pay Policy Statement will be reviewed on an annual basis prior to the start of the financial year and will next be reviewed and approved by the Fire Authority in February 2025.
.
[NB: Some of the documents that are underlined will be hyperlinked when the Policy is published on the internet]

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 14 FEBRUARY 2024
REPORT OF: HEAD OF FINANCE
AUTHOR: JAMES CUNNINGHAM

SUBJECT: **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024-25**

Purpose of Report

1. This report seeks approval of the Treasury Management Strategy for the year 2024-25. This is a requirement of the Local Government Act 2003, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Investment Guidance, DLUHC Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Guidance, the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

Recommended: That Members

[1]   approve the Treasury Management Strategy for 2024-25 (in doing so Members are confirming the Authorised Limit at paragraph 5.2.7 of the Strategy).

Treasury Management Strategy for 2024-25

2. The Treasury Management Strategy which is attached to this report in Appendix 1 is a comprehensive document, this report seeks to summarise the key points from the 4 elements of the strategy:

    - Capital Expenditure Plans and Prudential Indicators
    - Borrowing Strategy and Prudential Limits
    - Annual Investment Strategy
    - Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement

3. **Capital expenditure** continues with fleet replacement, station modernisation and house modernisation programmes. Placeholder estimates for Ellesmere Port and Warrington Fire Station rebuilds (£16m in total) have been added to 2026-28; it is envisaged that these will be funded through capital receipts, reserves and further external borrowing (£9m).

4. **Borrowing Strategy** means how we manage short term and long term debt and internal funding to minimise the risk of being tied to higher than necessary fixed rate long term debt, so that we do not overstretch our resources. Given current interests rates are relatively high and it is forecast that these will reduce over the next two years, we intend to fund capital projects in the short term through a mix of internal borrowing, cash, reserves and short term external borrowings. Our

current Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) is £25m, against actual debt of £11.6m. We envisage extending our net borrowing this year by up to £6.5m, to cover Crewe Fire Station and the continuation of the house modernisation programme. We are monitoring PWLB rates and will take additional long term debt to meet our CFR when most prudent.

5.   The Authorised limit for external debt for 2024/25 is to be set at £23.3m. Please note that this is below the CFR and we will need to extend the limit in future years. The operating boundary for debt is set at £21.3m and increases to £25m in 2026/27. We have adjusted the allowable ratio on short term borrowing, upto 25% of total loan portfolio can be under 2 years maturity, in order to manage interest rate risk.

6.   **Annual Investment Strategy** means what do we do with the cash on hand. We look for security, liquidity and yield in that order. At 2nd Jan 2024 we had £13.3m held in approved bank accounts or short term notice accounts (35 days). We will: continue to use our external treasury management advisors to monitor our counter parties credit worthiness (security), continue to hold money on short notice, after cashflow reviews (liquidity) and interest rates obtained are averaging 5.5% (yield). We continue to operate within the parameters previously approved. Forthcoming capital expenditure will see cash diminish in the year.

7.   **Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement** means the mechanism by which we ensure we have both sufficient cash to repay our loans at maturity and that we don't overstretch our resources. The MRP is currently £0.7m this year and will rise to £1.1m in 2027-28, based on estimates of the forecast borrowing required to meet future capital requirements, effectively 1.8% of our forecast revenue budget in 2027-28 will be used to pay our loans.

Treasury Management Performance Reporting

8.   We will continue to report on treasury management, in accordance with both the requirements of the Prudential Code and the CIPFA Code for Treasury Management in the Public Services through: a mid year report (Dec CFA meeting), an annual Treasury management report (April CFA meeting) and 2 quarterly updates to the Performance and Overview Committee.

 Legal Implications

9.   The approval of the Treasury Management Strategy is a legal requirement. It provides officers with a clear framework within which to operate.

Financial Implications

10.   The report is financial in nature.

Equality and Diversity Implications

11. There are no specific impacts identified on any section of our community in relation to this report.

Environmental Implications

12. There are no specific environmental implications identified in relation to this report.

CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING MANAGER TEL [01606] 868804

BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE

This page is intentionally left blank

APPENDIX 1

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024-25

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Cheshire Fire Authority ("the Authority") is required to operate a balanced budget meaning that cash raised during the year from grants, council tax and other income sources will match the cash expenditure for the year. The first requirement of treasury management is to ensure that this cashflow is adequately planned with cash being available when it is needed. Surplus funds are invested in low risk counterparties or financial instruments commensurate with a low risk appetite, that offer adequate liquidity (i.e. ease of access) before considering any return on the investment. The investment strategy objectives are, in order of priority, security, liquidity and then yield (i.e. interest earned).

1.2   The second main function of treasury management is the funding of the capital programme. The capital programme and plans provide a guide to the Authority's borrowing requirement which is essentially the longer-term cashflow planning to ensure that the capital programme commitments can be met. The management of longer-term cashflow may involve arranging long or short-term loans or the use of cashflow surpluses. Any debt currently held may also be re-structured when favourable conditions arise and in line with risk and/or cost objectives.

1.3   The contribution the treasury management function makes to the organisation is critical, as the balance of debt and investment operations ensure liquidity or the ability to meet spending commitments as they fall due, either on day-to-day revenue or for larger capital projects. The treasury operations will see a balance of the interest costs of debt and the investment income arising from cash deposits affecting the available budget. Since cash balances generally result from reserves and balances, it is paramount to ensure adequate security of the sums invested, as a loss of principal will in effect result in a loss to the balance on the General Reserve.

1.4   The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) defines treasury management as:

'*The management of the local authority's borrowing, investments and cash flows, including its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks.*'

Whilst any commercial initiatives or loans to third parties will impact on the treasury function, these activities are generally classed as non-treasury activities, (arising usually from capital expenditure), and are separate from the day-to-day treasury management activities. The Authority does not currently undertake or plan to enter into any non-treasury activities.

1.5   CIPFA published revised Prudential and Treasury Management Codes on 20 December 2021. The Authority has regard to these codes of practice when it prepares the Treasury Management Strategy and included Annual Investment Strategy.

1.6   The revised codes have a number of implications for public sector organisations although most have limited or no impact on the Authority, which does not currently hold or plan to enter into any commercial or non-treasury investments. In view of this, the most notable new requirement for the Authority is a requirement to adopt a new debt liability benchmark treasury indicator to support the financing risk management of the capital financing requirement (included at paragraph 4.3 of this Strategy).

1.7   In addition, all investments and investment income must be attributed to one of the following three purposes

Treasury Management
Arising from the organisation's cash flows or treasury risk management activity, this type of investment represents balances which are only held until the cash is required for use. Treasury investments may also arise from other treasury risk management activity that seeks to prudently manage the risks, costs or income relating to existing or forecast debt or treasury investments. All of the Authority's current and planned investments fall into this category.

Service Delivery
Investments held primarily and directly for the delivery of public services including housing, regeneration and local infrastructure. Returns on this category of investment which are funded by borrowing are permitted only in cases where the income is "either related to the financial viability of the project in question or otherwise incidental to the primary purpose". The Authority has no Service Delivery investments.

Commercial Return
Investments held primarily for financial return with no treasury management or direct service provision purpose. Risks on such investments should be proportionate to an organisation's financial capacity – i.e., that 'plausible losses' could be absorbed in budgets or reserves without unmanageable detriment to local services. The Authority must not and does not borrow to invest primarily for financial return.

1.8   The CIPFA 2021 Prudential and Treasury Management Codes require the preparation of a Capital Strategy providing a longer-term focus to capital plans including:

- a high-level long term overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services

- an overview of how the associated risk is managed

- the implications for future financial sustainability

The Capital Strategy is being reported separately as part of the annual budget report pack. The aim of the Capital Strategy is to ensure that the Authority fully understands the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting Capital Strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.

2. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

2.1 The Authority is required to receive and approve, as a minimum, three main reports each year concerned with treasury management which include information about policies, estimates and actual income and expenditure.

Treasury Management Strategy (this report) – the first and most important report covering:

- the capital plans (including prudential indicators);
- Borrowing Strategy and prudential limits (how borrowings are to be organised and includes the treasury indicators);
- an Investment Strategy (the parameters on how investments are to be managed); and
- a minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy statement (how residual capital expenditure is charged to revenue over time).

A Mid-Year Treasury Management Report – this updates the Authority on the progress of the capital position, updates prudential indicators as necessary, and whether the actual execution of treasury management is in line with the Strategy or whether any policies need revision.

An Annual Treasury Management Report – This is a backward looking review document and provides details of a selection of actual prudential and treasury indicators and actual treasury operations compared to the estimates within the Strategy.

Quarterly reports – In addition to the three major reports detailed above, from 2023-24, additional quarterly reporting (end of June/end of December) is also required. This new reporting requirement is being fulfilled by the inclusion of updated and forecast Treasury/Prudential Indicators within the main First Quarter and Third Quarter financial review reports to Performance and Overview Committee.

Scrutiny - The above reports are required to be adequately scrutinised before being recommended to the Fire Authority. This scrutiny is undertaken regularly by the Head of Finance and the Principal Accountant. as part of the review process as quarterly reports are prepared, and by the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and the Director of Governance prior to reports being submitted for approval to Members.

3.   **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024-25**

3.1   The Treasury Management Strategy covers two main areas:-

Capital:
   □   The capital expenditure plans and associated prudential indicators; and
   □   The minimum revenue provision (MRP) statement.

Treasury Management:
   □   The current position;
   □   Prudential indicators which limit the treasury risks and activities of the Authority;
   □   Prospects for interest rates;
   □   The borrowing strategy;
   □   The policy on borrowing in advance of need;
   □   Debt rescheduling;
   □   The investment strategy;
   □   The policy on creditworthiness; and
   □   The policy on using external service providers in relation to Treasury Management.

3.2   These elements cover the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Investment Guidance, DLUHC Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Guidance, the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

3.3   The CIPFA Treasury Management Code requires the responsible officer (the Head of Finance) to ensure that anyone with responsibility for treasury management receives adequate training. The Code requires that organisations have a formal and comprehensive knowledge and skills or training policy for the effective acquisition and retention of treasury management knowledge and skills for those responsible for management, delivery, governance and decision making which is appropriate to the size and complexity of the organisation's treasury management needs.

3.4   The external treasury management supplier will provide suitable training during the year as appropriate and the training needs of treasury management officers will be regularly reviewed in order to maintain those skills and keep them up to date.

3.5   The Finance team will manage all day to day treasury management services on behalf of the Authority, supported directly by Link Group as its external treasury management advisors. However, it is recognised that responsibility for treasury management decisions remains with the Authority at all times and overdue reliance will not be placed upon one source of advice alone. Nevertheless, it is also recognised that there is value in employing external advisors in order to gain access to specialist skills and resources.

4. **CAPITAL EXPENDITURE PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2024-27**

4.1 Capital expenditure

4.1.1 Capital expenditure plans are a key driver of treasury management activity. The funding of such plans impact on cash balances and borrowing requirements in the short and longer terms. The on-going consequences of these decisions have a direct impact on the annual revenue budget. As such, the following prudential indicators show the proposed capital expenditure plans, how they are to be funded, the impact on the organisation's finances and their affordability in terms of the impact on revenue budgets.

4.1.2 This prudential indicator is a summary of the Authority's capital expenditure plans, both those agreed previously, and those forming part of this budget cycle. These are based on actual and forecast 2023-24 cash spend along with the planned future capital programme.

Table 1: Capital Expenditure

2023-24 Estimate £000	2024-25 Estimate £000	2025-26 Estimate £000	2026-27 Estimate £000	2027-28 Estimate £000	2028-29 Estimate £000
10,284	5,190	3,965	9,905	9,655	1,655

4.1.3 The next table shows how the above capital expenditure is to be financed. Where there is a shortfall in available funds, the shortfall is covered by an additional borrowing requirement. It is anticipated that c£5m of additional borrowing requirement will be utilised over the period, as shown in table 2 below, to finance the completion of the new Crewe Fire Station and continuing modernisation of Service houses. The Fire Station Modernisation Programme is also included in these capital expenditure forecasts, which has recommenced in 2023 following review.

4.1.4 A "placeholder" estimate has been made for re-builds of the Ellesmere Port and Warrington fire stations in 2026-27 and 2027-28. These are yet to be approved, but have been included to forecast future possible spend and borrowing requirements. The builds will be financed with a mix of Capital receipts, reserves and borrowing.

Table 2: Capital Financing

2023-24 Estimate £000		2024-25 Estimate £000	2025-26 Estimate £000	2026-27 Estimate £000	2027-28 Estimate £000	2028-29 Estimate £000
10,284	Forecast Spend	5,190	3,965	9,905	9,655	1,655
	Financed by:					
0	Capital grants	0	0	0	0	0
0	Capital Receipts	0	0	1,500	1,500	0
5,828	Capital Reserves & Revenue Contributions	4,940	3,715	3,655	3,655	1,655
4,456	Borrowing requirement	250	250	4,750	4,500	0

4.2 Capital Financing Requirement (or borrowing needs)

4.2.1 The second prudential indicator is the Authority's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). The CFR is simply the total historic outstanding capital expenditure which has not yet been financed either from revenue or capital funds. It is essentially a measure of borrowing need and any capital expenditure not financed in the above table will increase the CFR.

4.2.2 It should be noted that the CFR increases in 2023/24, reflecting the construction of the new Crewe Fire Station and then begins to reduce as the borrowing requirement incurred relating to completed recent major estates projects is offset by the annual MRP provision. The impact of the inclusion of Ellesmere Port and Warrington Firr Stations can then be seen in years 2026-27 and 2027-28.

Table 3: Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)

2023-24 Estimate £000	Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)	2024-25 Estimate £000	2025-26 Estimate £000	2026-27 Estimate £000	2027-28 Estimate £000	2028-29 Estimate £000
21,735	CFR brought forward	25,454	24,817	24,170	27,923	31,326
4,456	Net financing need for the year	250	250	4,750	4,500	0
(737)	Less MRP	(887)	(897)	(997)	(1,097)	(1,097)
25,454	**CFR carried forward**	**24,817**	**24,170**	**27,923**	**31,326**	**30,229**
3,719	**Movement in CFR**	**(637)**	**(647)**	**3,753**	**3,403**	**(1,097)**

4.2.3 The CFR is reduced every year by the minimum revenue provision (MRP). The Authority is required by statute to set aside MRP each year for the repayment of external debt. Under amendment regulation 4(1) of the 2008 Regulations, the Authority has a duty to set aside MRP which it considers to be prudent. Guidance has been issued which sets out recommendations on the interpretation of 'prudent' and the Authority is required to prepare an annual statement on how it proposes to calculate MRP. The 2024-25 annual statement is set out in the Annex.

4.2.4 The DLUHC is finalising a consultation on amending MRP regulations/guidance for England which primarily covers concerns that the government has in respect of compliance with the duty to make a prudent MRP. The consultation states that DLUHC are not intending to change the current statutory guidance, but to clearly set out in legislation the practices that authorities should already be following. There are two main proposals and neither will impact upon the Authority's current MRP practices which are already consistent and fully compliant with the intent of the framework and government expectations.

4.3 Liability Benchmark

4.3.1 A new prudential indicator from 2023/24 is the Liability Benchmark (LB). The Authority is required to estimate and measure the LB for the forthcoming financial year and the following two financial years, as a minimum. However, CIPFA strongly recommends that the LB is produced for at least ten years and should ideally cover the full debt maturity profile of a public body. The chart below covers the Authority's full debt maturity profile as recommended.

4.3.2 There are four components to the Liability Benchmark:

1. **Existing loan debt outstanding**: the Authority's existing loans that are still outstanding in future years.

2. **Loans Capital Financing Requirement (CFR):** this is calculated in accordance with the loans CFR definition in the Prudential Code and projected into the future based on approved prudential borrowing and planned MRP.

3. **Net loans requirement:** this shows the Authority's gross loan debt less treasury management investments at the last financial year-end, projected into the future and based on approved prudential borrowing, planned MRP and any other major cash flows forecast.

4. **Liability benchmark (or gross loans requirement):** this equals net loans requirement plus short-term liquidity allowance.
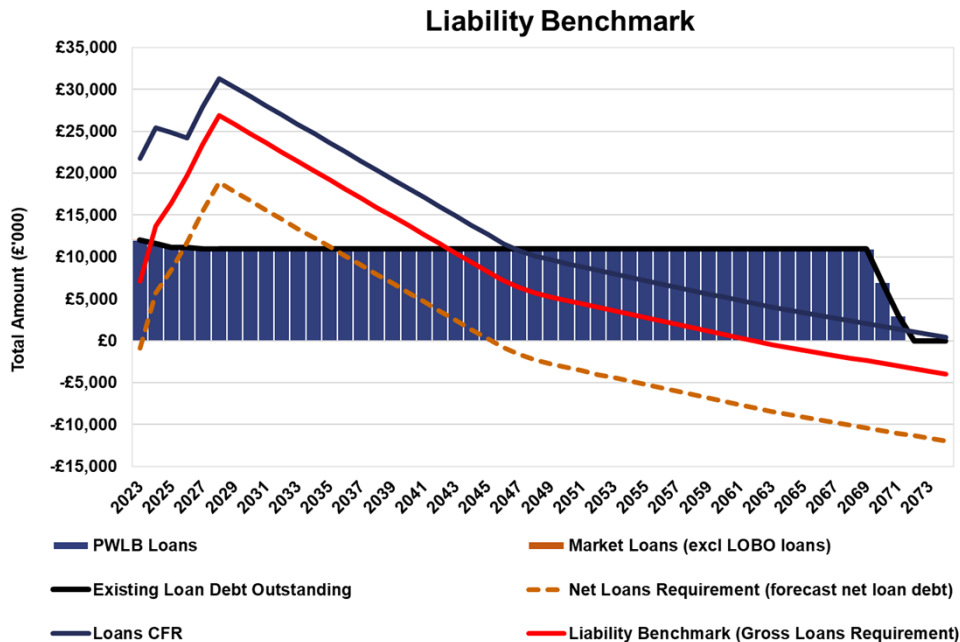
4.3.3 The aim of the LB is to minimise/reduce refinancing, interest rate and credit risks by informing the timing and duration of new external borrowing. For this purpose it has been assumed that a short-term liquidity allowance of £8m is required to be

maintained throughout the period, to provide access to liquidity if needed due to unanticipated short-term cash flow variations.

4.3.4   The chart has changed since the mid year review as it now incorporates the "placeholder" capital requirement for Ellesmere Port and Warrington rebuilds

4.3.5   The chart shows that the Authority's LB is currently rising sharply to a peak in around 2029 indicating the additional borrowing requirement associated with delivery of the currently approved and forecasted major estates projects. This requirement then reduces as provision is made to repay outstanding borrowing via the annual MRP charge. We would expect to fund the additional borrowing with PWLB fixed rate loans around 2078-28, as these have not been taken they are not shown on the chart. No further Capital Expenditure financed by borrowing is currently planned beyond 2029.

4.3.6   In view of this, by around 2043, the LB will have reduced back down to the level of the existing loan portfolio, indicating that although there is a significant short to medium term requirement for new borrowing, this borrowing would ideally be for a range of durations up to around 13 years, i.e. filling the white triangular period in the chart between 2024 and 2043 where the LB (red line) exceeds the current loan portfolio (black line/bar chart). This profile will change if PWLB long term fixed rate loans are taken.

4.3.7   The chart also shows that that the existing loan debt portfolio will be fully repaid by 2072 and that the requirement to borrow (CFR) will also be reduced to nil by 2074, indicating that the Authority's current MRP policy remains prudent and appropriate.

4.3.8   The chart then indicates that without any further new approved capital expenditure financed by borrowing beyond the period of the current Capital Strategy, the existing borrowing portfolio exceeds the LB after 2043. If this remains the case then it indicates either excess cash requiring investment or an opportunity to repay/restructure debt over this future period.

4.4   Core Funds and Expected Investment Balances

4.4.1   The application of funds (capital receipts, reserves etc.) to finance capital expenditure or other budget decisions to support the revenue budget will have an on-going impact on the cash available for investments unless resources are supplemented each year from new sources (asset sales etc.).   Detailed below are the estimated year-end balances for reserves. The Capital Receipts and Unapplied Capital Grants reserves are restricted in their usage to funding capital expenditure or repaying debt and cannot be used for revenue purposes.

Table 4: Reserves

	Actual 31 March 23 £000	Forecast 31 March 24 £000	Forecast 31 March 25 £000	Forecast 31 March 26 £000	Forecast 31 March 27 £000	Forecast 31 March 28 £000	Forecast 31 March 29 £000
General Reserve	1,928	1,928	1,928	1,928	1,928	1,928	1,928
Earmarked Reserves							
Capital receipts	0	0	0	3,000	1,500	0	0
Capital Reserves	14,233	13,584	8,851	6,680	4,569	2,458	2,347
Staff related	1,309	581	486	391	391	391	391
Legal and insurance costs	517	479	379	379	379	379	379
ICT and systems development	433	461	495	495	495	495	495
Training	141	225	201	201	201	201	201
Equipment & Uniform	1,724	1,668	1,587	662	662	662	662
Collaborations and partnerships	125	125	917	521	125	125	125
Property related	697	462	441	471	500	530	559
Operational Policy and Assurance - resilience	269	193	166	166	166	166	166
Prevention	1,077	699	650	650	650	650	650
Protection	299	340	249	0	0	0	0
Funding	1,488	1,488	1,448	1,448	1,448	1,448	1,448
UPG	286	318	318	318	318	318	318
Specific projects	64	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Reserves	**24,590**	**22,551**	**18,116**	**17,310**	**13,332**	**9,751**	**9,669**

<u>Affordability Prudential Indicators</u>

4.4.2   So far the Strategy has covered the control of overall capital expenditure plans and borrowing prudential indicators. The following indicator provides an indication of the impact of the above capital expenditure plans and their financing proposals on the overall finances and precept (council tax).

Table 5: Ratio of financing costs to net revenue funding

2022-23 Actual	2023-24 Estimate	2024-25 Estimate	2025-26 Estimate	2026-27 Estimate	2027-28 Estimate	2028-29 Estimate
2.23%	1.89%	2.36%	2.49%	2.87%	2.97%	2.90%

4.4.3   This indicator identifies the trend in the financing costs of the Authority, (borrowing, MRP and other long term obligation costs), against the net revenue stream. The estimates of financing costs include current commitments and the proposals included in the budget/medium-term financial plan. The above ratio reduces in 2023-24 due to the deferral of new borrowing along with increased net revenue funding, but then estimated to rise due to the requirement to increase borrowing in order to finance the recently completed Wilmslow and Crewe major estates projects.

4.4.4   The above ratios do include estimates on future interest rates incurred with Warrignton and Ellesmere Port project (if approved), which is the peak seen in 2027-28. These rates are based on interest rates falling in the next few years.

5. BORROWING

5.1 Section 4 provides details of the capital plans of the Authority. A key function of treasury management is to ensure that the cash resources are organised in accordance with the relevant regulations and professional codes so that sufficient cash is available to meet service activity and the capital strategy. This will involve both cashflow management and where capital expenditure plans require it, the arrangement of appropriate borrowing facilities. This Strategy covers the relevant treasury and prudential indicators, the current and projected debt positions and the Annual Investment Strategy.

Current Debt Position

5.1.1 The current debt position with forward projections, is summarised below. The table shows actual external debt against the underlying capital borrowing need, highlighting any internal borrowing or over borrowing. With forecast additional debt in 2026-28.

Table 6: Debt Position

2022-23 Actual £000	2023-24 Estimate £000	Gross Borrowing Requirement	2024-25 Estimate £000	2025-26 Estimate £000	2026-27 Estimate £000	2026-27 Estimate £000	2027-28 Estimate £000
		External Debt					
12,012	12,012	Debt at 1 April	11,586	18,119	20,119	24,619	29,119
0	(426)	Expected change in Debt	6,533	2,000	4,500	4,500	-
12,012	11,586	External Debt at 31 March	18,119	20,119	24,619	29,119	29,119
0	0	Finance Lease	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	Expected change in Finance Lease	0	0	0	0	0
12,012	11,586	Actual Gross Debt at 31 March	18,119	20,119	24,619	29,119	29,119
21,735	25,454	Capital Financing Requirement	24,817	24,170	27,923	31,326	30,229
9,723	**13,868**	**Internal *1 / (over) borrowing**	**6,698**	**4,051**	**3,304**	**2,207**	**1,110**

*1 – Paragraph 5.4 below discusses the internal borrowing position.

5.1.2 Within the prudential indicators there are a number of key indicators to ensure that the Authority operates its activities within well-defined limits. One of these is that the Authority ensures that its gross debt does not, except in the short-term, exceed the total Capital Financing Requirement in the preceding year plus the estimates for any additional Capital Financing Requirement for 2024-25 and the following two financial years. This allows some flexibility for limited early borrowing for future plans but ensures that borrowing is not undertaken for revenue or speculative purposes.

5.1.3 The Treasurer confirms that the Authority complied with this prudential indicator in the current year and does not envisage any issues for the immediate future. This view takes into account current commitments, existing plans and the proposals included in

the budget report and Medium Term Financial Plan for 2024-29 to be considered by the Fire Authority on 14th February 2024.

5.2   Treasury Indicators – limits to borrowing activities

5.2.1   There are two limits to borrowing, the operational boundary and the authorised limit for external debt. These are the current debt position as shown in 5.1.1 above plus the forecast requirement for external financing over the next three years.

5.2.2   **The operational boundary** is the limit which external debt and long-term liabilities is not normally expected to exceed. In most cases this would be a similar figure to the Capital Financing Requirement but may be higher or lower depending on the level of actual debt and repayment schedules. Temporary breach of the operational boundary is not in itself cause for concern but an indicator that such liabilities should be reviewed. If there was a sustained breach, (such as an increase in long-term borrowing), then this would need to be investigated and action taken.

5.2.3   The operational boundaries below are based on estimating the Authority's most likely level of borrowing and leasing each year. It includes long-term borrowing to fund capital expenditure plans, short-term temporary borrowing for cashflow purposes and the impact of any finance leases.

Table 7: Operational Boundary

Operational Boundary	2024-25 Estimate £000	2025-26 Estimate £000	2026-27 Estimate £000
Debt	21,119	23,119	25,000
Other long term liabilities	200	200	200
Total	**21,319**	**23,319**	**25,200**

5.2.4   As Table 7 shows, the Operational Boundary over the period 2024-27 is increasing to around £25m in 2025-26 because of the new borrowing requirement in support of the capital programme.

5.2.5   The **authorised limit for external debt** is a further key prudential indicator representing a control on the maximum level of borrowing. This represents a limit beyond which external debt and finance leases are prohibited and is set or revised by the Authority. It reflects the level of such debt which, while not desired, could be afforded in the short term but is not sustainable in the longer-term.

5.2.6   This is a statutory limit determined under section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003. The Government retains an option to control either the total of all local authorities' plans or those of any specific public body; although this power has yet to be exercised.

5.2.7   There is a statutory requirement for the Authority to confirm the authorised limit. This is set out in the table below:

Table 8: Authorised Limit

Authorised limit for external debt	2024-25 Estimate £000	2025-26 Estimate £000	2026-27 Estimate £000
Borrowing	23,119	25,119	27,000
Other Long Term Liabilities	200	200	200
Total Authorised Limit	**23,319**	**25,319**	**27,200**

5.3   Prospects for Interest Rates

5.3.1   Link Group have been appointed as external treasury advisor and part of their service is to assist the Authority to formulate a view on interest rates. The following table gives our current view.

Link Group Interest Rate View 07.11.23	Dec-23	Mar-24	Jun-24	Sep-24	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26
BANK RATE	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.25	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
3 month ave earnings	5.30	5.30	5.30	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.50	3.30	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
6 month ave earnings	5.60	5.50	5.40	5.10	4.60	4.10	3.60	3.40	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.10
12 month ave earnings	5.80	5.70	5.50	5.20	4.70	4.20	3.70	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30
5 yr PWLB	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.70	4.40	4.20	4.00	3.80	3.70	3.60	3.50	3.50	3.50
10 yr PWLB	5.10	5.00	4.80	4.70	4.40	4.20	4.00	3.80	3.70	3.70	3.60	3.60	3.50
25 yr PWLB	5.50	5.30	5.10	4.90	4.70	4.50	4.30	4.20	4.10	4.10	4.00	4.00	4.00
50 yr PWLB	5.30	5.10	4.90	4.70	4.50	4.30	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.90	3.80	3.80	3.80

Source: Link Group

5.3.2   2023-24 has seen political and economic volatility and uncertainty along with significant inflationary pressures. In the first half of 2023-24 interest rates were increased by a further 1.0%, taking Bank Rate from 4.25% to 5.25% and, possibly, the peak in the tightening cycle.

Forecasts for Bank Rate

5.3.3   The above forecast for interest rates was updated on 7 November and reflects a view that the MPC will be keen to further demonstrate its anti-inflation credentials by keeping Bank Rate at 5.25% until at least the second half of 2024.

5.3.4   It is anticipated that the Bank of England will start rate cuts when both the CPI inflation and wage/employment data are supportive of such a move, and that there is a likelihood of the overall economy enduring at least a mild recession over the coming months, although most recent GDP releases have surprised with their on-going robustness. Timing on that matter will be one of fine judgment. Cut too soon and inflationary pressures may well build up further, cut too late and any downturn or recession may be prolonged.

5.3.5   In the upcoming months, updated forecasts will be guided not only by economic data releases and clarifications from the MPC over its monetary policies and the Government over its fiscal policies, but also international factors such as policy

development in the US and Europe, the provision of fresh support packages to support the faltering recovery in China as well as the on-going conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and Gaza and Israel.

5.3.6   On the positive side, consumers are still estimated to be sitting on some excess savings left over from the pandemic so that will cushion some of the impact of the above challenges.   However, most of those are held by more affluent people whereas lower income families already spend nearly all their income on essentials such as food, energy and rent/mortgage payments.

Forecasts for PWLB rates and gilt and treasury yields

5.3.7   PWLB borrowing rates for periods of 5 to 50 years are currently in the range of 5.02% to 5.38%. The overall longer-run trend is for gilt yields and PWLB rates to fall back over the timeline of our forecasts, as inflation starts to fall through the remainder of in 2024. Temporary borrowing rates will remain elevated for some time to come but may prove the best option whilst the market continues to wait for inflation, and therein gilt yields, to drop back later in 2024.

5.3.8   As the interest forecast table for PWLB certainty rates above shows, there is now forecast to be stability of rates until mid-2024, followed by a gradual reduction during the forecast period to December 2026.

5.3.9   Downside risks to current forecasts for UK gilt yields and PWLB rates include:

- Labour and supply shortages prove more enduring and disruptive and depress economic activity (accepting that in the near-term this is also an upside risk to inflation and, thus, could keep gilt yields high for longer).

- The Bank of England has increased Bank Rate too fast and too far over recent months, and subsequently brings about a deeper and longer UK recession than we currently anticipate.

- UK / EU trade arrangements – if there was a major impact on trade flows and financial services.

- Geopolitical risks, for example in Ukraine/Russia, the Middle East, China/Taiwan/US, Iran and North Korea, which could lead to increasing safe-haven flows.

5.3.10   Upside risks to current forecasts for UK gilt yields and PWLB rates:

- The Bank of England proves too timid in its pace and strength of increases in Bank Rate and, therefore, allows inflationary pressures to remain for a longer period within the UK economy, which then necessitates Bank Rate staying higher for longer than we currently project.

- The pound weakens because of a lack of confidence in the UK Government's pre-election fiscal policies, resulting in investors pricing in a risk premium for holding

UK sovereign debt. Longer term US treasury yields rise strongly if inflation remains more stubborn there than the market currently anticipates, consequently pulling gilt yields up higher. Projected gilt issuance, inclusive of natural maturities, could be too much for the markets to comfortably digest without higher yields compensating.

5.3.11   Link's long-term (beyond 10 years) forecast for Bank Rate has increased from 2.75% to 3%. As all PWLB certainty rates are currently above this level, borrowing strategies will need to be reviewed in that context.

5.4   Borrowing Strategy

5.4.1   As shown in Table 6, the Authority is currently utilising internal borrowing and forecast to remain so for the period covered by this Strategy. This means that the capital borrowing need (the Capital Financing Requirement), has not been fully funded with external loan debt as cash supporting reserves, balances and cash flow has been used as a temporary measure. This approach is appropriate for the current economic scenario and prudent as medium and longer dated borrowing rates are expected to fall from their current levels once prevailing inflation concerns are addressed by tighter near-term monetary policy.

5.4.2   As a result of deferring the approved 2022/23 and 2023/24 new external borrowing, the position at 31 March 2024 is now forecast to be around £13.9m internally borrowed. This is temporarily above the 2023/24 target of £10m, but consistent with the current strategy of increasing internal borrowing over the period of major estates projects delivery in order to minimise new long term external borrowing over this period. It will be achieved through careful cashflow management.

5.4.3   At this point, a temporary increase to the target level of internal borrowing over this period, supported by short periods of temporary external borrowing if required, is considered to be manageable and a sensible position in view of the current high cost of borrowing and forecasts that this will begin to reduce as the economy stabilises over the next two to three years. It is not, however, sustainable on a longer term basis as current reserve balances are used to support current financial plans, most notably the ongoing Fire Station Modernisation Programme. The position will continue to be monitored closely throughout 2024/25 and reviewed again as part of the 2025/26 Treasury Management Strategy.

5.4.4   Against this background and the risks within the economic forecast, caution will be adopted with the 2024-25 treasury operations. The Head of Finance will keep interest rates and the cashflow under regular review in order to adopt a pragmatic approach to changing circumstances, supported by advice from the external Treasury Management advisers.

5.4.5   A key aim of the borrowing strategy is to minimise the cost of the loan portfolio whilst ensuring that the obligation to repay the loans is spread out over a period of time. This reduces the impact of such loans on the revenue budget. The profile of the repayment of the debt portfolio is shown below at 5.6.3.

5.4.6 New long term borrowing is currently planned during the life of this Strategy. Where short term borrowing arrangements are required to support a temporary low general fund bank balance, the Authority will engage with Treasury Advisors to understand if there are any local authority counterparties available to lend from. The offer will then be considered and terms of loans agreed between the Head of Finance and nominated officer from the lending organisation.

5.5 Policy on borrowing in advance of need

5.5.1 The Authority will not borrow more than or in advance of its needs purely in order to profit from the investment of the extra sums borrowed. Any decision to borrow in advance will be within forward approved Capital Financing Requirement estimates, and will be considered carefully to ensure that value for money can be demonstrated and that the Authority can ensure the security of such funds.

5.6 Debt Rescheduling

5.6.1 Rescheduling of current borrowing in the debt portfolio is unlikely to occur as there is still a very large difference between premature redemption rates and new borrowing rates.

5.6.2 The reasons for any rescheduling to take place will include:

- The generation of cash savings and/or discounted cash flow savings
- Helping to fulfil the treasury strategy
- Enhancing the balance of the portfolio (amending the maturity profile and/or the balance of volatility).

5.6.3 Any potential rescheduling will be carefully considered. A table showing the current profile of the debt portfolio, highlighting years in which debt matures, is shown below:
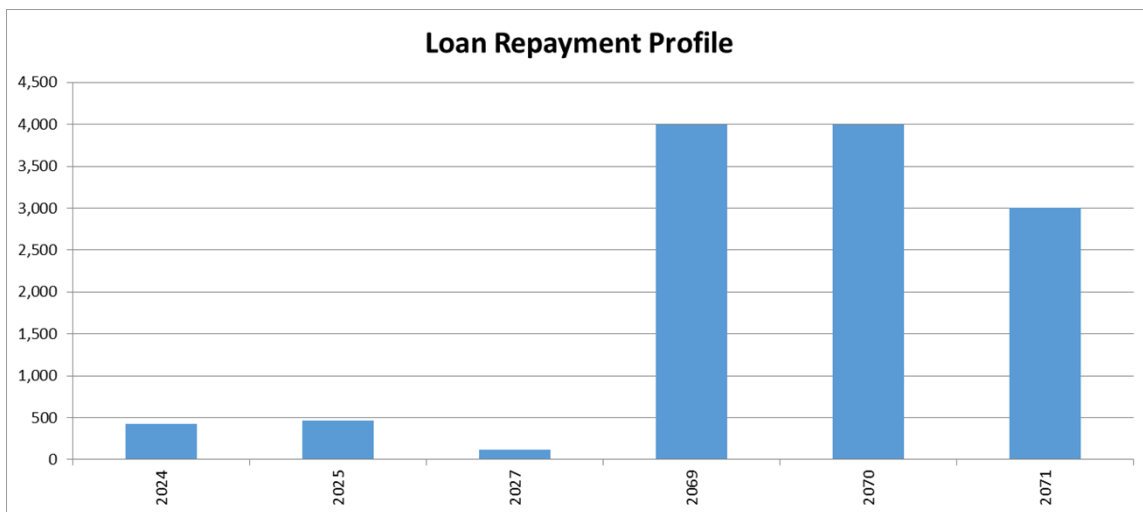
Note- gap between years 2027 to 2069 on the x-axis

5.6.4   All current borrowing is on a fixed rate basis with a current overall weighted average of 1.91% for 2024-25, reduced from 2.01% in 2023-24 due to the planned repayment of a maturing loan on 31/3/24 which was taken out in 2000 at 4.875%. Any new loans taken out will be subject to the rates applicable at that time. Any early repayment of debt would also be subject to either early pay-back premiums or discounts.

5.6.5   Key sensitivities of the interest rate forecast are likely to be:

- if it was felt that there was a significant risk of a much sharper rise in long and short term rates than that currently forecast, fixed rate funding will be drawn whilst interest rates are lower than they are projected to be in the next few years; and

- If it were felt that there was a significant risk of a sharp fall in short and long-term interest rates then longer-term borrowing will be postponed until rates were deemed at their lowest and a review of current debt would be undertaken to ascertain the benefit of rescheduling to more competitive short term loans.

5.7   Treasury Management limits on activity

5.7.1   There are three debt-related treasury activity limits. Their purpose is to restrain borrowing activity within certain limits to manage risk and reduce the impact of adverse movement in interest rates. However, if these are set too restrictively they will impair the opportunity to reduce costs or maximise value for money. As such the upper limits on shorter term debt has been raised since the last report to enable the Authority to manage high interest rate risk, through short term borrowing until PWLB long term rates fall.

Table 9: Interest Rate Limits

	2024-25 Upper	2025-26 Upper	2026-27 Upper
Limits on fixed interest rates based on net debt	100%	100%	100%
Limits on variable interest rates based on net debt	25%	25%	25%

Table 10: Maturity structure of fixed interest rate borrowing 2024-25

Maturity Structure of Authority Borrowing	Lower Limit %	Upper Limit %
Under 12 months	0%	25%
12 months to 2 years	0%	25%
2 years to 5 years	0%	50%
5 years to 10 years	0%	50%
10 years and above	50%	100%

6.   **ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

6.1   Investment Policy

6.1.1   The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and CIPFA have extended the meaning of 'investments' to include both financial and non-financial investments. This Strategy deals solely with treasury (financial) investments. The Authority does not hold any non-financial investments, essentially the purchase of income yielding assets, but if it did these would now be covered in the separate Capital Strategy.

6.1.2   The Authority's investment policy has regard to the following:

- DLUHC's Guidance on Local Government Investments ("the Guidance")
- CIPFA Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice and Cross Sectoral Guidance Notes 2021 ("the Code")
- CIPFA Treasury Management Guidance Notes 2021

6.1.3   The Authority's principal objectives for investments are security first, liquidity next and finally yield (return). The Authority will aim to achieve the optimum return on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity. In the current economic climate, it is considered appropriate to keep investments short term to cover cash flow needs. However, where appropriate, the Authority will also consider the value available in periods up to 12 months with high credit rated financial institutions.

6.1.4   The above guidance from the DLUHC and CIPFA place a high priority on the management of risk. This Authority has adopted a prudent approach to managing risk and defines its risk appetite by the following means:

a) Minimum acceptable credit criteria are applied in order to generate a list of highly creditworthy counterparties. This also enables diversification and thus avoidance of concentration risk. The key ratings used to monitor counterparties are the short term and long-term ratings.

b) Ratings will not be the sole determinant of the quality of an institution; it is important to continually assess and monitor the financial sector on both a micro and macro basis and in relation to the economic and political environments in which institutions operate. The assessment will also take account of information that reflects the opinion of the markets. To achieve this consideration the Authority will engage with its external advisors to monitor market pricing such as "credit default swaps" and overlay that information on top of the credit ratings.

c) Other information sources used will include the financial press, share price and other such information pertaining to the banking sector in order to establish the

most robust scrutiny process on the suitability of potential investment counterparties.

d) The Authority has defined the list of types of investment instruments that the treasury management team are authorised to use. There are two lists in table 11 below under the categories of 'specified' and 'non-specified' investments.

- **Specified investments** are those with a high level of credit quality and subject to a maturity limit of one year or have less than a year left to run to maturity if originally they were classified as being non-specified investments solely due to the maturity period exceeding one year.

- **Non-specified investments** are those with less high credit quality, may be for periods in excess of one year, and/or are more complex instruments which require greater consideration by the Authority before being authorised for use.

Table 11: Approved Investment Instruments

Specified Investments (maturities up to one year)
□ Bank & Building Societies Term Deposits
□ Other Local Authority Term Deposits
□ Debt Management Agency Deposit Facility
□ AAA Money Market Funds (CNAV/LVNAV/VNAV)
Non-Specified Investments (maturities over one year)
□ Bank & Building Societies Term Deposits
□ Other Local Authority Term Deposits
Other Non-Specified Investments
□ Fixed term deposits with variable rates & maturities

e) Non-specified investments limit. The Authority has determined that it will limit the maximum total exposure to non-specified investments as being 20% of the total investment portfolio.

f) Lending limits, the maximum amount for each counterparty will be set at £10m per organisation/group. The maximum investment duration for each counterparty will be set in line with the creditworthiness service provided by Link Asset Services as set out in paragraph 6.2.

g) The Authority will set a limit for the amount of its investments which are invested for longer than 365 days, (see paragraph 6.4.5).

h) Investments will only be placed with counterparties from countries with a specified minimum sovereign rating, (see paragraph 6.3).

i) The Authority has engaged external consultants, (see paragraph 3.5), to provide expert advice on how to optimise an appropriate balance of security, liquidity and

yield, given the risk appetite of this authority in the context of the expected level of cash balances and need for liquidity throughout the year.

j)   All investments will be denominated in sterling.

k)   As a result of the change in accounting standards for 2023-24 under IFRS 9, the Authority will consider the implications of investment instruments which could result in an adverse movement in the value of the amount invested and resultant charges at the end of the year to the General Fund. (In November 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [MHCLG], concluded a consultation for a temporary override to allow English local authorities time to adjust their portfolio of all pooled investments by announcing a statutory override to delay implementation of IFRS 9 for five years ending 31 March 2023). More recently, a further extension to the over-ride to 31 March 2025 has been agreed by Government.

6.1.5   The above criteria are unchanged from last year.

6.2   Creditworthiness Policy and Exposure to Risk

6.2.1   The Authority utilises the creditworthiness service provided by Link Group, its Treasury Management advisers. This service employs a sophisticated modelling approach incorporating credit ratings from the three main credit rating agencies – Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's. The credit ratings of counterparties are supplemented with the following overlays:

- Credit watches and credit outlooks from credit rating agencies;
- Credit Default Swaps (CDS) to give early warning of likely changes in credit ratings; and
- Sovereign ratings to select counterparties from only the most creditworthy countries.

This modelling approach combines credit ratings, credit watches and credit outlooks in a weighted scoring system which is then combined with an overlay of CDS spreads. The end product of this is a series of colour coded bands which indicate the relative creditworthiness of counterparties. These colour codes are used by the Authority to determine the suggested duration of investments. The Authority will use counterparties within the following durational bands:

- Yellow   5 years
- Purple   2 years
- Blue   1 year (only applies to nationalised or semi nationalised UK banks)
- Orange   1 year
- Red   6 months
- Green   100 days
- No Colour   Not to be used

6.2.2　The Link creditworthiness service uses a wider array of information rather than just primary ratings. Furthermore, by using a risk weighted scoring system, it does not place undue reliance to just one agency's ratings. Typically, the minimum credit ratings criteria the Authority uses will be a short-term rating (Fitch or equivalent) of F1 and a long-term rating of A- indicating high security and stability. There may be occasions when the counterparty ratings from one rating agency are marginally lower than these ratings but may still be used. In these instances, consideration will be given to the whole range of ratings available, or other topical market information, to support their use.

6.2.3　All ratings and colour codes are monitored weekly via Link's credit listings and in-between via business press. The Authority is alerted to changes to any ratings via email from Link.

- If a downgrade results in the counterparty / investment scheme no longer meeting the Authority's minimum criteria, its further use as a new investment will be withdrawn immediately.

- In addition to the use of credit ratings the Authority will be advised of information in movements in Credit Default Swap spreads against the iTraxx European Senior Financials benchmark and other market data on a daily basis via its Passport website, provided exclusively to it by Link. Extreme market movements may result in the downgrade of an institution or its removal from the Authority's lending list.

6.2.4　Sole reliance will not be placed on the use of this external service. In addition to Link, the Finance Team officers will also use market data and information on any external support for banks to help support its decision making process.

6.3　Country Limits

6.3.1　The Authority has determined that it will only use approved counterparties from the UK and from countries outside of the UK with a minimum sovereign credit rating of AAA from Fitch (or equivalent). The list will be added to, or deducted from, should ratings change. Significant levels of downgrades to Short and Long-Term credit ratings have not materialised since the crisis in March 2020. In the main, where they did change, any alterations were limited to Outlooks. Nonetheless, when setting minimum sovereign debt ratings, the Authority will not set a minimum rating for the UK

6.4　Investment Strategy

6.4.1　Investments will be made with reference to the core balance and cash flow requirements and the outlook for short-term interest rates (i.e. rates for investments up to 12 months). Greater returns are usually obtainable by investing for longer periods and the current shape of the yield curve suggests that is the case at present, but there is the prospect of Bank Rate having peaked in the second half of 2023 and possibly reducing as early as the second half of 2024 so an agile investment strategy would be appropriate to optimise returns. While most of the Authority's cash balances are required in order to manage the 'ups and downs' of cash flow, where cash sums can

be identified that could be invested for longer periods, the value to be obtained from longer term investments will be carefully assessed.

6.4.2   The Authority would seek to maintain at all times a core liquid balance of £4m.

6.4.3   For its cash flow generated balances, the Authority will seek to utilise its business reserve instant access and notice accounts, money market funds and short-dated deposits, (overnight to 100 days), in order to benefit from the compounding of interest.

6.4.4   Bank Rate - The current forecast shown in paragraph 5.3, includes a forecast for a succession of rate decreases from 2023's peak of 5.25%. Bank Rate forecasts for financial year ends (March) are:

| 2023/24 – 5.25% | 2024/25 – 4.00% | 2025/26 – 3.00% | 2026/27 – 3.00% |

Investment treasury indicator and limit

6.4.5   This indicator limits the total funds which the Authority is willing to invest for periods greater than 365 days. This limit is set with regard to the Authority's liquidity requirements and to reduce the need for early sale of an investment. It is based on the forecast availability of funds after each year-end.

Table 12: Investment Treasury Limit:

	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
	Upper	Upper	Upper
Principal sums invested for longer than 365 days	Nil	Nil	Nil

6.5   End of Year Investment Report

6.5.1   At the end of the financial year, the Treasurer will report on the Authority's investment activity as part of the Annual Treasury Report.

Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement

1.   The Authority is required to make an annual provision from revenue to contribute towards the repayment of borrowing. This requirement arises under the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008, which simplifies earlier MRP requirements by placing a duty on the Authority to determine each year an amount of minimum revenue provision, which it considers to be prudent. In order to assist the Authority with this determination, guidance for assessing what would represent a prudent provision has been issued under Section 21 (1A) of the Local Government Act 2003 (the Guidance). The Authority is required to have regard to the Guidance when considering the amount of their annual "prudent" MRP.

2.   At the end of 2023-24, around 19% (£4.8m) of the Authority's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) will relate to the balance of historic (up to 2017-18) supported debt liability. The Authority determined that from 2023-24, this historic element of the CFR will be charged MRP at the rate fixed as 4% of the balance at 31st March 2023 (£5m). The Authority considers this approach to be more prudent as it will ensure that the CFR will be cleared over a finite 25 year period rather than the previously adopted reducing balance method (6.7% per year) which would technically never clear this element of the Authority's CFR.

3.   Any post 2017-18 new borrowing will continue be subject to MRP under option 3 of the Government Guidance. It will be charged over a period which is reasonably commensurate with the estimated useful life applicable to the nature of expenditure, using the equal annual instalment method. For example, MRP in respect of capital expenditure on the new Training Centre Project relates to the estimated life of that asset.

4.   The use of this approach for certain schemes will also result in a nil MRP charge until the year after that in which all expenditure on the scheme, project or other item of capital expenditure has been fully accrued under proper accounting practices, regardless of the extent of such expenditure that has not been accrued at the end of the previous financial year. Estimated life periods will be determined using appropriately qualified professional judgement.

5.   Based on the current projected capital outturn position for 2023-24 and this statement, it is expected that the resulting MRP charge will be approximately £887k for 2024-25.

6.   This MRP statement will be reviewed on an annual basis. If it is proposed to vary the policy during the year, a revised statement will be submitted to the Authority.

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF:	CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE:	14 FEBRUARY 2024
REPORT OF:	HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT
AUTHOR:	GRAEME WORRALL

SUBJECT: 2024-2025 BUDGET (PRECEPT) CONSULTATION

Purpose of Report

1.   This report provides details about the 2024-2025 Budget (Precept) Consultation.

Recommended:

[1]   That Members consider the responses to the Consultation when determining the Council Tax Precept for 2024-2025.

Background

2.   Members approved a consultation on the proposed level of precept for 2024-2025 at the meeting of the Authority on 6 December 2023.

Consultation Feedback

3.   The consultation was held between 5 and 26 January 2024 and was in the form of an online survey which asked to what extent respondents supported the Authority's proposed increase in precept of 2.99% for 2024/2025. The survey outlined the 2.99% increase in monetary terms for each council tax band so consultees were able to relate the proposal to their own household.

4.   The survey was promoted via a press release, on the Service's social media channels and through direct email using the Service's Neighbourhood Alert system.

5.   A total of 448 respondents took part in the consultation. This comprised of 375 members of the public, 18 members of staff, 10 business owners and one partner organisation (the Cheshire Association of Local Councils).

6.   65.18% of respondents expressed support for the proposed increase, compared to 23.21% who opposed. A further 11.61% of respondents either stated they neither supported nor opposed the increase, or did not know.

7.   Consultees were able to provide free text comments to express their opinion. 216 comments were provided. Of these, 73 stated support for the increase, with reasons including a view that the requested amount is small in monetary terms and that the Authority provides a vital service that needs to be properly funded. Other comments also called for more funding to be provided from central government.

8.   Fifty comments stated opposition to the proposed increase. Most of these cited the impact of the cost of living on being able to afford higher levels of council tax, as well as the cumulative effect of year-on-year increases and proposed rises from other authorities. Other comments suggested that the Authority should instead look to make savings within its existing budget. Seven respondents called for a reduction in senior officers salaries and to concentrate spending on core functions instead of what they viewed as unnecessary spending.

9.   There were 27 comments which referred to the fire cover proposals within the draft 2024-2028 Community Risk Management Plan. The majority of these comments state opposition to an increase in precept given the proposed removal of the second fire engine in Northwich.

10.   A further 20 comments were provided which were more general in nature and not necessarily linked to the issue of the precept consultation.

11.   Free text responses are provided in full in Appendix 1 to this report.

Financial Implications

12. The financial implications associated with any council tax precept increase are considered in the budget report that appears later on the agenda.

Legal Implications

13. The Authority must determine its precept by the middle of February. It should consult and must take the responses to any consultation into account in reaching its decision on the council tax precept.

Equality and Diversity Implications

14.   There are no equalities implications.

Environmental Implications

15.   There are no environmental implications.

CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING MANAGER
TEL [01606] 868804
BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE

This page is intentionally left blank

Cheshire
Fire Authority

2024-2025 Budget (Precept) Consultation

Appendix 1: Consultation Feedback Report

www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

Profile of respondents

Responses: 407

Type of respondent

Type	Count
None of the above	3
A member of the public	375
A business owner	10
A representati...	1
An employee of Cheshire Fir...	18
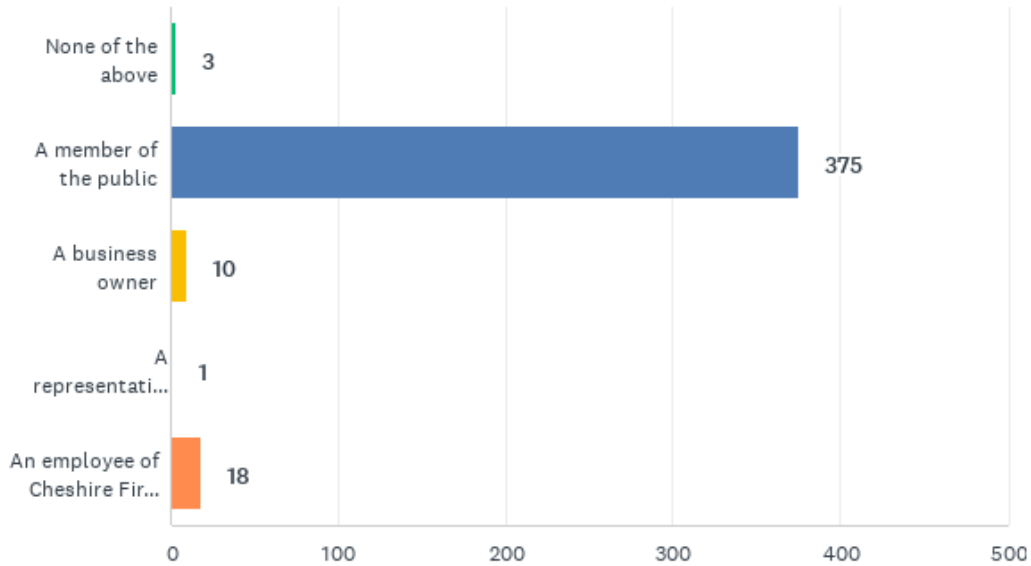
Respondents by unitary area

Area	Count
Cheshire East	109
Cheshire West and Chester	231
Halton	23
Warrington	27
I do not live in Cheshire	7
Prefer not to say	10
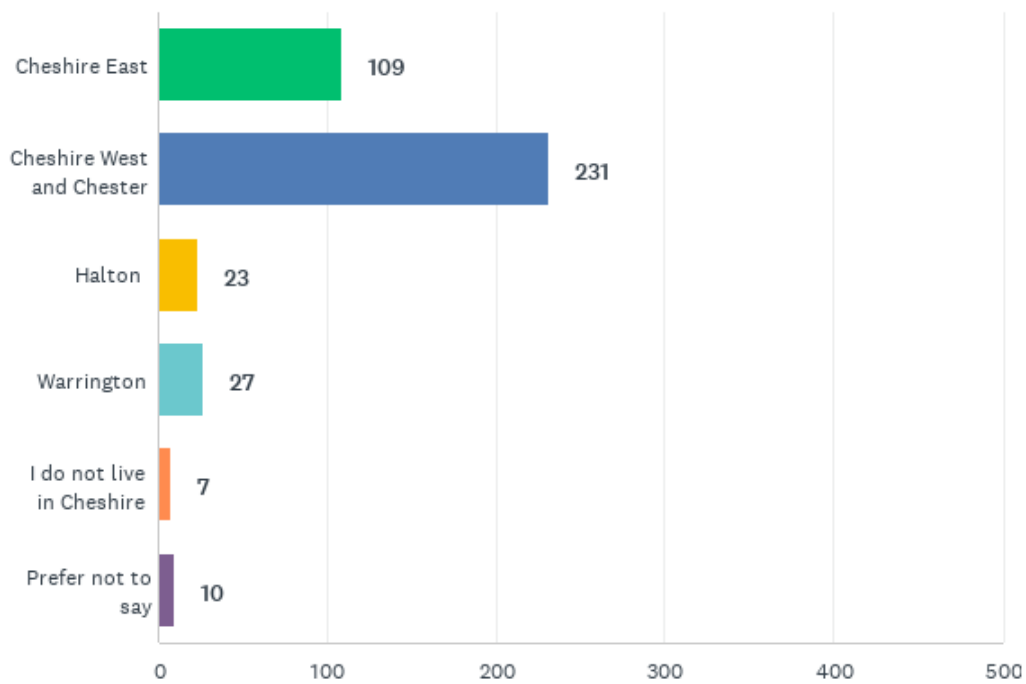
Respondents by postcode

Responses: 379

2024-2025 Budget Consultation
February 2024

© Crown copyright and database rights
2013 Ordnance Survey 1000240064
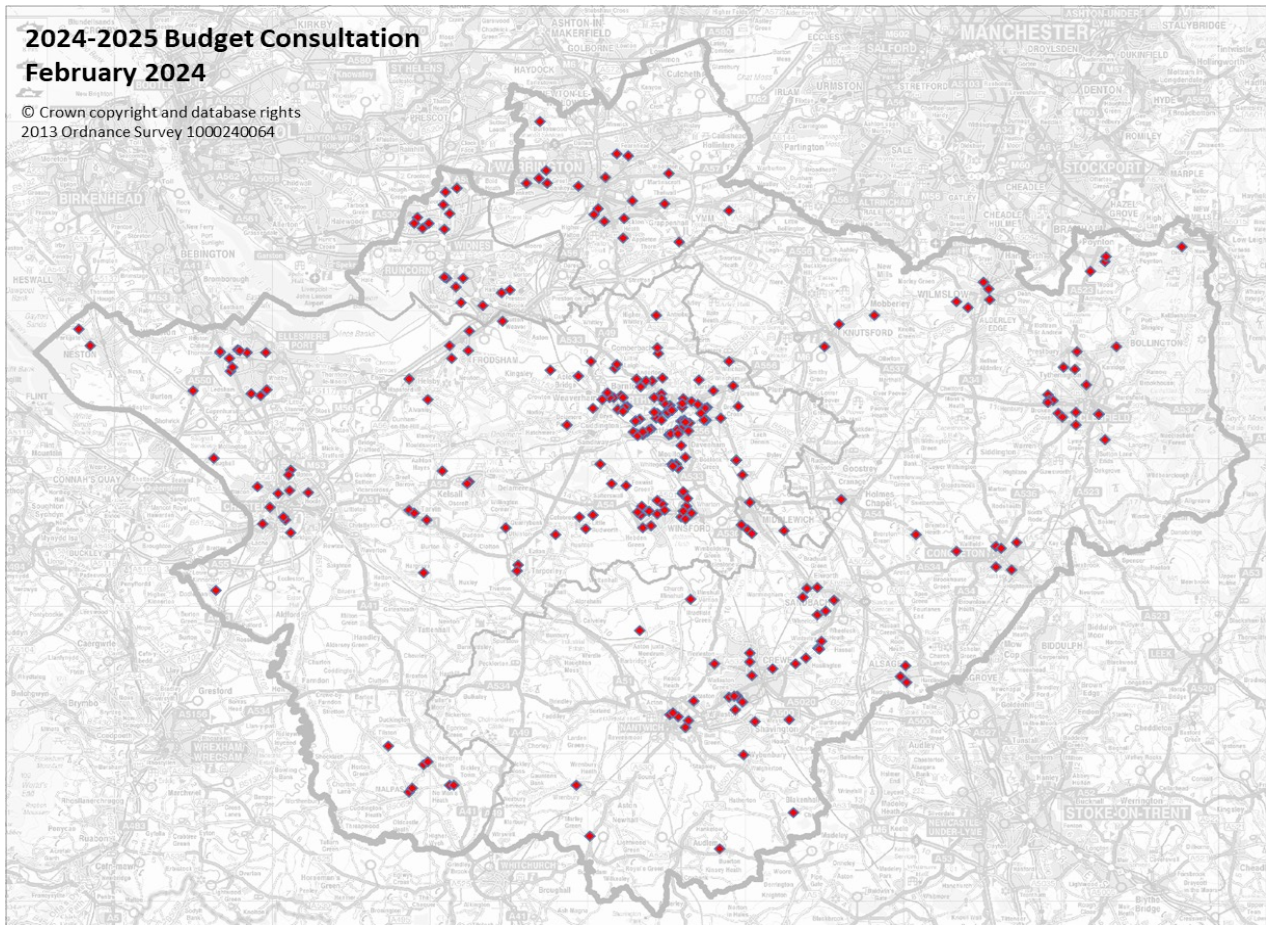
Respondents by council tax paying status

Responses: 407
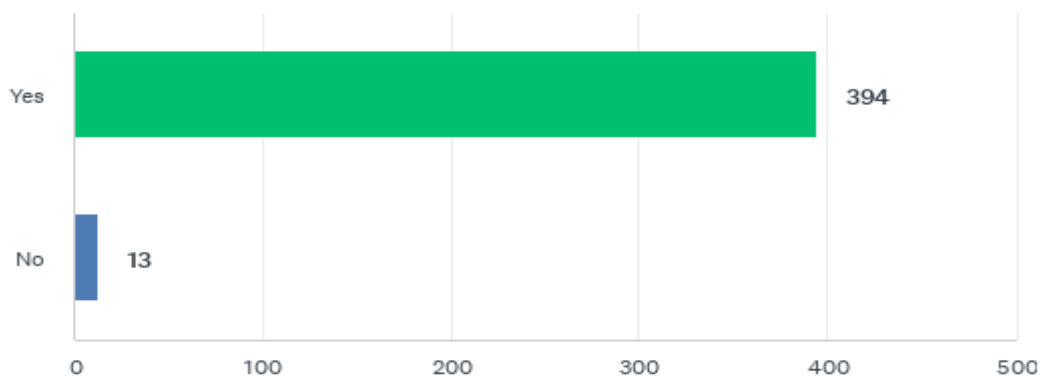
Respondents by gender

Responses: 396

Gender	Count
Male	212
Female	154
Prefer not to say	28
I prefer to self-describ...	2
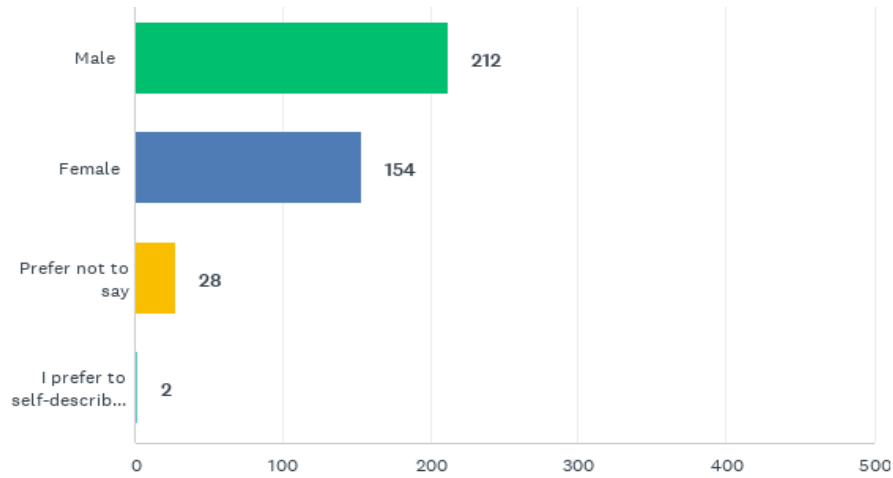
Respondents by trans identity

Responses: 391

Trans identity	Count
Yes	3
No	353
Prefer not to say	35
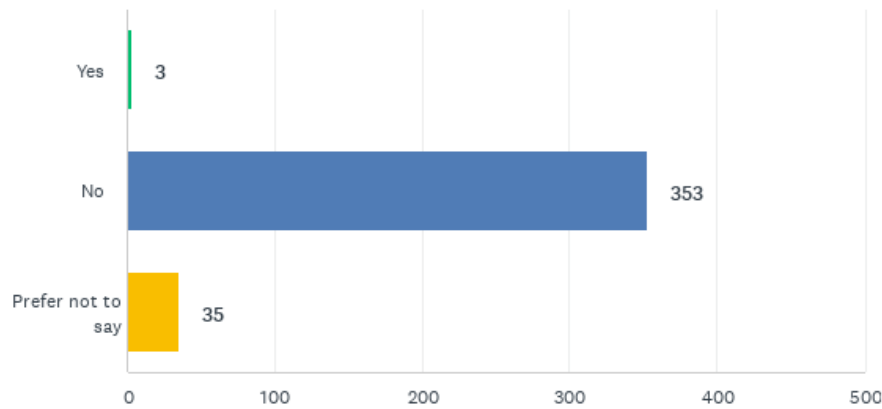
Respondents by age

Responses: 388

Age	Count
Under 18	0
18-24	11
25-34	38
35-44	56
45-54	57
55-64	72
65-74	83
75+	49
Prefer not to say	22
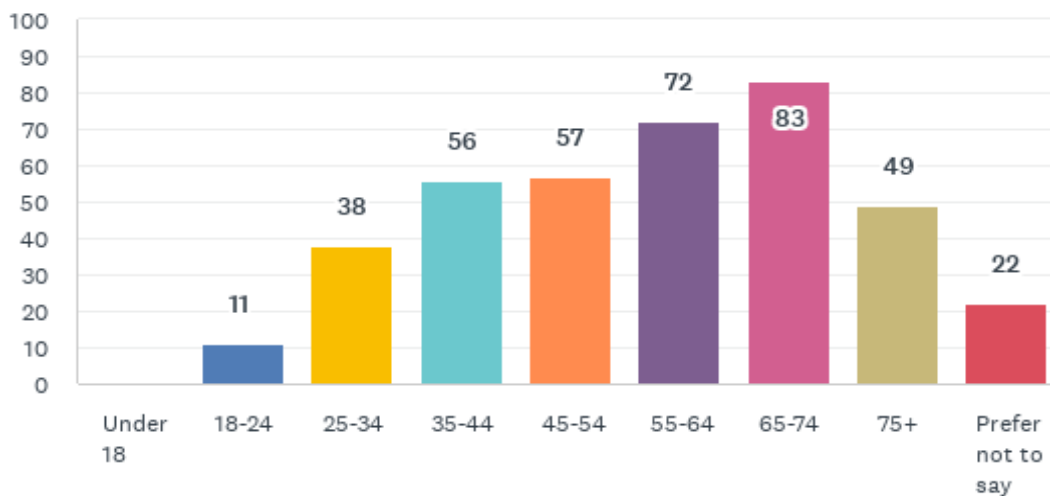
Respondents by ethnicity

Responses: 388

Ethnicity	Count
White English/Scottish/W...	334
White Irish	4
Any other White back...	3
White and Black British	7
Any other mixed or...	1
Asian British	2
Black British	1
Prefer not to say	31
I prefer to self...	5

Respondents by religion

Responses: 381

Religion	Count
No religion	142
Christian (including C of E, Catholic,...)	192
Muslim	2
Prefer not to say	39
Other religion (please specify)	6
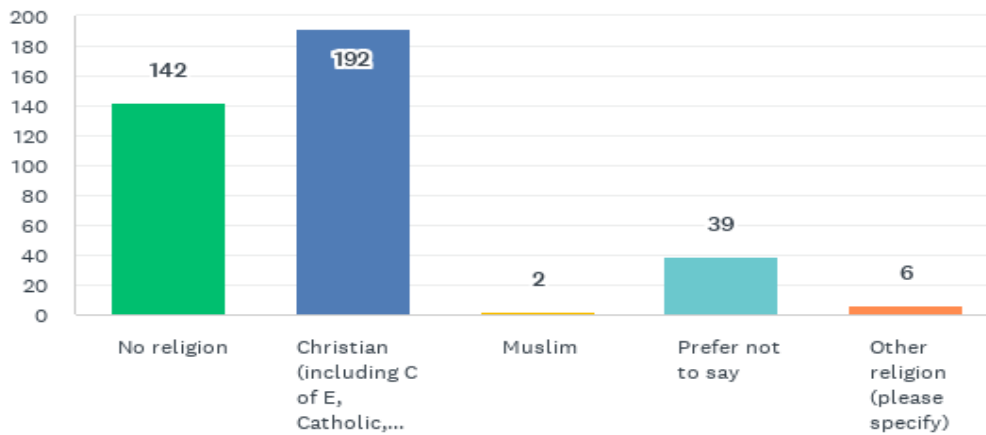
Respondents by sexual orientation

Responses: 382

Sexual orientation	Count
Heterosexual or straight	317
Gay or lesbian	7
Bisexual	9
Prefer not to say	44
Other (please specify)	5
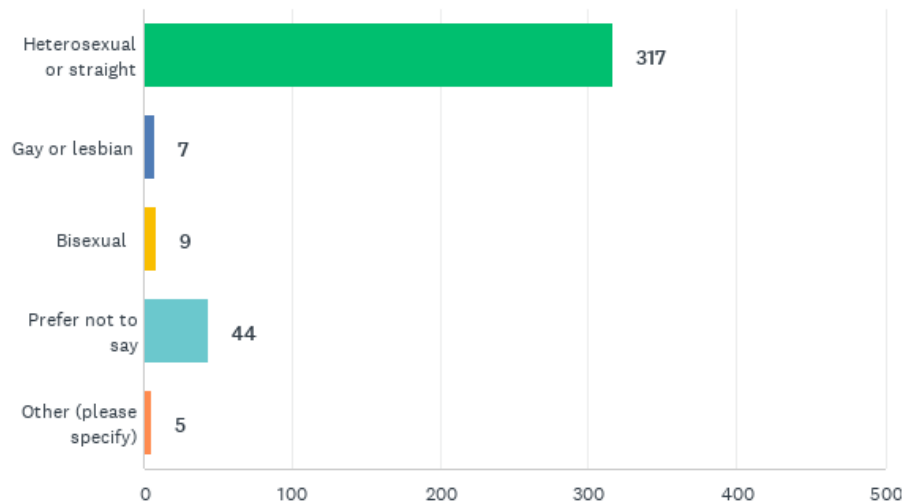
Respondents by disability status

Responses: 387
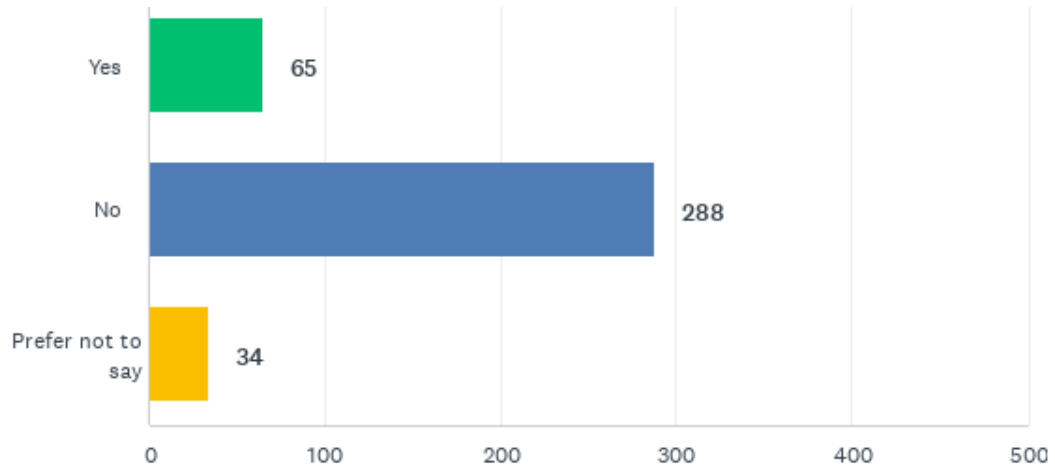
Free text comments

A total of 216 free text comments were received through the course of the consultation process. Of these, 33 stated the respondent had no further comment to make and these have not been included within the list of comments below.

- Pay staff more! Life savers!
- The proposed increase is miniscule to each rate paper. The overall operational response needs improvement which only increase in funding will provide.
- If the service need money to make proposals happen throughout the county, then that's how it is, it's a growing economy and the responsibilities of the service only grow by each year so the budget should reflect that and a public service such as the fire service shouldn't be scrapping the bucket to make the necessities happen.
- An increase in funding is vital to provide class a fire service to the every growing residents & visitors of Cheshire. Whether it be pay increases to attract top talent to fill positions; to provide up to date modern equipment & vehicles.
- I believe funding needs to be increased to ensure the fire service has up to date equipment and the ability to provide a quick response service to the public. I'm aware of the pressures on on-call stations to be available but feel the wage and benefits do not encourage enough new staff due to the current cost of living.
- A much needed service, invaluable.
- We need our fire service so am happy to pay this.
- Considering how well the finances have been managed since 2014, it's quite low percentage increase! Well done.
- This is such an important service and needs to be able to keep up with improvements.
- If only people knew the full extent of the cuts over the past few years. Having a family member firefighter, I hear things most people don't. Can't begrudge a small increase.
- The service provides a great deal of preventative advice and measures which is as important as the day to day tasks. Hence we need more investment in this area.
- Essential service that has been underfunded for a decade.
- This is a vital service and we the public all rely on you being there when we are in danger. If help is needed to raise the funds to continue with your vital work then I believe we should agree to help.
- Its a small increase for a very valuable service.
- More investment.
- Everything costs more and we need a good service.
- With fire nothing is too high a price to pay.
- The Fire Service is crucial and should be properly funded.
- Don't think anyone would notice such a small amount - could be more for me
- One day I might need the Fire and Rescue Service. I am happy to pay for that eventuality
- Although I have answered "strongly agree" there is actually not enough information in the statement for me to give a more nuanced answer. My response assumes pay awards will be greater than 2.99%, although there will be some efficiencies to be made there will also be cuts which will impact possibly on the most vulnerable.
- The fire service needs help to keep the people of Cheshire safe, I think what ever the proposal is it should be granted. A few extra pounds a year is nothing considering the work that the fire service do.
- You should be asking for at least a figure that does not make the authority worse off in real terms.
- You deserve more.
- It's a. Investment into health and safety.
- We need to stay protected and so if CT needs increasing, it has to be done rather than risk lives.
- The increase should be 50% more.

- Investment in such an essential service deserves strong public input to strengthen this resource.
- If the increase is necessary to keep the level of service, then a no brainer. It should increase.
- For the small increase I think the gain is substantial enough to warrant it. It's an emergency service designed to save lives and property.
- It is an emergency service & the funds need to be available to ensure this important service continues.
- Fire Police and Ambulance service all need support.
- People's safety is worth more than money.
- It's a no-brainer for a few pounds a year. I witnessed a house fire and it is a terrible experience.
- Only that to invest in something as essential as fire and rescue is worth paying slightly more for.
- With the amount of extra houses being built the revenue surely is also increasing. We need more emergency services not less
- The fire brigade is an essential service and to reduce this will put lives at risk. I do not begrudge paying extra for this service.
- The security of the local people is worth the cost.
- The fire and rescue services require pay increases alongside the rest of the emergency service services.
- I don't mind paying the increase in tax, but strongly oppose reducing fire engines. Look to improve efficiencies by reducing admin and sharing IT systems
- Fire service, along with all Emergency Services, need to be properly funded. Particularly when dealing with such a wide and diverse geographical area.
- If we want a service for a first world economy we have to pay for it.
- It's such a trifling amount for such a vital life saving service. Just do it
- Yes up the rate if we keep the same amount of fire engines
- For the sake of a few pound a year it isn't worth loosing a fire engine anywhere
- I think you could have asked for more than 2.99%
- You all deserve a better pay rise for doing the remarkable job that you do
- We need an efficient, well funded and well equipped fire and rescue service.
- I strongly agree to pay more to keep the service.
- Good for people safety
- We must ensure we have a Fire Service which has the ability to meet all current and future demands and requirements!
- My daughter needed assistance and I agree to paying a little extra
- a small increase to keep vital services is okay with me. The key is that if you are increasing it for this service then the money should go to the service, and not get watered down, or used in other areas if there are gaps.
- I would support an increase in line with RPI increase.
- It seems reasonable
- Seems reasonable
- It is a service which we cannot lose!
- Cheshire fire authority are a vital service and must be able to continue to maintain their high standards and protect the People of Cheshire
- Would be nice for the government to support more but support the need for a budget increase
- Emergency Services deserve our support. We hope never to need them but their presence is essential!
- We need a good fire and rescue service. Our current service is well run so the increase should be supported.
- No, it's a reasonable increase. Well done for managing your budget so well and providing transparency.
- No, I support the increase
- We need to recognise rising costs impact the service provided and investment is needed.

- As long as the increase is considered fair and reasonable when compared directly to UK's annual CPI inflation rate. Also the amount or percentage provided by Government does not reduce. This existing Government has unfairly reduced the amount of money it provides to all public sector budgets causing the ratepayers to make up the budget gap by increases majority of Council's Pre-cepts charges. This is a very underhanded method of this Government increasing taxation for all.
- I recognise the need for the budget to increase given the effects of inflation.
- An unavoidable need but a comparatively small increase compared to the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- Absolutely agree
- The Fire Authority has to cope with inflationary pressures that we all do, it is sensible to maintain the precept in line with inflation and hence the efficiency of the Brigade.
- Very important to increase income to improve services
- With arson attacks on the increase like recent wheelie bin fires we need to support our fire & rescue services & make sure they have everything they need to do their job properly
- Providing that service quality is maintained at a high level and, assuming the tax payer wants that service, we should be prepared to pay what is necessary for that service to be provided.
- It's an essential service which needs full support.
- How much money has been wasted on shared services with the Police? How much did the failed On Call program cost? These would have covered any precept increase for several years
- Senior management teams wages are astronomical!
- Giving valuable equipment to Ukraine for virtual signal projects without approval from the public
- Turn down heating in council offices
- Do away with EDI positions; they are not necessary. Spend on quality frontline equipment and not on speciality items such as rainbow lanyards/pins/banners, etc. Spend on training and frontline pay, not managers.
- I would like to see the pay scales of managers at CFRS and a list of their roles before I made a decision. In my experience the emergency services have too many management posts and need streamlining
- Cut seniors officers
- Lack of availability at your retained stations
- I would accept this increase if Cheshire fire was increasing the amount of wholetime pumps to 24/7 cover. You have closed two stations 50% of the time. If the on call was incentivised correctly to at least 50% of a whom time firefighters salary you would get retention and increase recruitment for those stations.
- I hear your cutting fire engines at night
- Lack of fire cover in my area
- My local area is set to see a reduction in fire engine cover
- Total lack of investment in the next generation of fire and rescue personnel. Large number of on-call roles pushes people to look at other full time roles. Changes are being made hopefully to replace with full time week crews which we support
- I would support an increase in tax if they were not cutting the number of fire engines
- Support but only in the condition that there are no cuts to the number of engines at Northwich
- Fire Services are an essential service and should be treated as such. There should be two fire engines per large town to ensure full coverage and support as well as rural communities.
- It's vital to keep all the engines we have, these have all been drastically cut previously.
- I feel that increasing the council tax 2.99% would be OK if Northwich wasn't at risk of losing 1 of the fire engines they have. It seems slightly odd you would increase the cost yet take some of the service away... It's a big town which often floods and needs all the help it can get on occasions. The fire service is an amazing emergency service. But there's more and more houses being built here, with a possibility of less fire engines - how could an overstretched watch get round it all?

- CWAC residents have seen numerous increases in recent years across a range of services and seeing a decline in service delivery everywhere. This feels like a further burden at a financially difficult time for all whilst a potentially reduced number of vehicles is in the offing.
- I will only support an increase if it means we retain rural fire services and not just ploughed into city and town centre fire stations.
- You can't get rid of fire engines and expect an increase in spending. Other brigades manage it on similar budgets.
- No change to number of engines at Northwich
- Don't reduce fire engines in Northwich please
- We must not lose any engines.
- It's an excessive increase to loose and engine in Northwich
- Loss of on call station recruitment is dire
- You are closing Northwich
- Our village is 'supported' by an on call fire service who due to other jobs are unable to be on call in the working day. If we have to rely on services coming from much further for the working day, why can't we rely on them in the evening and not have an on call service or have a 'hub' between some of the more rural on call stations so that not as many staff are required
- Do NOT reduce the number of fire engines from Northwich fire station
- Do NOT reduce the number of fire engines out of Northwich.
- The payment of council tax would increase and yet Northwich and other areas would loose a fire engine. With 4 fire engines not being available evenings and weekends
- Pay more for less?
- Is it not possible to budget to maintain current resources opposed to taking even more services and jobs from the community? Appalling that we are to lose resources and pay for the privilege.
- It's a joke, council tax going up, yet the fire engine at Birchwood is being cut 50 percent
- Pay retired firefighters the pension they are owed under immediate detriment
- Pay the pension money that you owe the recently retired firefighters
- Fire authorities are overpaid for the work they do
- We are already taking a big hit as tax payers
- The Fire Authority needs to streamline its services by sharing with neighbouring authorities to reduce costs, achieve economies of scale along with efficiency savings. It is totally unacceptable to keep making residents pay more during a cost of living crisis. The old adage 'cut your cloth according to your pocket' is pertinent to the Fire Authority.
- Costs and Budgets can not keep going up year on year to pay for pay deals and pension costs. I haven't received any pay increases in the private sector since 2021 but still need to meet the rises in the cost of living. Concentrate on working leaner and not just using council tax as a get of jail card.
- Fire authority members happy to increase their expenses claims whilst saying a precept increase is required for council tax. Not acceptable
- Happy for percentages to be adjusted within the council tax I pay however not to an increase in payment from me.
- Don't agree with the proposal at all.
- Council Tax is paid to provide all services. Any additional funding requested suggests mismanagement by the Council of such funds.
- More payment less service? Quite literally doesn't add up.
- Not needed, make savings internally
- There has been increases every year and we pay enough money for the council tax
- The Fire Service have done very well to maintain/further improve service levels etc over the past year but it must work within the finances available and fund continuing improvement through increased efficiencies as most businesses in the Private Sector would do.
- Don't agree with the proposal. Less appliances at night and at weekend within my area and an increase in council tax. Absolutely not.

- Reduce management costs though.
- I'm not getting any more money during this 'cost of living crisis' and have to make sacrifices to survive! but it seems that police, fire, council can just increase their demands every year.
- With inflation at its current high level the average rate payer could also be queuing at a food bank !! We cannot stand any more rate increase you must for once cut your own costs accordingly
- we are paying to much has it is
- In the current financial climate all changes should be done within existing budgets
- You continually waste money on unnecessary items. To name a few the joint shared services scheme with Cheshire police, how much did that cost? Support staff uniform? Fire bikes for road safety initiatives that do not target the young and those just hitting the roads. There is no accountability for the money you spend and I would love to see more transparency.
- Absolutely disgusting. There is no logic or rationale to these decisions. More crews and services are required to accommodate the increased housing. How is it allowed for more houses to be built without the necessary infrastructure? Increases should only be allowed when a increase in service is provided. The emergency service resources are stretched enough. Disgusting.
- I understand the number of machines are to be reduced, so we pay more for less. People only have so much money, no doubt Cheshire Police will demand an increase again. Council Tax is already like a 2nd mortgage for very poor returns.
- Cut something non safety and useless from the budget instead like flowers on roundabouts
- We are all suffering with the cost of living and unfair we have to pay more because the government can't see how the poor live! They don't understand as they have money!!!
- Council tax is already too high.
- The increase in cost and reduction in service isn't acceptable
- households are under even further financial problems so if fires are not put out on properties the council will have to home people & eventually the Government would have to step in
- Already paying too much in council/local taxes.
- People are already struggling
- It is utterly immoral to request people pay more when they are struggling to make ends meet.
- I'm an OAP and can't afford increase
- I and my family didn't receive any increases in salary in the last year but have seen all our costs go up, find savings in other areas, like not painting fire engines with rainbow flags etc.... spend less money on DE&I and that way as a resident in Cheshire I don't have to pay for the pandering Cheshire Fire brigade does!!
- Including other services wanting more it's too much
- Cost of living, find ways to save money
- Sick of everybody trying to inflate prices higher than budget ! I do not receive more !
- With the council tax going up so much it is becoming less and less defendable.
- You can't keep putting council tax up.
- It's an absolutely disgraceful to even think of putting the charges up And I strongly along with a lot of people disagree stop taking increases from people ,If you really care don't do it .
- Cost of living already a problem
- First it's fire ... then it's police ... then it summit else...in these times I wouldn't expect an increase.
- I haven't received a pay rise for two years, when you pay your chief over 125k per year I wonder what the wage bill is for senior managers , let's see some cost savings internally
- Fire houses are closing therefore no increase is needed
- Like all public sector organisations, there is still too much waste and there are other areas that this money could be saved to prevent further increases to the precept year on year when everyone is struggling to pay a mortgage and bills
- The cost of living is currently hurting everyone this would just be the proverbial straw that breaks the camels back
- Why increase year on year ?people can no longer afford heat and food !

- We all have to tighten our belts I'm afraid, this includes the fire service
- Cost of living crisis. Every little helps.
- A fire engine is being removed from my area there is no way I would support an increase for a reduced service
- Far too much increase we pay taxes towards this service, now they are going to cut men and engines what are we paying for?
- People are struggling already with bills
- It is not fair to increase this budget as the police are increasing there's too and it will affect a lot more people
- It's an open book and honest insight for a service which is highly thought of and respected within the community.
- They put their lives at risk, to save others.
- I live in a small village far away from immediate help. The fire service provide advice and free smoke alarms.
- Maintain enough fire engines to deal with fires and rescues in Cheshire. Save money by investing in computer systems that replace back room staff.
- I think everybody paying council tax should pay the same amount.
- I already get very little from my council tax
- There should be greater cooperation with the Police and other organisations in the investigation of possible cases of arson. An example is the recent fire that destroyed the disused Birchfield Park clubhouse in Tuson Drive, Widnes.
- The council tax raises yet we revive less services each year and even worse contact and completed jobs from CWAC. Just look at the disgrace of the potholes all over our roads that are never repaired!
- What % of budget is funded by commercial/industry?
- Yes I know what it like to be looking for a fire engine people
- If the fire service were given this rise the firefighters would agree not to strike in this authority
- We need them
- It's a tricky one. The fire service is one of those services that seems invisible- but is crucial when needed!
- What happens if there is an emergency on the M6 or M56 requiring a fire engine. We also have numerous industries.
- Important to make some statement of accounts, so that citizens can clearly see where the money is going.
- Yet again rate payers or expected to be an everlasting source of fiancé !!!
- Ellesmere Port second fire engine moved to Chester the previous year reducing the cover but there was no reduction in tax
- I would fully support this increase IF all the Private Schools in Cheshire Paid their share in Council Tax for all the buildings and grounds they own but due to a ancient charity status they pay next to nothing....
- Please keep redundancies to a minimum
- Safety is of the utmost importance in our community
- Public services have been under funded for years.
- Everything is going up this should be subsidised by the government as they get enough taxes out of us
- Should be funded by central government by increasing tax on higher earners
- Government should being more to support local councils instead of reducing their funding

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF:	CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE:	14 FEBRUARY 2024
REPORT OF:	TREASURER
AUTHOR:	PAUL VAUGHAN

SUBJECT:	**2024-25 BUDGET;** **COUNCIL TAX PRECEPT; AND** **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024-29**

Purpose of Report

1.   The purpose of this report is to allow Members to:

   a.   Approve the Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-29;

   b.   Agree the Authority's 2024-25 budget (including the Net Budget Requirement);

   c.   Agree the Authority's 2024-25 council tax precept as required by law;

   d.   Approve the Authority's Capital Programme and funding;

   e.   Approve the Authority's Capital Strategy; and

   f.   Approve the Authority's Reserve Strategy.

Recommended: That Members

[1]   Approve the Medium-Term Financial Plan set out in Appendix 1;

[2]   Agree the 2024-25 budget, including the Net Budget Requirement of £56,479k (as set out in Table 1 paragraph 11) which takes account of adjustments for inflation, growth, one off-items and savings (as detailed in Appendix 2);

[3]   Agree the proposed council tax precept increase of £2.61 at Band D (2.99%) and set a Band D council tax precept of £90.09 for 2024-25;

[4]   Agree the levels of council tax precept set out in Table 2, paragraph 30;

[5]   Approve the proposed Capital Programme for 2024-25 set out in Table 3, paragraph 31 together with its associated funding;

[6]   Approve the Capital Strategy set out in Appendix 3;

[7]   Approve the Reserves Strategy set out in Appendix 4;

[8]   Note the Statement of Robustness of Estimates set out in Appendix 5; and

[9]	Adopt the Financial Health Targets set out in paragraphs 35.

Medium Term Financial Plan and Funding Position

2.	The Authority is required to approve a budget and set a council tax precept (the Authority's share of the council tax bill) for the financial year commencing 1 April 2024. The Authority is required to take into account government funding, precept regulations and organisational demands. This requirement is supported by the production of a Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) with the annual budget forming the first year of the MTFP. The creation and maintenance of the MTFP is fundamental in promoting good financial planning and delivery of value for money. The MTFP is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

3.	Government funding is provided through the Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) which includes Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Baseline Funding (i.e., Business Rates paid over to the Authority by the four local authorities together with a Top Up grant from Government), to provide a minimum agreed funding level. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, published on 18 December 2023, is a one-year only settlement, although supporting documentation from the Office of Budget Responsibility indicates that funding beyond 2024-25 (to 2028-29) is estimated to increase by 0.9% only. The potential impact of Government plans and commitments in the funding of the NHS, defence and other protected departments, suggest that Government funding of non-protected departments may fall. The Final Local Government Settlement for 2024-25 was confirmed by the ministerial statement on 5th February 2024.

4.	The Government pays local authorities (including fire authorities) Section 31 Grants to counteract the impact of the Government's policy in respect of business rates on new and small businesses. The Government has indicated that this grant is likely to remain in place until revisions to the Business Rates Retention Scheme are introduced. Therefore, it remains within the forecasts in the MTFP. When the grant is withdrawn, the loss of funding should be replaced, in theory, by an increase in business rates receivable from the local authorities.

5.	The Government sets a limit on the amount by which a local authority can increase its council tax each year. Should any local authority wish to increase council tax by more it would need to carry out a referendum and gain approval from local council tax payers. Members will be aware that the fire sector, including this Authority, has lobbied government to allow a £5 increase per Band D property as happened in 2023-24. Government has confirmed that the referendum limit for 2024-25 for fire authorities will be 2.99%, in line with the base position for local authorities. The difference in funding between an increase of 2.99% and £5 is around £950k. It is assumed that the 2.99% limit will apply only for one year, and that from 2024-25 the referendum limit for

the Authority will be 1.99%, as inflation is forecast to fall in future years.

6.   Additionally, there is a financial impact from both the council tax and business rates collection funds. Each year council tax and business rates income are calculated based on assumed levels of collection rates, benefit levels and other discounts, by the local authorities. This means that, at the end of each year, an adjustment is made to reflect the actual collection rates. This can lead to a one-off surplus or deficit on the fund that must be accounted for within the calculation of the following year's net budget requirement. The four local authorities declare these amounts in January each year. The Authority is required to pay its share of any deficit or will receive its share of any surplus. The Authority has a funding reserve in place which will be utilised to offset the impact of this in 2024-25 which is estimated to be a deficit £100k.

7.   The Authority will receive two grants which are being treated as funding in 2024-25, being a continuation of the Service Grant (£66k), and, as a recognition that the Authority' spending power has not increased by a minimum level of 4% when compared to 2023-24, a Funding Guarantee Grant (estimated to be £880k). It is not assumed that these grants will continue beyond 2024-25.

8.   Included in the MTFP and the proposed 2024-25 budget are a number of financial assumptions. The level of expenditure incurred increases each year based on a number of factors such as pay awards, inflation and additional demands, or burdens. The following lists the financial assumptions included within the MTFP:

   ▪   Pay awards – for 2024-25 a 4% increase has been included with 2% thereafter.

   ▪   Price inflation – specific increases applied for known high inflation areas such as energy, business rates, occupational health and ICT with most other budgets inflated at 2%;

   ▪   Borrowing – additional borrowing is required to meet the planned capital programme, although the exact timing will depend on actual spend. Interest payable is based on the forecast interest rates of the Authority's Treasury Management advisors;

   ▪   Funding – while the main details of funding for 2024-25 are now known, the Office for Budget Responsibility has only estimated Government departmental spend at a high level. How this translates into funding for the Authority remains uncertain. An additional 0.9% has been assumed in the MTFP in Revenue Support Grant in 2024-25 onwards, but no increase is assumed in the Baseline Funding Level.

9.   Both the MTFP and the proposed 2024-25 budget include the estimated on-going impact of inflationary pressures, but these remain subject to change given the uncertainty of the economic situation. In particular, the government's decision to limit Council Tax increases to 2.99% for 2024-25 has impacted the finances of the Authority significantly. However, this has been in part mitigated by other areas of the settlement, particularly the receipt of the Funding Guarantee Grant. This has allowed the Authority to include an assumption of a 4% increase in salaries in the 2024-25 budget. If the Authority is subject to significant rises in pay inflation (or other significant inflationary increases) in 2024-25 or later years, then if necessary, it would need to utilise reserves to offset any immediate in-year impact. It would then need to reconsider delivery of the Community Risk Management Plan. The budget building process includes sensitivity analysis, where officers consider the impact of different budget scenarios, including significant increases in expenditure. If it became necessary, savings plans to offset the impact of such a scenario would be presented to Members for consideration.   The Authority would also need to consider whether capital proposals remain affordable.

Proposed Revenue Budget 2023-24

10.   The proposed 2024-25 budget takes into account the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement as published on 18 December 2023 and the final settlement announced on 5th February 2024. The Settlement includes the Government's Funding Assessment and grant allocations for 2024-25. An increase in the council tax precept of 2.99% at Band D is assumed which would generate additional funding of £1,402k compared to 2023-24, based on the tax bases of Band D equivalent properties. Of this increase, around £365k is due to the estimated increase in tax base. When all elements of funding are included – such as Revenue Support Grant and business rate income - the overall net revenue budget would increase by £4,735k compared to the previous year, including a 2024-25 Service Grant (including the Funding Guarantee) of £946.

11.   Based on all the above information and assumptions, the following table sets out the proposed 2024-25 budget.

Table 1 – Budget Proposals 2024-25		£000
Budget	Base Budget	50,076
	Inflation	2,190
	Commitments (Appendix 2)	2,895
	Growth (Appendix 2)	1,606
	One-off items (Appendix 2)	850
	Budget Requirement before savings and reserve movements	**57,617**
	Identified savings (Appendix 2)	(492)
	Transfers from revenue reserves (Appendix 2)	(798)
	Transfer to capital reserve (Appendix 2)	152
	Proposed Budget Requirement	**56,479**

Funding	Revenue Support Grant	(6,960)
	Business Rates Top Up Grant	(5,562)
	Local Business Rates Income	(4,717)
	Precept (Council Tax) - at 2.99% Band D increase	(35,798)
	Collection Fund deficit - business rates	19
	Collection Fund deficit - council tax	81
	Section 31 Business Rates Grant	(2,596)
	Funding Guarantee Grant	(880)
	Services Grant 2024-25	(66)
	Total Funding (Net Budget Requirement)	**(56,479)**

Precept (Council Tax - Band D)	**£90.09**
Increase from 2023-24 Band D of £87.48	**£2.61**

12.   As the above table shows, this delivers a balanced budget as required by law. Should the Authority wish to propose a council tax precept that is lower than 2.99%, further savings would be required. For example, a 1.99% increase (rather than 2.99%) would reduce funding by approximately £350k.

Commitments

13.   Commitments reflect the impact of previous decisions that have a financial consequence in 2024-25 or are due to legal, or regulatory changes. These are set out in Appendix 2.

14. Up until 2023-24, the government has included as a Section 31 (discretionary) grant an amount of £2,104k to offset the cost of a previous increase in firefighter pension employer contributions. This has previously been presented in the budget in such a way that it nets off against costs. From 2024-25, this grant will be added into the Revenue Support Grant, which is shown in the Authority's budget as funding. In order to make the necessary formatting changes, there is a requirement to include the gross expenditure in the budget for the first time in 2024-25. In addition, there is a funding adjustment of £374k from previous years included in the budget.

15. The 2023-24 budget included an allowance for a pay increase of 6% in respect of the Grey Book pay award for 2022-23, which at the time the 2023-24 budget was approved had not been agreed. The final pay award for 2022-23 was for 7% and so an additional 1% (£290k) is included in the 2024-25 budget. The 2023-24 budget also included an allowance for a pay increase of 5% in 2023-24. The pay award agreed for Green Book employees for 2023-24 was in fact slightly less than 7%. The additional approximately 2% (£127k) is therefore now included in the 2024-25 budget.

Growth Proposals

16. A number of growth proposals are presented for approval in Appendix 2. These were considered by Members at the Member Planning Day on 10th January 2024.

17. The Authority includes an allowance in its budget calculations, which reduces the budget and is intended to reflect the impact of establishment levels, the relationship between the number of competent firefighters and number that are in development, the number of firefighters in the pension scheme and the potential impact of the policies relating to maternity and paternity. Monitoring firefighters' pay budgets indicates that the provision is not currently in line with actual spend and it is proposed to reduce it by £400k. The impact of the allowance will continue to be monitored.

18. The estimated impact of the borrowing required to support the capital programme, specifically in relation to Crewe Fire Station, the purchase of houses at Wilmslow and the continuing programme of modernising the Authority's houses is £299k, given current assumptions. The potential impact of the cost of replacing Ellesmere Port and Warrington Fire Stations is discussed as part of the MTFP proposals and the Capital Strategy in Appendices 1 and 3.

19. At the Fire Authority meeting in December 2023 Members agreed proposals in respect of updating the service provided to the Authority by North West Fire Control. The impact on the base revenue budget is included as a growth item (£280k).

20. At the Member Planning Day on 10 January 2024, Members received a

presentation on the introduction of a revised Talent Management Scheme which requires the realignment of budgets currently used to fund firefighter apprentices, with the required growth item (£135k) being more than offset by savings (£282k).

21. Other significant base budget growth proposals include changes to support services previously delivered through Blue Light Collaboration, (£108k); IT infrastructure costs (£100k); revenue running costs of the proposed Incident Command Support Unit (£93k); and the estimated increase in business rates at Crewe Fire Station (£75k).

One-off Growth Proposals

22. There are also some temporary, one-off growth items as set out in Appendix 2. Some of these will be funded from reserves.

23. In relation to North West Fire Control, in addition to the costs recommended to be added to the base budget, there are some one-off costs required. Of these, £396k relate to the procurement of a new mobilising system. This is the first-year cost of a three year programme, with the impact built into the MTFP.

24. The Public Service Telephone Networks require updating on the Authority's fire stations (£124k) to continue to support the level of communication required.

25. Other one-off growth items include an estimate for costs relating to the implementation of the CRMP (£56k), replacing foam concentrate (£46k), particulate flashhoods (£35k), additional temporary HR work (£24k) and refreshing some of the sets at Safety Central (£24k).

Proposed Savings

26. Assuming the proposed increases in expenditure are approved, savings will be required as the level of funding from the Government, local business rates and council tax precept will not be sufficient to meet expenditure levels in 2024-25. Proposals for savings totalling £492k have been identified which provide a balanced budget position. A full list of the proposed savings is included in Appendix 2.

27. As discussed in paragraph 20 above, there is a saving in the apprentice budget (£282k), with further savings from the impact of senior salary changes (£87k) and the discontinuation of remaining COVID budgets (£57k). Review of other revenue budgets has identified a number of other small savings.

Use of reserves

28. Aa well as including one off-growth proposals, Appendix 2 also identifies those which are intended to be funded from reserves. Reserve funding is also intended to be used to enhance the Protection service in 2024-25, and as mentioned in paragraph 6, to offset collection fund deficits. There may be further use of reserves in 2024-25, for example in relation to McCloud administration costs, Protection prosecutions, and in support of the Station Modernisation Programme, but these have not been specifically identified in the budget as they remain uncertain and difficult to estimate.

29. The Authority's funding includes a £66k Services Grant, and it is assumed that this will not be continued in future years. In order to offset future potential funding issues, it is proposed to transfer this to reserves. In addition, it is also proposed to transfer £152k from the revenue budget to the capital reserve as a one-off to assist with future capital funding, especially in relation to the replacement fire stations that are required at Ellesmere Port and Warrington.

Council Tax Precept

30. To calculate the level of Council Tax funding, each local authority calculates the taxbase (the assimilated number of council tax bills issued) taking into account changes in the number of houses, council tax benefits etc. Compared to 2023-24, the overall taxbase has increased by 4,172.28 (last year the increase was 5,744.36). The following table shows the proposed level of precepts for each local authority and the individual amount levied for each Council Tax band, based on the assumption of a 2.99% increase to £90.09 for Band D.

Table 2: Proposed Precepts 2024-25	Number of Band D Equivalents	Precept on Collection Fund £
Cheshire East	160.151.52	14,428,051
Cheshire West & Chester	129,059.20	11,626,943
Halton	36,409.00	3,280,087
Warrington	71,738.00	6,462,876
TOTAL	**397,357.72**	**35,797,957**

Band	Proposed 2024-25 £	Actual 2023-24 £	Change per year £	Change per week £.p
A	60.06	58.32	1.74	0.03
B	70.07	68.04	2.03	0.04
C	80.08	77.76	2.32	0.04
D	**90.09**	**87.48**	**2.61**	**0.05**
E	110.11	106.92	3.19	0.06
F	130.13	126.36	3.77	0.07
G	150.15	145.80	4.35	0.08
H	180.18	174.96	5.22	0.10

Capital Strategy

31.   In addition to the revenue budgets, a programme of capital investment is proposed for 2024-25. Funding for this comes from receipts from the sale of assets, reserves held by the Authority and, when necessary, borrowing. Details of the proposed capital budget for 2024-25 is shown in the following table together with the proposed funding. Further details are included in the Capital Strategy attached to this report as Appendix 3.

Table 3 - Proposed Capital Programme	2024-25 £000
Annual Replacement Schemes:	
Fleet Vehicles	1,093
Provision for new projects	250
ICT & Communications	50
Existing Schemes:	
Fleet Vehicles	547
Fire Station modernisation	3,000
House modernisation	250
Capital Expenditure	**5,190**
Financed by:	
General Capital Grants	0
Capital Receipts	0
Capital Reserves and Revenue Contributions	4,940
Borrowing	250
Total Funding	**5,190**

32.   The Authority receives no dedicated grant for capital, and this means that in order for the Authority to invest in its assets it continues to include movements from its revenue budget into capital reserves, which mitigates the costs of borrowing to support its capital programme. The Authority is planning to complete a programme of modernisation and, where necessary, replacement of its fire stations during the lifetime of the MTFP. The impact of the funding to complete this programme has been included in the MTFP and now includes the fire stations at Ellesmere Port and Warrington. More detail is included in the Capital Strategy in Appendix 3.

Reserves Strategy

33.   Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 places a requirement on Chief Finance Officers (the Section 151 Officer) to formally report on the adequacy of the reserves. The Chief Finance Officers assess this in the context of the strategic, operational and financial risks and opportunities facing the Authority.

34.   While holding reserves is a recognised and recommended financial management tool, the levels of such reserves must remain prudent, appropriate to the level of risk and opportunity and not excessive. This is set out within the Reserves Strategy attached at Appendix 4, which includes details of the reserves held and their proposed usage over the next five years.

Financial Health Targets

35.   It is considered best practice to maintain a set of Financial Health Targets. The Financial Health Targets below are those previously adopted by the Authority.

- That the Authority reviews and approves its Reserves Strategy on an annual basis. This should be supplemented by consideration of the level of reserves at mid-year review.

- That the Authority maintains its revenue spending within 1% of its revenue budget.

- That the Authority reduces slippage to 25% of the total capital programme (the total capital programme includes the existing capital programme and slippage brought forward from previous years).

36.   Performance against these targets will be reported to Members as part of the quarterly financial reviews.

Robustness of Estimates

37.   Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 also places a requirement on Chief Finance Officers to report on the robustness of estimates used in preparation of the budget proposals. Details of how this requirement has been met are set out in Appendix 5.

Conclusion

38.   The proposed budget 2024-25 as set out in this report relies upon, in part, the Local Government Finance Settlement, which was again a one-year settlement. Savings have been identified through a thorough review of departmental budgets with the intention to protect and ensure continuity of service delivery.

39.   The Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024-25 includes Council Tax Referendum Principles that allow for an increase in council tax of up to 2.99% at Band D. This level has not been exceeded.

40.   Section 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires an authority to set its Net Budget Requirement. Based on the proposed council tax increase of 2.99%, the net budget requirement will amount to £56,479k.

Financial Implications

41.   This report considers financial matters.

Legal Implications

42.   The Authority is required to approve a balanced budget and set its precept charge on the council tax by mid-February 2024.

Equality and Diversity Implications

43.   This is a strategic report that does not contain detailed proposals that have any equality and diversity implications, a particular proposal may have such implications but will be identified as each is assessed.

Environmental Implications

44.   This is a strategic report that does not contain detailed proposals that have any environmental implications. A particular proposal may have such implications but will be identified as each is assessed.

CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING MANAGER
TEL [01606] 868804
BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024 TO 2029

1. **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The purpose of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is to provide the Authority, staff, the public and other stakeholders with information on the financial outlook and the estimated available funding over the next five years. The MTFP takes into account future high level potential revenue and capital expenditure based upon current known information and estimates.

2. **THE BUDGET STRATEGY**

2.1 The purpose of the budget strategy is to provide a basis for determining:

- The level of funding available in the future to deliver national and local priorities;
- The future demands upon the revenue budget;
- The impact of external factors;
- The financial implications of collaborations, partnerships etc.;
- The amount of capital investment which is required to achieve corporate objectives;
- The revenue consequences of such capital investment;
- The future reserve levels;
- The impact of additional demands on the level of council tax that is required; and
- The potential impact of the main financial risks facing the organisation.

2.2 The above help to establish the anticipated level of funding and demands on finances over the MTFP period enabling strategic financial planning processes to address the challenges and outcomes. The following set out the key principles for that planning process:

- Ensure that plans contribute to improved outcomes in support of set priorities within the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP);
- Set a comprehensive, timely, balanced and realistic budget;
- Take into account pay and price inflation and achievability of savings;
- Ensure compliance with the approved treasury management strategy;
- Ensure compliance with the approved reserves strategy;
- Raise awareness of and communicate key financial messages both internally and externally;
- Ensure budgets set are affordable and do not jeopardise financial stability either in the short or long term;
- Demonstrate that all spending plans achieve value for money;
- Agree spending only when the necessary funding is identified and approved;

- Seek external funding wherever it can be used in a sustainable manner that does not lead to unforeseen costs; and
- Publicise significant budget proposals and where appropriate consult with the public and stakeholders in an open and transparent manner

3. **FINANCIAL SCENARIO**

3.1 The MTFP takes account of local, regional, national and global economies. This provides a basis for the estimates and assumptions used.

3.2 The Authority receives its main funding from three sources – Government funding, a share of local business rates and local council tax (known as a precept). These are discussed in more detail below.

3.3 Government funding is provided through a Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) that includes the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and Baseline Funding (i.e., business rates paid over to the Authority by the four local authorities in Cheshire), together with a 'top-up' grant from the Government to ensure a minimum level of funding is achieved. This is supplemented by a Section 31 Business Rates Grant recognising the impact of Government policy which affects local business rates, and a Funding Guarantee grant to ensure that the Authority achieves a minimum level of funding. A grant in respect of pension contributions which has previously been paid as a Section 31 Grant has been rolled into Revenue Support Grant.

3.4 On 18 December 2023 the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities issued the 2024-25 Local Government Finance Settlement that set out the SFA for one year only. In addition to setting SFA, the Secretary of State announced a one-off 2024-25 Services Grant worth £60k for the Authority and a Funding Guarantee Grant worth £880k.

3.5 A precept is levied on the council tax to partly fund Cheshire Fire Authority and it is the responsibility of the Authority to set the level of precept as part of the annual budget setting process. To calculate the level of council tax funding, each local authority calculates the taxbase (the assimilated number of council tax bills issued) taking into account changes in the number of houses, council tax benefits etc. These vary each year and the MTFP includes assumptions for these changes based on discussions with and forecasts supplied by the Cheshire local authorities.

3.6 It is now standard for the Government to set a limit on the amount by which a local authority can increase its council tax each year, with any increase above this limit requiring a referendum. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement confirmed that for 2024-25 this is 2.99% at Band D for one year only.

3.7 Each year the council tax income is calculated based on assumed levels of collection rates by the local authorities. This means that at the end of each year, an adjustment has to be made to reflect the actual collection rate. If more has been collected, the fund will be in surplus; if less has been collected, the fund will be in deficit. The

Authority will either receive its share of any surplus or be required to pay its share of any deficit and this is taken into account as part of the overall budget setting process.

3.8   The same process applies to the collection of local business rates in which the Authority has a 1% stake. The details of these are published by the end of the January prior to setting the budget.

3.9   Based on the above and other known factors, the following table shows the forecast funding over the MTFP period. Although the table forecasts increase in the council tax, the decision will be made by the Authority as part of the annual budget setting process.

Table 1 - Funding	2024-25 £000	2025-26 £000	2026-27 £000	2027-28 £000	2028-29 £000
Government - Settlement Funding Assessment	(15,135)	(15,179)	(15,223)	(15,267)	(15,312)
Pension Grant (now core funding)	(2,104)	(2,123)	(2,142)	(2,161)	(2,181)
Section 31 Business Rates Grant	(2,596)	(2,596)	(2,596)	(2,596)	(2,596)
Collection Fund (surplus)/deficit - business rates	19	0	0	0	0
Precept (Council Tax)	(35,798)	(36,964)	(38,169)	(39,412)	(40,696)
Collection Fund (surplus)/deficit - council tax	81	0	0	0	0
Services Grant Allocation	(66)	0	0	0	0
Funding guarantee	(880)	0	0	0	0
Total Funding	(56,479)	(56,861)	(58,130)	(59,436)	(60,785)

4.   FINANCIAL ASSUMPTIONS

4.1   The level of expenditure incurred increases each year due to a number of factors such as pay awards, inflation and additional demands or burdens. The following lists the key financial assumptions included within the MTFP:

- Pay awards – in line with current forecasts, for 2024-25 a 4% increase has been included with 2% in the following years

- Price inflation –specific increases applied for known high inflation areas such as energy with other budgets subject to a 2% increase;

- Borrowing – additional borrowing is required to meet the planned capital programme, although the exact timing will depend on actual spend. Interest payable is based on the forecast interest rates set by the Treasury Management Advisors.

4.2   Funding – while the details of funding in 2024-25 are now largely known, the settlement is for one year only. The government indicated that public sector funding

might expect to see increases of 0.9% from 2025-26 onwards and this has been included for Revenue Support Grant. No increases are assumed for Baseline Funding Level or the section 31 Grant in support of business rates. It is assumed that the Service Grant and Funding Guarantee grant will not be payable after 2024-25. For future years it is assumed that the Council Tax referendum limit will be set at 1.99%, in line with the government's inflation limit.

5.   FINANCIAL FORECASTS 2024-2029

5.1   It is important to note that the MTFP is a high-level strategy document designed to inform and direct the Authority's financial planning over the medium term based on current estimates and assumptions. As with any forecasting, the actual outcome is unlikely to match the forecast. A certain level of detailed information is included in the financial forecasts beyond 2024-25 but these should be regarded as indicative and illustrative rather than firm proposals at this stage. As further information and data become available, the figures will be updated.

5.2   Based on the current information, priorities and assumptions, the table below sets out an indicative budget for 2024-25 to 2028-29. The figures show the budget gap assuming a 2.99% increase at Band D for 2024-25 and a 1.99% increase to the council tax precept each year thereafter, as explained above. These are subject to approval each year by the Authority. Savings above those already identified will need to be identified to meet these predicted shortfalls. The Service undertake a Priority Based Budget exercise each year to highlight priorities, ensure resources are targeted to meet those priorities and to determine those areas of the organisation where efficiencies can be delivered.

Table 2 - Financial Forecasts	2024-25 £000	2025-26 £000	2026-27 £000	2027-28 £000	2028-29 £000
Base Budget	50,076	56,275	56,861	58,130	59,436
Inflation (pay related)	1,486	773	788	804	822
Inflation (non-pay)	704	373	384	395	407
Commitments	2,895				
Growth - permanent	1,606	500	500	760	760
Growth - one off	850	396	396	0	0
Transfer to/from revenue reserves - one off items	(798)	(396)	(396)	0	0
Transfer to/from capital reserves	152	0	0	0	0
Identified Savings	(492)				
Net budget	56,479	57,920	58,533	60,089	61,425

Funding:					
Government - Settlement Funding Assessment	(15,135)	(15,179)	(15,223)	(15,267)	(15,312)
Pension Grant (now core funding)	(2,104)	(2,123)	(2,142)	(2,161)	(2,181)
Section 31 Business Rates Grant	(2,596)	(2,596)	(2,596)	(2,596)	(2,596)
Collection Fund (surplus)/deficit - business rates	19	0	0	0	0
Precept (Council Tax)	(35,798)	(36,964)	(38,169)	(39,412)	(40,696)
Collection Fund (surplus)/deficit - council tax	81	0	0	0	0
Services Grant Allocation	(66)	0	0	0	0
Funding guarantee	(972)	0	0	0	0
Total Funding	(56,479)	(56,861)	(58,130)	(59,436)	(60,785)
Budget deficit	0	1,059	403	653	640

6. GROWTH

6.1 Growth can arise from a number of areas such as increased service demands, new burdens or temporary investment to support change etc.. All growth bids are scrutinised by the Service Leadership Team to ensure they reflect genuine need and are in line with the Authorities plans and priorities. A modest amount of growth is anticipated in the MTFP.

6.2 Where growth is temporary or one-off expenditure and there are specific earmarked reserves set aside to support such activity, these reserves will be used to fund the growth. Temporary growth or one-off expenditure is subject to the same rigour as permanent changes to the base budget.

7. PROPOSED SAVINGS

7.1 As mentioned earlier in the report, the Authority undertakes a priority-based budgeting process that provides a comprehensive review of the entire budget, identifying and ranking services provided based on the Authority's priorities and demands. This diagnostic process enables officers to advise the

Authority about linking funding decisions to the priorities in the Community Risk Management Plan.

7.2 This process also allows rigorous scrutiny of budgets to help identify the opportunities for potential savings.

8. RISK AND SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS

8.1 As with any assumptions there are risks that the actual outcome will be different. There are three key assumptions included within this MTFP that could impact significantly upon the figures presented in this MTFP. These are: the level of government funding; the amount of council tax received; and the level of pay awards agreed nationally. As such the following details the financial impact of changes to the levels assumed in Table 2. It is also important to note that these changes would be cumulative as they represent a change to base level funding.

- For each change of 1% in the level of SFA, the impact would be either a reduction or increase in the budget gap of £152k.
- For every 1% above or below the proposed 2.99% Band D council tax increase, the impact would be a change in funding by approximately £347k per annum.
- Likewise, a 1% movement in the firefighter pay award would have a potential impact of around £290k.

8.2 The MTFP does indicate that savings will be required in the years after 2024-25 given the assumptions used, in particular in 2025-26. The Authority recognises the challenge that this poses. The iterative priority based budgeting process used by the Authority models scenarios which include potential reductions in funding and increases in expenditure, and ensures that officers develop plans to manage budget pressures if required. Spending plans are scrutinised, avenues for additional income explored and potential efficiencies are identified.

8.3 This means that during the process of budget preparation, officers consider what impact on the budget and the MTFP changing the assumptions underpinning the MTFP would make. Officers are then tasked with identifying the potential impact of changes on the delivery of their service and how changes might be accommodated.

8.4 In December 2018, the Court of Appeal ruled that the Government's changes to firefighters' pensions were discriminatory on the grounds of age. The Government has accepted this, and the situation is being remedied. The financial implications are not wholly known at this point as the final costs are unclear and the source of funding remains uncertain. It is likely that the government will fund remedies, but there are other potential costs which may fall on the Authority. In addition there are other future pension costs,

particularly in relation to employer contributions, which may be significant and for which funding has not been clearly identified.

8.5   The Authority has in place equipment replacement strategies which reflect the Authority's desire to ensure that Firefighters are equipped with the best possible equipment. The funding of such strategies remains challenging and will require careful management in the future.

8.6   The Authority has now included in its MTFP and Capital Strategy the replacement of Ellesmere Port and Warrington Fire Stations. Significant risks remain, both in terms of costs and funding. The Authority will monitor progress on the development of plans for these stations closely to ensure that they remain affordable.

9.   INDICATIVE CAPITAL PROGRAMME

9.1   In addition to the revenue budgets, a programme of capital investment is proposed within the MTFP. Funding for this comes from reserves held by the Authority, contributions from the revenue budget and borrowing. Spending profiles are indicative based on current knowledge and actual spend is monitored in-year and reported to Members in the quarterly reviews.

9.2   The following table shows the indicative capital programme and proposed funding:

	2024/25 Estimate £000	2025/26 Estimate £000	2026/27 Estimate £000	2027/28 Estimate £000	2028/29 Estimate £000
Expenditure:					
Annual Replacement Schemes:					
Fleet Vehicles	1640	65	1005	1005	1005
Operational Equipment	0	350	350	350	350
ICT & Communications	50	50	50	50	50
New Schemes:					
Estates – ERP Station Builds	0	0	0	0	0
Estates – Training Centre	0	0	0	0	0
Estates – Chester FS	0	0	0	0	0
Estates – Crewe FS	0	0	0	0	0
Estates – FS Modernisation	3000	3000	0	0	0
Estates – Poynton Drill Tower	0	0	0	0	0
Estates – Houses Modernisation Programme	250	250	250	0	0
Estates – Wilmslow Emergency Services Facility	0	0	0	0	0
Estates- Ellesmere Port & Warrington	0	0	8000	8000	0
Provision for New Project	250	250	250	250	250
Capital Expenditure	**5190**	**3965**	**9905**	**9655**	**1655**
Financed by:					
General capital grants	0	0	0	0	0
Capital Receipts	0	0	1500	1500	0
Contributions from Partners	0	0	0	0	0
Use of Reserves/Revenue Financing	4940	3715	3655	3655	1655
Borrowing	250	250	4750	4500	0
Total Funding	**5190**	**3965**	**9905**	**9655**	**1655**

9.3 Full details of the capital programme and its associated funding are included in the Capital Strategy. In addition, given that the above funding proposals includes borrowing, the impact of this is discussed in more detail within the Treasury Management Strategy.

Budget 2024-25 - Proposed growth, savings and reserve movements   **Appendix 2**

Base budget committed costs	£000
Pension Employer cost	2,104
Previous year pay inflation	417
Previous year funding adjustment	374
	2,895

Base budget growth	
Service delivery vacancy provision	400
Borrowing costs	299
North West Fire Control	280
Apprentices	135
IT infrastructure costs	100
Post BLC changes	108
Incident Command Support Unit Revenue costs	93
Business Rates - Crewe Fire Station	75
Other items	116
	1,606

One-off growth	
North West Fire Control	488
Station end PSTN replacement	124
CRMP severance payments	56
Foam concentrate replacement	46
Replacement particulate flashhoods	35
Temporary HR support	24
Safety Central refresh	24
Other items	53
	850

Savings	£000
Apprentice budget	(282)
Salary related	(87)
Covid budgets	(57)
Other items	(66)
	(492)

Transfers to/from revenue reserves	
North West Fire Control	(488)
Collection Fund deficits	(100)
Use of Protection reserve	(91)
CRMP severance payments	(56)
Foam concentrate replacement	(46)
Replacement particulate flashhoods	(35)
Temporary HR support	(24)
Safety Central refresh	(24)
Transfer Service Grant to funding reserve	66
	(798)

Transfer to capital reserves	152

This page is intentionally left blank

CAPITAL STRATEGY
2024 TO 2029

1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1.   The CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities establishes a framework that supports local strategic planning, asset management and appropriate options appraisal.

1.2.   The objectives of the Code are to ensure that the capital plans of an organisation are affordable, prudent and sustainable and the treasury management decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice and in full understanding of the risks involved.

1.3.   This document updates the previous Capital Strategy approved by the Authority in February 2023.

2.   DEFINITION

2.1.   To utilise the full extent of the Code and its framework, it is essential that there is a clear understanding of what capital expenditure is. Unless expenditure qualifies as capital it will normally fall outside the scope of the Code and its framework and be charged to revenue in the period in which the goods or services were received. If expenditure does qualify as capital, there are opportunities to finance such spend from any capital receipts held or to spread the cost over future years in line with the life of the asset(s) purchased/created.

2.2.   In the main, expenditure must meet one or more of the following conditions for it to be classified as capital:

➢ Spend results in the acquisition, construction or enhancement of an asset (tangible or intangible) in accordance with 'proper practices';
➢ Spend meets one of the definitions specified in regulations made under the 2003 Local Government Act; or
➢ The Secretary of State makes a direction that the expenditure can be treated as capital.

3.   CONTEXT

3.1.   The capital programme requirements of the fire sector nationally are by nature limited in comparison to other public sector organisations such as local authorities who have diverse responsibilities to prioritise including Schools, Housing, Highways and Economic Development. Certainly, this is true of Cheshire Fire Authority with its capital expenditure plans largely limited to replacing and upgrading essential operational assets (e.g. Estate Facilities, Vehicles, Equipment, Communications Infrastructure) together with individual ad-hoc capital investment schemes aimed at improving efficiency and operational performance/priorities which tend to be largely estate based. Examples include the completed programmes to build the Operational Training Facility and replacement Chester and Crewe Fire stations along with the purchase of additional service housing in Wilmslow in order to facilitate a change to a Day Crewed duty system at Wilmslow Fire Station. Currently in progress is the ongoing fire station modernisation programme.

3.2.   In its *'Integrated Risk Management Plan 2020-24'* (IRMP), the Authority sets out its vision for fire and rescue services in Cheshire. The plan sets out a vision in which Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service focus on improving the safety of local communities and in developing its services and its people.

3.3. The IRMP will be replaced with the *"Community Risk Management Plan 2024-28"* (CRMP), subject to the Authority approving the plan. The Capital Strategy continues to support the items within the IRMP and the forthcoming CRMP through improving the estate, operational equipment and fleet vehicles.

3.4. The Authority is committed to having rolling medium term revenue and capital plans (summarised in a Medium Term Financial Plan – MTFP) that usually extend for up to 5 years. The plans are drawn up, reassessed and extended annually and if required re-prioritised to enable the Authority to achieve its aims and objectives established in the IRMP and the CRMP.

3.5. In the past, general capital grant funding of over £1m was received each year, which helped to fund annual replacement of vehicles, IT and operational equipment and capital maintenance of fire buildings. This general grant funding ended in 2014/15. As a result all capital investment since 2015 has been funded from the Authority's own reserves unless specific funding was available. The Authority was very successful in bidding for and achieving specific grant funding towards both the safety centre and earier community fire station builds. However, no further government capital grant funding is anticipated going forward. The level of reserves currently held will not be sufficient to fund the current and proposed capital programmes over the medium term and borrowing will therefore be required going forward to meet the annual replacement programmes as well as investment in new technology and estate. Borrowing incurs on-going costs of interest payments and the funding set aside to repay the loan in due course.

3.6. Key focuses of the Capital Programme plans, all aligned to achieving the Authority's priorities above are:

➢ To ensure the property estate remains fit for purpose, identifying opportunities to streamline assets and develop the estate infrastructure; maintaining core sites and improving core training facilities.

➢ The replacement of other core assets where necessary, e.g. vehicles, operational equipment and communication infrastructure.

➢ Development of improved capability.

➢ To ensure provision is made for information technology to maintain and develop the existing infrastructure and invest in the core technologies required to provide innovative and efficient digital services.

3.7. The plans must take into account the constrained financial position of the Authority and the need to maximise both the available financial resources and the capacity that the Service has to manage change projects.

4. GOVERNANCE

4.1. The annual budget setting process is an ongoing process managed by the Authority's Service Leadership Team (SLT) and other key stakeholder groups assisting departmental managers to identify change proposals and develop business cases for future capital investment requirements with ideas aligned to CRMP priorities.

4.2. Business cases must explicitly identify the organisational requirement, rationale, deliverables, benefits, links to the Authority's priorities and costs in terms of both capital investment and ongoing revenue consequences.

4.3. Based on an agreed budget setting timetable, business cases are submitted for presentation to and scrutiny review by the SLT along with an initial view of potential affordability. Prioritisation is then made, taking into account the following in order of priority:

> Unavoidable (statutory or contractual);

> Operational Need (Enables continuity of agreed service delivery levels and priorities);

> CRMP Improvement Priority;

> Other (efficiency, invest to save, leverage of external funding, etc.).

4.4. An updated Draft Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), including a recommended Capital Programme, is then presented to Members, providing views on affordability, potential funding issues and options.

4.5. A final version of the MTFP is then presented to the Fire Authority for approval in February each year. The MTFP reflects the known funding position and any further updates to the plan. At this stage, the Fire Authority is recommended to agree the capital budget for the following year and acknowledges the intention for planning purposes of the remaining years of the MTFP.

4.6. Where in-year additions to the approved Capital Programme are identified, a business case will be prepared and reviewed by the appropriate board/group (e.g. Performance and Programme Board or Land and Stations Working Group) before being submitted to the SLT. The SLT will then submit the proposal to the Authority for consideration and approval, including details of how the new scheme is to be funded, delivered and benefits realised, noting any ongoing MTFP implications.

4.7. Currently approved Financial Regulations (Section 10 of the Authority Constitution) specify individual officer roles and responsibilities relating to the Capital Programme along with a number of key controls as follows:

> Capital expenditure will be identified as such during the budget building process, and if additional expenditure is approved during the year. The Capital Programme will be approved annually by the Authority. In order to qualify as capital, expenditure must satisfy the following criteria:

- Be in excess of £10k
- Create an asset which has benefits which last for more than one year
- Comply with guidance in the appropriate CIPFA code

> Progress on the Capital Programme will be reported quarterly to the Performance and Overview Committee. The impact of any estimated overspends on the funding of the Programme will be considered and every effort will be made to accommodate the impact within the existing funding package. If the overall impact cannot be accommodated, then the

Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive with the Treasurer/Head of Finance jointly may approve an increase in funding of up to £50k. For funding above this level, approval must be sought from the Authority.

4.8. Following approval of the Capital Programme, a programme or project manager and a user representative is identified for each capital project. That individual is responsible for managing the project implementation and delivering its objectives. For all projects within the Capital Programme a senior officer is identified as project sponsor.

4.9. To evaluate the success and outcomes of capital projects a post project review is carried out. The depth of this review is proportionate to the scale of the project and the benefits set out in the initial Project Initiation Documentation. This review focuses on the outcomes achieved, the extent to which the benefits claimed are being realised, the actual costs, both revenue and capital, and the impact of other funding and partnership working. This information can then be used to learn lessons and make any improvements during subsequent projects. The post project report is reviewed by the Performance and Programme Board and escalated to the SLT if required.

5. FUNDING STREAMS

5.1. Capital expenditure can be funded from a number of sources as set out below:

➢ **Government Grants** – these are either general grants which can be used to fund any capital spend approved by the Authority or specific grants which can only be used to fund specific projects in line with any conditions placed with the grant. The Authority has not received an annual government capital grant allocation since 2014-15;

➢ **Capital Receipts** – when an asset held by the Authority is sold, the proceeds are held in reserve to be used either to fund future capital expenditure or to repay debt. They cannot be used to fund revenue expenditure;

➢ **Reserves** – funds can be set aside and held in earmarked reserves if known expenditure is to be incurred at a future date. These reserves can then be used to fund such expenditure be it capital or revenue. In terms of capital expenditure, it may be known that a specific asset may need replacing in 10 years and therefore funds are set-aside each year to build up the reserve to fund the replacement. Details of the reserves held are found within the Authority's Reserves Strategy;

➢ **External Contributions** – these are funds or grants provided by external organisations such as collaboration partners or local authorities for specifically agreed capital expenditure; and

➢ **Borrowing** – the Authority is permitted in law to take out loans or financing to fund capital expenditure. The Prudential Code sets out the requirements under which such borrowing must be undertaken including affordability, prudence and cost effectiveness. Any borrowing will incur costs for interest payable and the need to set-aside sufficient funds to repay the loan. These costs impact on the revenue budget.

6.   CAPITAL PROGRAMME

6.1.   The following table shows the Authority's overall Capital Programme and how it is anticipated that it will be funded from 2023-24 to 2028-29. Figures quoted include both in-year approvals and schemes rolled forward from previous years. They therefore represent estimates of total capital expenditure in each year:

Note 1
The Fire Station Modernisation Programme (Estates – FS Modernisation) was paused in 2022-23 to allow a review to take place in light of significant inflationary pressures on the overall programme. The review is now complete, a number of Programme Delivery Principles have been agreed, and the programme has now recommenced. It will be completed over the period to 2025-26.

Note 2
Provisional "placeholders" for the fire station rebuilds at Ellesmere Port and Warrington are included across the year 26-28. They will be funded through a mix of capital receipts, reserves and further borrowing.

	2024/25 Estimate £000	2025/26 Estimate £000	2026/27 Estimate £000	2027/28 Estimate £000	2028/29 Estimate £000
Expenditure:					
Annual Replacement Schemes:					
Fleet Vehicles	1,640	65	1,005	1,005	1,005
Operational Equipment	0	350	350	350	350
ICT & Communications	50	50	50	50	50
New Schemes:					
Estates – FS Modernisation	3,000	3,000	0	0	0
Estates – Houses Modernisation Programme	250	250	250	0	0
Estates- Ellesmere Port & Warrington	0	0	8,000	8,000	0
Provision for New Projects*	250	250	250	250	250
Capital Expenditure	**5,190**	**3,965**	**9,905**	**9,655**	**1,655**
Financed by:					
General capital grants	0	0	0	0	0
Capital Receipts	0	0	1,500	1,500	0
Use of Reserves/Revenue Financing	4,940	3,715	3,655	3,655	1,655
Borrowing	250	250	4,750	4,500	0
Total Funding	**5,190**	**3,965**	**9,905**	**9,655**	**1,655**

7.   AFFORDABILITY

7.1.   Capital expenditure plans are a key driver of treasury management activity. The funding of such plans impacts on cash balances and borrowing requirements in the short and longer terms. The on-going consequences of these decisions have a direct impact on the annual revenue budget. As such, having regard to the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities, the Authority sets and reviews a number of prudential indicators showing the proposed capital expenditure plans, how

they are to be funded, the impact on the organisation's finances and their affordability in terms of the impact on revenue budgets.

7.2. Full details and commentary on the prudential indicators are found within the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy 2024-25. Along with controls and limits relating to levels of capital expenditure and resulting borrowing requirements, these prudential indicators also include a specific affordability indicator, shown below, which provides an indication of the impact of the above capital expenditure plans and their financing proposals on the overall finances:

Ratio of financing costs to net revenue funding (Extract from Treasury management Strategy 2024-25 - Table 5)

2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate	2027/28 Estimate	2028/29 Estimate
2.23%	1.89%	2.36%	2.49%	2.87%	2.97%	2.90%

7.3. This indicator identifies the trend in the financing costs of the Authority, (borrowing, Minimum Revenue Provision and other long term obligation costs), against the net revenue stream. The estimates of financing costs include current commitments and the proposals included in the budget/MTFP. The above ratio reduced in 2023-24 due to the deferral of new borrowing along with increased net revenue funding, but will increase due to the requirement to increase borrowing in order to finance the recently completed Wilmslow and Crewe major estates projects.

7.4. The above estimates include provision for forecast borrowing required to part fund development of Ellesmere Port and Warrington Fire Stations; this is seen in the peak percentage in 2027-28. The affordability of any significant proposed future capital expenditure in respect of these sites will be reviewed carefully alongside the MTFP.

8.   RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1. Risk is the threat that an event or action will adversely affect the Authority's ability to achieve its desired outcomes and ability to execute its strategies successfully. Risk management is the process of identifying risks, evaluating their potential consequences and determining the most effective methods of managing them and/or responding to them. It is both a means of minimising the costs and disruption to the organisation caused by undesired events and of ensuring that staff understand and appreciate the element of risk in all their activities.

8.2. The aim is to reduce the frequency of adverse risk events occurring (where possible), minimise the severity of their consequences if they do occur, or to consider whether risk can be transferred to other parties. The corporate risk register sets out the key risks to the successful delivery of corporate aims and priorities and outlines the key controls and actions to mitigate and reduce risks, or maximise opportunities.

8.3. To manage risk effectively, the risks associated with each capital project need to be systematically identified, analysed, influenced and monitored. It is important to identify the appetite for risk for each scheme and for the capital programme, especially when investing in complex business change programmes. Where greater risks are identified as necessary to achieve desired outcomes, the organisation will seek to mitigate or manage those risks to a tolerable level. All key risks identified as part of the capital planning process are considered for inclusion in the corporate risk register.

8.4. The Head of Finance will report on the deliverability, affordability and risk associated with this Capital Strategy and the associated capital programme. Where appropriate they will have access to specialised advice to enable them to reach their conclusions.

8.5. <u>Credit Risk</u> - The risk that an organisation with which we have contracted to deliver capital projects becomes insolvent and cannot complete the agreed contract. We will ensure that robust due diligence procedures cover the appointment of partners and contractors relating to capital programme delivery. Where possible contingency plans will be identified at the outset.

8.6. <u>Liquidity Risk</u> - This is the risk that the timing of any cash inflows from a project will be delayed, for example if other organisations do not make their contributions when agreed. There is also a risk that the cash inflows will be less than expected, for example due to the effects of inflation, interest rates or exchange rates. Our exposure to this risk will be monitored via the revenue and capital budget monitoring processes and mitigating actions taken promptly where appropriate.

8.7. <u>Interest and Exchange Rate Risk</u> - This is the risk that interest rates or exchange rates will move in a way that has an adverse effect on the value of capital expenditure or the expected financial returns from a project. Rates will be reviewed as part of the on-going monitoring arrangements to identify such adverse effects. As far as possible our exposure to this risk will be mitigated via robust contract terms and when necessary contract re-negotiations.

8.8. <u>Inflation Risk</u> - This is the risk that rates of inflation will move in a way that has an adverse effect on the value of capital expenditure or the expected financial returns from a project. Rates of inflation will be reviewed as part of the ongoing monitoring arrangements to identify such adverse effects. As far as possible our exposure to this risk will be mitigated via robust contract terms and when necessary contract re-negotiations.

8.9. <u>Legal and Regulatory Risk</u> - This is the risk that changes in laws or regulation make a capital project more expensive or time consuming to complete, make it no longer cost effective or make it illegal or not advisable to complete. Before making capital investments, the Authority will understand the powers under which the investment is made. Forthcoming changes to relevant laws and regulations will be kept under review and factored into any capital bidding and programme monitoring processes.

8.10. <u>Fraud, Error and Corruption</u> - This is the risk that financial losses will occur due to errors or fraudulent or corrupt activities. Officers involved in any of the processes around capital expenditure or funding are required to follow the agreed Code of Corporate Governance. Cheshire Fire Authority has a strong ethical culture which is evidenced through its values, principles and appropriate behaviour. This is supported by a Code of Ethics and detailed policies such as Anti-Fraud and Corruption and processes such as that in relation to declaration of interests.

9. FUTURE ACTIONS

9.1. This Capital Strategy currently looks ahead over the next 5 years to 2029. It will be reviewed to consider whether it would be appropriate and of value to extend this period to cover a longer term period of for example 10 or 20 years.

9.2. In view of the removal of ongoing government funding for capital programme expenditure, alternative potential funding arrangements will need to be considered which will include the extension of partnerships and collaborations.

9.3. The Strategy will be reviewed in light of emerging and changing issues, circumstances and priorities.

This page is intentionally left blank

RESERVES STRATEGY 2024 TO 2029

BACKGROUND

1.   The Local Government Act 1992 requires billing and precepting authorities to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement.

2.   In addition, Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Treasurer to present a report assessing the adequacy of the unallocated reserves in the context of the corporate and financial risks facing the organisation. The Authority needs to balance the necessity for reserves against the cost to council taxpayers and arrive at a level that is both prudent and adequate, but not excessive.

3.   The Reserves Strategy describes the reserves held, their intended usage and the strategy for ensuring that they are maintained at an appropriate level. Reserves are held for three main purposes:

- To cover unforeseen risks and expenditure that may be incurred outside of planned budgets – known as a general reserve;

- To set-aside funds for specific purposes, known or predicted pressures, or future liabilities – known as earmarked reserves;

- To hold capital receipts from the sale of assets, the use of which is restricted under legislation to the purchase of new assets or the repayment of debt.

4.   In addition to holding financial reserves, there are a number of safeguards in place that mitigate against the risk of local authorities over-committing themselves financially:

- There is a legal requirement to set a balanced budget;

- In accordance with the 1988 Local Government Finance Act, the Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer/Treasurer) must report if there is or is likely to be unlawful expenditure or an unbalanced budget. This would include situations where reserves have become seriously depleted, and it is forecast that expenditure will exceed resources;

- The external auditor's responsibility to review and report on financial standing.

5.   While it is primarily the responsibility of Members and the Treasurer to maintain a sound financial position, the external auditors have a responsibility to review the arrangements in place to ensure that financial standing is soundly based. The work undertaken by external auditors will include a review of the level of reserves and the advice given to Members by the Treasurer.

6.	The Fire and Rescue National Framework (May 2018) includes the requirement that fire authorities "should establish a policy on reserves and provisions in consultation with their Chief Finance Officer". It also requires that "fire authorities should publish their Reserves Strategy, including details of the current and future planned levels, the purpose for which each reserve is held and how each reserve supports the Medium-Term Financial Plan".

DETERMINING THE LEVEL OF RESERVES

7.	There is no statutory guidance on the right level of reserves. Guidance from The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) confirms that each authority should make, on the advice of the Treasurer, their own judgement based on relevant local circumstances and the potential issues/risks that may occur across the medium term.

8.	In determining an appropriate level of reserves for the Authority the range of risks and issues that should be taken into account will include the following:

- The possibility of additional savings being required in the future and the potential difficulty in delivering such savings. Future funding levels are unclear with only the 2024-25 funding reasonably certain If increased demands or commitments outstrip funding, savings will be required.

- The provision of cover for extraordinary or unforeseen events occurring. Given that the purpose of the fire and rescue service is to respond to emergency situations, there is always the potential for additional, unexpected and unbudgeted expenditure to occur.

- The level of self-insurance that is carried to minimise insurance premiums: potential insurance liabilities can vary significantly across financial years. The levels of liabilities are difficult to forecast accurately, and it would not be appropriate to budget for peak levels of expenditure on self-insured liabilities.

- The commitments falling on future years because of capital plans and proposals to improve/develop the assets held by the Authority. Having reserves mitigates the impact on the revenue budget of borrowing and/or the need to make further revenue contributions to capital and supports projects and programmes that will improve the assets held by the Authority.

- The impact of the McCloud and Matthews pension cases means there is the potential for significant additional costs in the future. Whilst it appears likely that the funding of the remedy and compensation will fall to government, uncertainties remain which could have a significant impact on the Authority. In addition, there are uncertainties about the funding of employer contribution increases in future years.

PURPOSE OF EACH RESERVE

9.	**General Reserve**

9.1.	It is an accepted principle that an appropriate and prudent level of General Reserve is one that does not exceed 5% of the net revenue budget. This aligns to recommendations from past

Page 400

audit reports and comments by Government Ministers as being an accepted "reasonable level" of general reserve.

9.2.   The Fire and Rescue National Framework requires that a Reserves Strategy should explain how the "level of general reserve has been set" and should include "justification for holding a general reserve larger than 5% of budget".

9.3.   For the Authority, the level of General Reserve on 31 March 2023, stood at £1.9m which is approximately 3.7% of the net revenue budget. The level of the general reserve has fallen slightly from 2023-24 as a result of the growth in the revenue budget and the use of the general reserve to cover the deficit on the revenue budget in 2022/23 (£282k). However, some of the strategic risks which the Authority faces and which are described above are in part mitigated by earmarked reserves, particularly those in relation to pensions and funding. It is therefore considered that the level of general reserves is prudent and reasonable. The position will continue to be closely monitored during 2024-25.

9.4.   The table set out in Annex A summarises the overall anticipated reserves position to 2029. This Strategy will be kept under review as spending which affects the level of reserves is incurred.

10.   **Earmarked Reserves**

10.1.   The Authority has a number of earmarked reserves. These have been set aside to support capital and revenue expenditure in future years. An annual review is undertaken to ensure all earmarked reserves carried forward into the following financial year are still justified with clear plans for their usage. Details of the forecast levels of earmarked reserves are set out in Table 1. The forecast levels reflect the planned usage of reserves to meet anticipated expenditure. The main earmarked reserves are explained below.

10.2. Capital Receipts

As mentioned above, receipts from the sale of assets may generally only be used to fund capital expenditure or repay debt. As part of the CRMP, assets will be freed and will then be sold to help fund the future capital programme. Estimates included in Table 1 for Capital Receipts are at this stage indicative.

10.3. Capital Reserve
The Government stopped providing capital grants to local authorities in 2014, although occasionally there are national initiatives announced that involve authorities bidding for grants in support of specific projects. The draft capital programme, including new fire stations and the modernisation of existing premises, is significant. To minimise borrowing and the associated revenue expenditure, the capital funding strategy is to use contributions from reserves to help fund the capital programme wherever possible. A contribution from the revenue budget is made each year to replenish the reserve.

Other revenue reserves

The remaining earmarked reserves are set aside to meet future identified commitments and potential liabilities. These include:

- Staff related – reserves to support pension costs, apprentice programme, and recruitment costs.

- Legal & insurance – reserves to support the Fire Safety Order prosecutions and potential insurance liabilities.

- ICT and systems – reserves to support the development, up-grading and replacement of ICT equipment and software.

- Training – a reserve to support future training needs.

- Equipment & uniform –reserves to avoid impacting the revenue budget in any one year with a high one-off equipment cost

- Collaborations and partnerships - a reserve held to support the cost of collaborative arrangements.

- Property related – reserves to avoid impacting the revenue budget in any one year with a high one-off property maintenance cost

- Operational Policy and Assurance – reserves mainly to support the costs of the Training Centre and fleet costs.

- Prevention – reserves to support the installation of sprinklers in social housing, supporting Prince's Trust, Cadets, Community Fire Protection and Road Safety and refreshing Safety Central

- Protection – grant received but not yet spent to support enhanced Protection activity

- Funding –a reserve to offset the potential impact of local authority deficits and other funding shortfalls

- UPG – a reserve to facilitate partner engagement in community safety activities.

- Specific projects – reserves for use on the completion of small projects

USE OF RESERVES

11. Each of the reserves is managed by an identified officer. Movement to and from reserves is in the first instance approved by the Authority as part of the annual budget.

12. Reporting of the level of reserves and forecast outturn will be provided as part of the quarterly budget updates submitted to Performance and Overview Committee.

OVERALL POSITION

13. The forecast balances on reserves are set out in Table 1, below. One of the key elements of the Reserves Strategy will be to use the earmarked Capital Reserves to support the Capital Strategy. The 2024-2029 Capital Strategy indicates that expenditure of £30m is planned between 2023 and 2028 with approximately £18m of this being financed from reserves.

Page 402

TABLE 1

FORECAST LEVEL OF RESERVES TO MARCH 2029

	Actual 31 March 23	Forecast 31 March 24	Forecast 31 March 25	Forecast 31 March 26	Forecast 31 March 27	Forecast 31 March 28	Forecast 31 March 29
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
General Reserve	1,928	1,928	1,928	1,928	1,928	1,928	1,928
Earmarked Reserves							
Capital receipts	0	0	0	3,000	1,500	0	0
Capital reserve	14,233	13,584	9,003	6,832	4,815	2,704	2,593
Staff related	1,309	581	486	391	391	391	391
Legal and insurance costs	517	479	379	379	379	379	379
ICT and systems development	433	461	495	495	495	495	495
Training	141	225	201	201	201	201	201
Equipment & uniform	1,724	1,668	1,587	662	662	662	662
Collaborations and partnerships	125	125	917	521	125	125	125
Property related	697	462	441	471	500	530	559
Operational Policy and Assurance - resilience	269	193	166	166	166	166	166
Prevention	1,077	699	650	650	650	650	650
Protection	299	340	249	0	0	0	0
Funding	1,488	1,488	1,454	1,454	1,454	1,454	1,454
UPG	286	318	318	318	318	318	318
Specific projects	64	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Reserves	**24,590**	**22,551**	**18,274**	**17,468**	**13,490**	**9,909**	**9,827**

ROBUSTNESS OF ESTIMATES

1. Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 places a requirement on the "Chief Finance Officer" of an Authority to report on the robustness of the estimates used in preparing the budget. There is then a requirement for the Authority to have regard to the report of the Chief Finance Officer when making decisions on its budget. At Cheshire Fire Authority, the Chief Finance Officer is the Treasurer.

2. The statutory requirement is reinforced by the Prudential Code, which requires authorities to have regard to affordability when considering recommendations about future capital programmes.

3. The Authority has a medium term planning process that takes account of service demands and the financial scenario covering a 5-year period to 2029. The aim of the Medium Term Financial Plan is to provide a realistic and sustainable plan that reflects the Authority's priorities and anticipates the future impact of current decisions. Alongside this, future capital programmes are planned taking into account forecast Government funding, borrowing limits and council tax.

4. For 2024-25, full consideration of these issues had led to:

    ▪ Policy and expenditure proposals that reflect the Local Government Finance Settlement together with the on-going revenue impact of new capital projects, whilst recognising the outstanding issues and uncertainties.

    ▪ A proposed capital financing budget based on the 2024-25 capital programme.

5. In assessing the robustness of the 2024-25 proposals and the estimates on which they are based, the Treasurer has been assured that:

    ▪ the budget proposals are based on the advice of service managers (supported by finance staff) or are based upon or supported by information that the Treasurer considers reasonable to accept

    ▪ the budget proposals have been fully reviewed and endorsed by Service Leadership Team members and the implications on performance, if any, have been identified and assessed

    ▪ the proposed budget provides for all known future developments either within the revenue budget itself or as part of the Reserves Strategy

6. When using estimates in preparing the budget every effort is taken to ensure that they take into account the most up to date data. There is however, always the potential for the actual impact to vary from the estimates used in setting the budget, particularly as a result of:

- Variations in the rate of price inflation, pay awards and pension increases
- Service financial performance (i.e. variances on budgets)
- Ability to deliver policy proposals and/or achieve projected savings
- Unforeseen additional operational demands and activities.

7. The potential for unanticipated events to occur that may impact on the budget, reinforce the importance of prudent financial management including:

- Promoting a robust approach to financial management requiring budget holders to monitor expenditure against budget and to take early action in reporting and responding to projected variances;
- Quarterly reporting of the projected budgetary outturn supplemented by monthly exception reports to prompt remedial action if necessary; and
- Maintaining an appropriate and proportionate contingency, as part of the General Reserve, to cushion the impact of unexpected events and emergencies.

8. Based on the advice and assurance set out above and the process by which the budget has been constructed, the Treasurer is satisfied that the estimates are robust and can be relied upon for approval as part of the proposed budget.

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 14TH FEBRUARY 2024
REPORT OF: HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT
AUTHOR: MARK SHONE

SUBJECT: **EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AND
                 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024-28**

Purpose of Report

1.   Members are asked to review and approve an External Communications and Engagement Strategy for the Service. The draft Strategy sets out a series of objectives to strengthen the way in which the Service will communicate and engage with the public and external stakeholders over the next four years.

Recommended:

[1]   that Members consider and approve the draft External Communications and Engagement Strategy for implementation from 1st April 2024.

Background

2.   Prior to the corporate communications function transferring to Joint Corporate Services in 2016, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service had a Corporate Communications Strategy and a separate Consultation and Engagement Strategy. The first covered all aspects of communications with internal and external audiences, and the second provided a framework for annual Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) consultations. Both strategies expired in 2015 and were not updated during the period of Blue Light Collaboration.

3.   In February 2022, the communications function shared between the Service and Cheshire Constabulary was disaggregated and a new in-house Communications and Engagement Department was reinstated. The Department's remit has been broadened to include public affairs and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

4.   The launch of the new External Communications and Engagement Strategy coincides with the publication of the Service's new four-year Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). It covers all aspects of external communications and engagement, including public and stakeholder consultation. Importantly, it also addresses the priorities set out in the new national Fire Standard for Communications and Engagement.

5. Work is underway separately on the development of an Internal Communications and Engagement Strategy, starting with an audit of existing channels and mechanisms during Q4 2023/24 as part of the 2023 Staff Survey feedback and action planning process. A draft strategy will be presented to the Service Leadership Team for consideration in Q1 2024/25.

Information

6. The draft External Communications and Engagement Strategy (attached to the report at Appendix 1) aims to provide a framework for the way in which the Service will talk, listen and respond to the public and its external stakeholders during the lifespan of the new CRMP. On pages 5-7 it lists the statutory and regulatory imperatives on the Service to communicate openly and transparently and discusses internal and external drivers for good communication and engagement.

7. A new values-led approach to external communications and engagement is proposed on page 8, with the aim of ensuring activity is strategic, professional, impactful and inclusive. These principles aim to strengthen the Service's brand and ensure consistency in the way it communicates and engages with people. Key to this will be the implementation of the communications industry-standard OASIS (objectives, audience, strategy, implementation and scoring) planning model.

8. Section 4 on page 9 maps the relative interest and influence of the Service's main external audiences and stakeholders, enabling communications and engagement activity to be prioritised accordingly. The list is not exhaustive and should remain dynamic throughout the life of the strategy.

9. Section 5 on page 10 lists the full range of communications and engagement tools available to the Service. Those that depend on face-to-face interaction are likely to have the greatest impact, while those that are one-way in nature are more appropriate for simple, factual communication. A distinction is made between paid-for channels such as advertising and non-paid methods such as media relations.

10. Pages 11-16 set out the external communications and engagement objectives for the next four years. There are three strategic objectives that directly support the delivery of the Service's vision and mission and enable it to meet its statutory communications obligations:

    1) Communicate messages that enable people to take action to keep themselves and others safe.

    2) Maintain public and stakeholder trust and confidence in us as a public service, partner and employer.

    3) Give people and partners a meaningful role in the delivery and development of our services.

11. Under each strategic objective, core activities are listed together with workstreams and actions to enable the Service to drive forward communications and engagement activities in these areas.

12. The draft Strategy concludes on page 17 by explaining how the Strategy will be delivered and how progress against its objectives will be measured and monitored. This will include an annual self-assessment against the Fire Standard for Communications and Engagement, which is included as an appendix to the draft Strategy for reference.

Financial Implications

13. It is anticipated that the draft Strategy can be delivered within the existing communications and events budgets. Requests for additional resources will be made through the priority based budgeting and annual budget bid processes if required.

Legal Implications

14. The Service has numerous communications and engagement obligations under the Fire and Rescue Framework for England, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and Localism Act 2011. These are explained on page 4 of the draft Strategy.

Equality and Diversity Implications

15. Inclusive communication and engagement is one of the four key principles of the approach proposed in the draft strategy. The draft Strategy will be fully equality impact assessed prior to publication, as will any significant projects and campaigns to result from it.

Environmental Implications

16. The draft Strategy describes a continuing shift away from printed materials and promotional merchandise towards an approach that relies on two-way, digital engagement. This is more sustainable and less reliant on physical materials or resources.

CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING MANAGER. TEL 07776297806

This page is intentionally left blank

APPENDIX 1

Draft **External Communications and Engagement Strategy 2024-28**

v1.1 for Cheshire Fire Authority approval

Cheshire
Fire & Rescue Service

www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

Contents

Produced:	5/1/24 MS v1.0
Approved by Service Leadership Team:	
Approved by Cheshire Fire Authority:	
To be reviewed:	April 2025

1. Introduction

1.1 No fire and rescue service can successfully fulfil its purpose of saving and protecting lives without maintaining the trust and confidence of the communities it serves and the partners with whom it works. This relies on clear, consistent and planned communication, and meaningful engagement. Without either, services are unlikely to be able to communicate effectively in an emergency, encourage people to stay safe, provide assurance of their performance, involve people in developing their plans, develop partnerships or recruit fresh and diverse talent.

1.2 This External Communications and Engagement Strategy provides a framework for the way in which Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service will talk, listen and respond to the public and its stakeholders over the next four years (2024-28), by:

- describing a fresh approach to external communications and engagement
- mapping our key external audiences
- referencing the many and varied channels available to us
- defining three strategic external communications and engagement objectives and how we will achieve these through 'business as usual' activity, and new ways of reaching people
- explaining how we will deliver and monitor progress against these objectives.

1.3 The strategy directly supports the delivery of our strategic vision, mission and the objectives set out in our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2024-28 and supersedes our previous Corporate Communications and Consultation and Engagement strategies.

1.4 A separate Internal Communications and Engagement Strategy will be published in Q1 2024 to strengthen dialogue with staff, volunteers and Cheshire Fire Authority members.

> **Definitions**
>
> **Communication:** process of exchanging information, thoughts or ideas.
>
> **Engagement:** active participation or interaction in a particular subject or issue.
>
> **Consultation:** formal process of gathering views or information from people or organisations affected by an issue or proposal.
>
> **Campaign:** series of co-ordinated communications activities designed to achieve a goal or promote a cause.
>
> **Audience:** individuals or groups who receive a message or are encouraged to engage.
>
> **Message:** information or ideas communicated with the intention of transmitting meaning or influencing thoughts, attitudes or actions.
>
> **Channel:** medium or platform through which messages are communicated.
>
> **Stakeholder:** an individual, group, or organisation with a vested interest or concern in a particular issue.
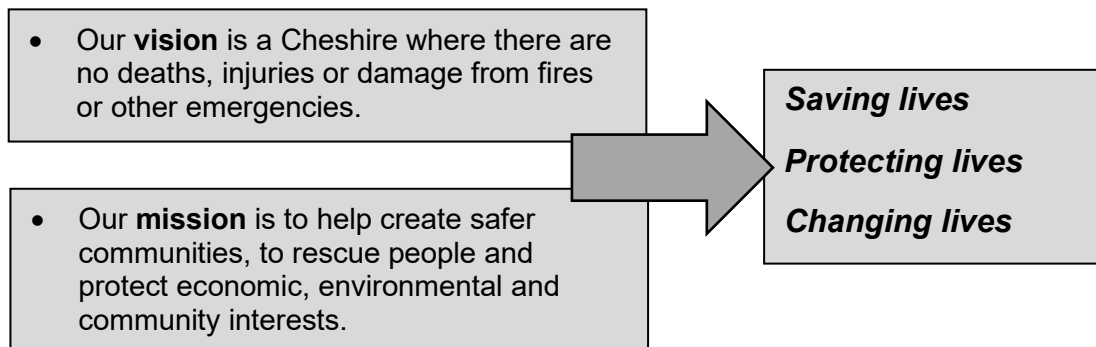
2. Context

Statutory responsibilities

2.1   As a publicly funded and accountable organisation with lifesaving responsibilities, we have a statutory and moral duty to be open and transparent about our work, our performance, and our risks and challenges. This requirement is set out in legislation and in the regulatory framework in which we operate:

- under the Fire and Rescue Framework for England we must "be transparent and accountable to [our] communities for [our] decisions and actions" and "provide the opportunity for communities to help plan their local service through effective consultation and involvement"

- we are required under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 "to make arrangements for the provision of information, publicity and encouragement in respect of the steps to be taken to prevent fires and death or injury by fire". This includes during periods of industrial action or disrupted service

- effective communication is crucial to our duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, to prevent emergencies and reduce, control or mitigate their effects. The Cheshire Resilience Forum (CRF) media protocol sets out the ways we will do this in co-operation with our partners

- as an authority that receives a share of council tax, Cheshire Fire Authority is required under the Localism Act 2011 to consult on the amount charged and run a referendum if proposed increases are over a certain threshold. The Act also offers a "community right to challenge" public authorities

- the Gunning Principles set the standard by which public consultation must be undertaken, ensuring that stakeholders are engaged when proposals are at a formative stage, that they have enough information and time to respond and that responses are given proper consideration. These principles are affirmed in the Consultation Institute Charter

- the Fire Standard for Communications and Engagement (Appendix 1) sets out 19 actions services should take to implement a strategic and inclusive approach to communications. These also support compliance with the Community Risk Management and Planning, Leading the Service and the Code of Ethics fire standards.

- His Majesty's Inspectorate for Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) judgement criteria require us to engage with the community to build up a comprehensive risk profile, promote fire and road safety, engage effectively with businesses and communicate information about incidents to the public.

Organisational factors

2.2 Effective communication and engagement is critical to the delivery of our organisational vision and mission. These statements also serve to provide the two principal messages that should underpin all our communications and engagement activity. In recent years, these have been summarised in some of our communications materials by a simple, now recognisable, three-part 'strapline':

> - Our **vision** is a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies.
>
> - Our **mission** is to help create safer communities, to rescue people and protect economic, environmental and community interests.

> *Saving lives*
>
> *Protecting lives*
>
> *Changing lives*

2.3 Our vision and mission are delivered through the objectives set out in our CRMP, the next iteration of which comes into effect in April 2024 and will run until March 2028. Not only will progress towards these objectives need to be regularly communicated, but many of the actions will also require significant communications support. These include:

- explaining the impact of changes to the way some fire stations and fire engines are crewed, with the aim of improving daytime emergency cover and increasing community safety activities

- reporting performance against redefined response targets

- supporting Prevention colleagues to:
  - improve and promote the referral process for Safe and Well visits
  - promote safety information about lithium-ion batteries
  - reduce the occurrence of deliberate fires
  - implement a new Road Safety Strategic Plan for Cheshire
  - increase water safety education activity
  - train advocates and firefighters to deliver safety messages more effectively.

- supporting Protection colleagues to:
  - communicate any changes to our risk-based inspection programme
  - lobby and campaign for the installation of sprinklers.

- supporting Service-wide efforts to:
  - attract a diverse range of talent to our organisation, strengthening the positive and inclusive culture we have worked hard to create

        o   continue to engage former staff as ambassadors for our Service after they have retired or left the organisation

        o   modernise or replace our fire stations, engaging the community in our plans where relevant.

2.4   In addition to their CRMP objectives, departments also deliver 'business as usual' activity, much of which will require communications and engagement input. This will continue to be considered as part of the annual departmental planning process, in line with the approach set out in this strategy.

2.5   While our vision, mission, CRMP and departmental plans set out what we do, our Core Values (together with the national fire and rescue service Code of Ethics) describe the *ways in which we do it*. These behaviours provide a solid foundation for our approach to communications and engagement (p8).

> - **Being inclusive**, by acting fairly, with integrity and without prejudice.

> - **Doing the right thing**, by holding each other to account for ensuring high standards of professionalism in everything we do.

> - **Acting with compassion**, by being understanding and offering to help each other and our communities with warmth, patience and kindness.

> - **Making a difference**, by making an impact in our organisation and in our communities in whatever ways we can, for as many people as we can.

Public perception

2.6   The fire and rescue service is highly valued by the public and has a unique standing that allows us into communities and homes. According to HMICFRS's 2022 public perception survey, 84% of people value the work of the fire and rescue service and 82% said they respect people who have a career in the sector. Furthermore, 67% of people who took part in a 2023 survey to help shape our CRMP proposals said that we offer value for money.

2.7   However, there are significant threats to the fire and rescue service's hard-earned reputation. Throughout 2023 and into 2024, the spotlight has fallen on workplace culture in the sector following highly critical reports into the conduct of staff in several services. In some instances, this has been evident in the inappropriate use of social media by fire and rescue service personnel. In 2024 HMICFRS will publish a further, wide-ranging culture report.

2.8   Meanwhile, the operational reliability of the service has also been called into question after public inquiries highlighted shortcomings in the operational responses to the Grenfell Tower fire and Manchester Arena attack in 2017.

2.9   Our challenge is to retain the trust and confidence of the public in the face of negative national media coverage. It is crucial that we promote and celebrate our successes, particularly in areas for which the fire and rescue service has

been criticised. At the same time, we should be open and transparent about where we need to improve and have plans in place to deal with issues that might negatively impact our reputation.

The changing nature of public sector communications

2.9 The emergence of social media platforms over the last two decades has transformed the way in which people receive, process and share information. Gone are the days where we wait patiently for public sector organisations to share news with us through a local newspaper or marketing material delivered through our front door. We now value communication that is immediate, authentic and two-way. We are no longer prepared to read reems of text and prefer to engage with short-form video content or images.

2.10 We have invested significantly in our digital communications capability over the last 15 years. In May 2023 we launched a new website that enables us to present information in a much more dynamic way. We also have roles dedicated to social media, graphic design and visual storytelling, and have attracted a considerable following across several social media platforms. In the years ahead, we must be prepared to be bolder, braver and more creative if we are to continue engaging audiences in our important work. We must also refine the mechanisms through which people can talk to us and make our communications channels truly two-way.

2.11 The nature of media relations is also changing. Journalists no longer work to daily or weekly deadlines, instead publishing stories instantly on social media platforms or websites. This requires us to move swiftly to take advantage of opportunities to promote our work or respond to negative issues. Audiences are also able to engage with news stories through comments threads, which require close monitoring – and sometimes intervention – to ensure misinformation and disinformation is addressed. Relationships with 'citizen journalists' such as influencers, podcasters, bloggers and vloggers, who may not have formal journalism training, must also be carefully managed.

2.12 The Government Communications Service describes a "double crisis of trust, in both governments and communications". To address this, it recommends that communications and engagement activity is "citizen centric" and informed by evidence, including behavioural insight, to ensure it is credible and connects with audiences.

2.13 Finally, it is important to remember that staff are also members of the general public, and therefore follow and engage with our external communications channels. While this may be useful as an additional way of conveying important information and building a sense of 'belonging', messages must be consistent with those conveyed through internal communications and engagement channels.

3. A fresh approach to communications and engagement

3.1 There are four guiding principles, reflecting our Core Values, that will underpin the delivery of this strategy over the next four years. Our objective will be to ensure that all external communications and engagement activity is undertaken in a way that is strategic, professional, impactful and inclusive.

3.2 This in turn will reinforce our brand, which is one of our most valuable assets as a fire and rescue service. The term 'brand' describes how we look (i.e. our logo, strapline and colour scheme), how we talk and listen to people and, most importantly, how we make people feel about us. To ensure our brand remains strong, distinctive and trusted, our communications must be designed, produced and delivered consistently. These principles support that ambition.
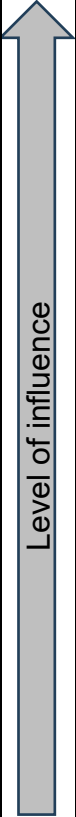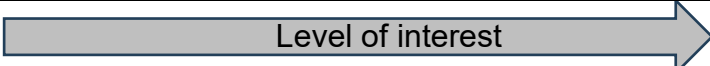
Strategic	**Professional**
• Directly supporting work towards our vision, mission and CRMP objectives. • Carefully planned and resourced to focus on high priority, high impact activity. • Founded on evidence of what works. • Implemented and evaluated using the communications industry-standard OASIS model (below), to achieve clearly defined outcomes. • Delivered in collaboration with key partners where required.	• Proactively led by the Communications and Engagement Team, under the direction of the Service Leadership Team. • Open, honest and accurate. • Responsive to the needs of colleagues, the media and stakeholders. • Compliant with relevant legislation and supported by clear and up to date policies and procedures. • Reflective of industry good practice, through engagement in continuous professional development.
Impactful	**Inclusive**
• Focussed on telling the story of our Service through our people and the people we serve. • Utilising creative, well-produced, high quality written and audio-visual content. • Consistent in the use of our visual corporate identity, including logo and strapline. • Employing new and innovative ways of reaching all audiences. • Actively encouraging feedback, engagement and conversation.	• Talking to our audiences as real people; in the first person, in plain English and with warmth and professionalism. • Making it clear how to access information in alternative formats if required. • Visibly championing diversity in our Service by using inclusive imagery and language. • Supported by equality impact assessments on significant campaign projects.

Objectives ➤ **A**udience insight ➤ **S**trategy ➤ **I**mplementation ➤ **S**coring (evaluation)

4. Defining our audiences

4.1   Different external audiences have very different communications and engagement needs, depending on the nature of our relationship and their level of interest and influence in our Service. Some share our aims, values and ambitions and may speak or act as advocates for us if kept informed. Others may require closer involvement if we rely on them to help us deliver our objectives. Those who stake their reputation in full or in part on our performance require the closest engagement.

4.2   The table below plots the relative interest and influence of our main groups of stakeholders. This map is dynamic because an individual or group's level of interest and influence can change depending on the subject matter or issue, or the stage of our relationship. By using the OASIS model to plan activity, we will consider where a stakeholder lies on this map, their needs and preferences, and the most appropriate communications tactics to reach and engage them.

Keep satisfied	Engage closely
• Civic leaders and dignitaries – e.g. mayors, Lord Lieutenant and High Sheriff • Fire Standards Board • Local authority councillors • National Fire Chiefs Council • National mainstream media • Parish, town and district councillors • Regional mainstream media	• Former members of staff • Home Office • HMICFRS • Local mainstream media • Members of Parliament • Primary Authority partners • Statutory and CRF partners – e.g. Cheshire Constabulary, North West Ambulance Service and local authorities
Monitor	**Keep informed**
• Business network groups • Community groups • General public with no perceived need to engage with us: ○ future Safe and Well customers ○ future participants in children and young people's programmes ○ future employees and volunteers	• Businesses • Housing partners • Neighbouring fire and rescue services • North West Fire Control • Prevention partners – e.g. health and social care agencies, referral partners, Prince's Trust, schools and colleges • Professional/trade media • Public actively engage in our services • Public impacted by changes • Safeguarding partners – e.g. local authority designated officers

Level of influence (vertical axis)

Level of interest (horizontal axis)

5. Our communications and engagement toolbox

5.1 Careful consideration will also be given to the mix of communications and engagement channels used to reach our target audiences. The richest channels use face-to-face interaction to engage, build trust and connection, and convey complex or sensitive messages. The leanest channels are one-way and should be used for communicating urgent or simple messages.

		Non-paid	Paid
Richest channels ↑ ↓ **Leanest channels**	**Physical presence**	• 1-1 briefings • Celebration events like award ceremonies, graduations and passouts • Community roadshows and drop-in events • Conferences and seminars • Deliberative workshops • In-house focus groups • Open days • Presentations or talks at external events	• Commissioned focus groups • Stands or enclosures at events or exhibitions • Attendance at paid-for events, to represent Service
	Personal interactive	• Virtual focus groups • Webinars and virtual events	• Mystery shopping • Sponsored social media
	Impersonal interactive	• Blogs and vlogs • Email • Engagement with citizen journalists • In-house surveys, polls and feedback forms • News releases to media outlets with capability for interaction • Social media posts, videos and stories • Website	• Commissioned surveys, polls and feedback questionnaires
	Impersonal static	• Articles in partner publications • E-bulletins • Leaflets, flyers and booklets • Letters • Neighbourhood Alert • Newsletters • News releases to print and broadcast media outlets • Reports	• Advertising in event programmes, guides or partner publications • Digital advertising • Print advertising • Television and radio advertising
	Ambient	• Posters in public areas • Signage and banners • Uniform • Vehicle livery	• Advertising outdoors, on public transport or in specific venues • Promotional merchandise

6. Objectives

6.1 Over the next four years we will focus our external communications and engagement efforts on three strategic objectives that will enable us to meet our statutory obligations and address the challenges outlined on the previous pages. Each objective will be delivered through core communications and engagement activity, plus actions under key workstreams to improve and increase our reach and impact.

Strategic Objective 1

Communicate messages that enable people to take action to keep themselves and others safe.

Core activity:

- Proactive and reactive media relations, including out of hours cover for urgent operational issues – guided by Media Protocol and Procedures.
- Publishing information about noteworthy incidents on website.
- Social media updates when incidents cause disruption or concern.
- Regular participation in major incident exercises.
- Supporting local, regional and national public and business safety campaigns.
- Proactively promoting successful fire safety prosecutions.
- Attending community events to raise awareness of safety issues.

Development objectives:

Public warning and informing	
Provide accurate, authoritative and timely information that minimises the risk of harm in the event of an emergency.	➢ Undertake training with CRF partners' communications leads on new joint media protocol. ➢ Review effectiveness of existing Neighbourhood Alert SMS and email system. ➢ Agree and work towards targets for increasing following on social media channels to increase public reach. ➢ Deliver media training to station, group and area managers to build confidence and competence in being interviewed.

Work with the CRF and statutory partners to help people prepare for emergencies with the potential to have a significant impact on the community.	➢ Support development and implementation of joint public awareness campaign and communications resources.
Provide information about how to access our services during times of disruption or high demand.	➢ Review and update Communications and Engagement Business Continuity Plan in line with CRF joint media protocol. ➢ Agree protocol with Cumbria, Greater Manchester and Lancashire fire and rescue services' communications leads for dealing with disruption to North West Fire Control.

Prevention	
Develop and deliver no more than three high impact, high quality campaigns per year, to address key community safety issues identified in the CRMP.	➢ Implement campaign in 2024/25 focussed on dangers of lithium-ion batteries and charging. ➢ Work with Arson Reduction Manager to strengthen messaging relating to deliberate fire setting. ➢ Work with Road Safety Team to support sub-regional road safety strategy and implementation of awareness campaign. ➢ Work with new Water Safety Lead to support regional water safety strategy and implementation of awareness campaign. ➢ Refresh communications team's knowledge and understanding of latest behaviour change techniques.
Support the delivery of a revitalised Safe and Well programme.	➢ Update Safe and Well booklet. ➢ Raise awareness among health and social care partners of fire risk and referral routes. ➢ Explain and promote new targeting strategy.
Promote full range of Prevention interventions, to change public perception about scope of fire and rescue service activity.	➢ Aim for one third of external communications output to be Prevention focussed. ➢ Identify single points of contact and communications plan for each area of Prevention, to ensure information and news about services is shared with communications team and onwards to relevant audiences. ➢ Use station open days as opportunities to better promote prevention work and safety messages.

Protection	
Support national efforts to lobby and campaign for changes to fire safety legislation in the built environment.	➢ Use case studies to promote the value of sprinklers in commercial premises and in high-risk residential buildings like tower blocks. ➢ Undertake public affairs activity to support NFCC work around planning for battery energy storage sites.
Promote full range of Protection interventions, to change public perception about scope of fire and rescue service activity.	➢ Aim for one third of external communications output to be Protection focussed. ➢ Identify single points of contact and communications plan for each area of Protection to ensure information and news about services is shared with communications team and onwards to relevant audiences. ➢ Inform relevant stakeholders of any changes to risk-based inspection programme. ➢ Implement Beechmere and Hazelmere prosecutions stakeholder engagement plan.

Strategic Objective 2

Maintain public and stakeholder trust and confidence in us as a public service, partner and employer.

Core activity:

- Proactive and reactive media relations, including out of hours cover for urgent reputational issues.
- Production of key reports like CRMP, annual plans and annual reports.
- Communications planning for potential adverse reputational issues.
- Involvement in wide range of sub-regional and sector meetings and forums.

Development objectives:

Strategy and performance	
Widely promote performance against objectives, targets and standards.	➢ Develop dedicated e-bulletin to share news with high interest/high influence stakeholders. ➢ Review format of CRMP progress report/annual action plan to ensure information presented in lively and engaging way. ➢ Work with Service Improvement Team to create public-facing digital performance dashboard on website.

	➤ Use publication of annual statements of assurance and accounts as opportunities to demonstrate value for money.
	➤ Routinely promote achievement of objectives and targets through social and mainstream media, and to stakeholders.
	➤ Work with partners to publicise successes in partnership working – e.g. work with children and young people or adults at risk.
Communicate openly and in detail about performance in external/independent assessments and accreditations.	➤ Publicise results of HMICFRS, ISO, Matrix and other independent assessments, providing updates on areas for improvement where required.
	➤ Promote accreditations such as White Ribbon, Disability Confident and Top 50 Inclusive Companies by describing difference made to staff and service users.
	➤ Publicise nominations, shortlists and wins in awards schemes. Ensure award branding is used on relevant sections of website.
Develop more effective relationships with local, regional and national/trade journalists.	➤ Schedule regular briefings with key reporters.
	➤ Develop programme of opportunities for media outlets to profile our work.
	➤ Track and evaluate media coverage more consistently on media management system.

People and culture	

Position Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service as an employer of choice.	➤ Refresh recruitment section of the website, being clearer about benefits of working or volunteering for us and profiling wider range of roles.
	➤ Promote and support positive action activity, using digital channels to engage people where relevant.
	➤ Support recruitment, prevention and staff network colleagues to engage young people through careers events and work experience placements.
Be more transparent about equality, diversity and inclusion performance.	➤ Involve a range of stakeholders in development of new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2024-28 and proactively promote its publication and EDI annual reports.
	➤ Summarise and publish workforce diversity information presented to Equality Steering Group on website, to demonstrate progress.

	➢ Include pay gap data relating to ethnicity and disability in Gender Pay Gap report and promote its publication more widely.
	➢ Promote improvements resulting from recommendations from cultural reviews in sector.
Challenge stereotypes and assumptions of what it means to work for the fire and rescue service.	➢ Regularly profile work of non-operational departments and diverse range of staff.
	➢ Actively manage external communications output to ensure incident-related or operational news is balanced with information about other Service areas.
	➢ Support participation in diverse range of community events.
Ensure presence on social media and engagement with the public supports our Core Values and communications and engagement principles.	➢ Review all Service social media accounts, with a view to focussing efforts, monitoring and moderation on those with most engagement.
	➢ Produce new fit-for-purpose Social Media Policy, enabling inappropriate responses to Service content to be managed and ensure use of personal social media by staff does not bring Service into disrepute.

Strategic Objective 3

Give people and partners a meaningful role in the delivery and development of our services.

Core activity:

- CRMP pre-engagement and consultation programmes on behalf of Cheshire Fire Authority
- Council Tax precept consultation on behalf of Cheshire Fire Authority
- Regular briefings and meetings between principal officers and key stakeholders.
- Feedback through website, email and customer satisfaction forms.

Development objectives:

Consultation	
Ensure as many people as possible, of all ages and backgrounds, have the opportunity to have a say on	➢ Re-establish annual public perception survey.
	➢ Evaluate participation in 2023/24 CRMP consultation and make recommendations for strengthening future processes.

our work and that feedback is continuously considered.	➢ Assess viability of re-establishing citizens' panel, representative of Cheshire's demography. ➢ Consistently collate, report on and respond to feedback left on social media platforms.
Adopt a planned approach to key stakeholder engagement.	➢ Determine interest in annual stakeholder conference, delivered in-person and virtually. ➢ Ensure stakeholder e-bulletin includes mechanism for two-way dialogue.

Customer feedback	
Understand the experience of people we have assisted in a fire, road traffic collision or other emergency.	➢ Explore alternatives to existing 'After the Incident' hard copy survey, including digital survey options and follow-up telephone calls. ➢ Put in place mechanism for feedback reports to be consistently produced and considered.
Understand the experience of people for whom we have undertaken a Safe and Well visit or other Prevention interventions.	➢ Explore alternatives to existing 'Home Safety Visit' hard copy survey, including digital survey options and follow-up telephone calls, that support Prevention's quality assurance process. ➢ Look at options for gathering feedback from children and young people, schools, partners and other users of Prevention services. ➢ Put in place mechanism for feedback reports to be consistently produced and considered.
Understand the experience of businesses visited or supported by Protection colleagues.	➢ Explore alternatives to existing 'Business Safety Visit' hard copy survey, including digital survey options and follow-up telephone calls. ➢ Put in place mechanism for reports to be consistently produced and considered.

Engaging former colleagues	
Recognise and harness the interest and influence of people who have worked for us through a plan to keep them informed and engaged in our work.	➢ Create official Service retirees and 'alumni' network, with clear terms of reference, brand and dedicated channels for dialogue including a social media page, e-bulletin and/or hard copy newsletter. ➢ Establish annual reunion event and open day at Headquarters. ➢ Support regular informal meetings in fire station community rooms.

7.   Making it happen

7.1   This strategy will be approved by Cheshire Fire Authority prior to implementation and the Head of Communications and Engagement will be responsible for its delivery, with oversight from the Deputy Chief Fire Officer. Significant external communications and engagement projects and issues will continue to be discussed by SLT and where relevant the Fire Authority will be informed and consulted. This should ensure communications and engagement is routinely considered as part of strategic decision making.

7.2   To implement this strategy the Head of Department will draw on the skills and talents of the Communications and Engagement Department, which will continue to be resourced to reflect our Service's ongoing commitment to talking and listening effectively to our diverse range of stakeholders. The team will work closely with colleagues to understand their communications and engagement challenges, especially those with public and partner-facing roles in Prevention and Protection. However, to deliver our new approach to communications and engagement (p8), the team will be responsible for developing OASIS-based project plans and have editorial control over all content (with reference to SLT where required).

7.3   Objectives will be set out in the annual Departmental Plan and progress will be monitored at weekly managers' meetings, fortnightly 1-1s and quarterly department-wide meetings. To assess progress against the objectives, the following information will be considered:

- data drawn from our online media and stakeholder relations management system, including interactions with journalists, numbers of proactive news releases issued, and level and favourability of media coverage

- social media and website analytics, detailing levels of engagement

- evaluation of specific campaign activity, for example insight gathered about changes in behaviour or awareness of key messages

- communications and engagement project requests from colleagues

- feedback gathered through surveys, polls and other mechanisms

- compliments or concerns about the service provided by the Department

- review of any departmental risks

- annual self-assessment against the Fire Standard for Communications and Engagement.

Appendix 1

Fire Standard for Communications and Engagement

To achieve this Fire Standard, a fire and rescue service MUST:

- have a strategic approach to communications and engagement, including consultation, which includes clear principles about how the organisation will communicate with its audiences, aligned to organisational goals of the service, its values and the principles contained within the Core Code of Ethics

- have leaders that support the strategic approach to communications and engagement and are exemplars in good communication behaviours and principles, aligned to those included in the NFCC Leadership Framework

- ensure that everyone in the Service understands their responsibilities in relation to communications and engagement

- have an appropriately resourced and competent communications and engagement capacity that:

  a. plans for and manages reactive communication issues such as crises and emergencies, working with local resilience partners;

  b. plans proactive communications internally and externally;

  c. carries out meaningful engagement exercises and consultations, aligned to the Gunning Principles to inform strategic direction and support decision making processes.

- have a resilient out of hours arrangement to handle enquiries and manage communications during crises and emergencies, in line with the requirements of the emergency preparedness and resilience fire standard.

- support, train and develop those working within its communications and engagement capacity (where they are employed within a service) encouraging them to maintain their competency and keep developing their skills, knowledge and new methods of communication through continued professional development

- deliver inclusive and accessible communications, recognising that every workforce, community and group has different and diverse needs

- evaluate communications and engagement activity to see whether objectives have been met and if there are any lessons that can be learned and shared.

To achieve this Fire Standard, a fire and rescue service SHOULD:

- involve the most senior communications professional in their service in discussions with the leadership team about matters affecting the organisation to ensure communications and engagement aspects are always considered

- ensure all departments liaise with and take advice from the communications and engagement functions as early as possible, when requiring any communications or engagement activity

- use an established and consistent communications planning framework for communications and campaign work

- place an emphasis on stakeholder relationships and management, mapping and analysing key stakeholders, prioritising audiences and managing influencers

- use established behavioural science methods to develop interventions and influence positive behaviour change

- use audience insight to inform and tailor communications and engagement activities, clearly defining and targeting audiences

- have a collaborative approach to communications and engagement both within the service and with partners and stakeholders

- seek to build effective relationships with relevant media outlets, proactively and collectively planning stories, building mutual understanding and exchanging feedback about proactive and reactive stories

- stay well informed of new communications and engagement methods and techniques, applying them where appropriate.

A fire and rescue service MAY:

- enhance its engagement approach by partnering with key stakeholders to co-design service delivery to best meet community needs

- professionalise the communications and engagement functions by investing in their continued professional development through membership of a recognised professional body.

This page is intentionally left blank