

# Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

## Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2025-2030 Consultation

### Report of findings



Opinion Research Services

May 2025



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## Acknowledgements

Opinion Research Services (ORS) is pleased to have worked with Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) on the consultation reported here.

We are grateful to the residents who took part in the focus groups. They were patient in listening to background information before entering positively into the spirit of open discussions. They engaged with the service, with the issues under consideration, and with each other in discussing their ideas readily. We would also like to thank those who responded via the open questionnaire, without whose valuable input the research would not have been possible.

We thank HWFRS for commissioning the project as part of its programme of consultation. At all stages of the project, ORS' status as an independent organisation was recognised and respected. We are grateful for the trust, and we hope this report will contribute usefully to thinking about HWFRS's future service planning.

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Any press release or publication of the findings of this report requires the advance approval of ORS. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation

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# 1. Summary of findings

## Background to the consultation

- 1.1 Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service (HWFRS) is required to produce a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) to identify risks within its areas of responsibility and set priorities for mitigating these risks and improving community safety. It is designed to assist the Service to identify the range of risks in its communities, and what it can do to keep people, communities, staff, and the environment safe from fire and other emergencies.
- 1.2 The Service's draft CRMP 2025-2030 provides an overview of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks across Herefordshire and Worcestershire and sets out HWFRS's high-level plans for tackling these through its Prevention, Protection, and Response strategies.

## The consultation process

- 1.3 To gather the views of local residents, staff, and other stakeholders on HWFRS's draft CRMP 2025-30, a formal consultation was undertaken between 13 January and 7 April 2025.
- 1.4 Opinion Research Services (ORS) was commissioned by HWFRS, under the governance of the Fire Authority (FRA), to offer independent advice on the design and conduct of the consultation programme, undertake a programme of key consultation activities, and report respondents' views, gathered through an open consultation questionnaire, and two in-person focus groups with seldom heard residents (one with residents in very rural areas; and one with people with learning disabilities). In total, 152 questionnaire responses were received; and 27 residents attended the in-person focus groups. HWFRS also received two written submissions: one from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and one from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for West Mercia.

## Summary of main findings

- 1.5 The following paragraphs summarise the main findings from 152 responses to HWFRS's online consultation questionnaire, two focus groups with seldom heard members of the public, and two written submissions. However, readers are referred to the detailed chapters that follow for the full report.

### Risk

- 1.6 Just over four-in-five respondents (82%) agreed that HWFRS has identified all foreseeable Fire and Rescue related risks within the draft CRMP. Less than one-in-ten (6%) disagreed, while 12% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 1.7 Questionnaire respondents were also asked if they felt there were any areas that had not been covered in the draft CRMP, several of whom commented that HWFRS had considered all foreseeable risk and possible mitigations, both across the Service area as a whole and within their local area. Only a couple of respondents explicitly disagreed that HWFRS had considered all foreseeable risk within its CRMP, but did not elaborate on what they felt had been omitted. Others, while generally agreeing that most risks were covered, made some suggestions around other possible inclusions, including the impacts of societal breakdown and unrest; pandemic threat and response; and unsafe cladding on residential buildings.

## Response

### *The 'Intel' programme*

To resource to risk appropriately, HWFRS must ensure it has relevant and up-to-date information on the risks communities may face. It does this by gathering intelligence or risk information (known as the 'Intel' programme), which is a requirement in law under the Fire Services Act.

Areas on which HWFRS has not traditionally focussed are becoming more likely to present new or changing risks in an emergency situation. For example, the expansion of light industry, diversification in agriculture and waste recycling are considered emergent risks and the Service may need to better understand these potential hazards.

- 1.8 Over nine-in-ten respondents (91%) agreed that HWFRS should develop its risk information gathering programme (Intel) to look at different type of risks. Only 2% of respondents disagreed, while 7% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 1.9 Identifying emergent risks in this way was also considered eminently sensible by participants in both focus groups. Other suggested areas of focus were solar farms; disused buildings that are used by young people to 'hang out' and by rough sleepers as shelter; and fuel stations/garages, in the context of the increasing prevalence of electric vehicles requiring charging.

### *Meeting the challenges of climate change*

Climate change is a significant challenge across the UK, and for Fire and Rescue Services.

The challenges and impacts of climate change across Herefordshire and Worcestershire are becoming more severe. Research suggests that there may be an increase in heatwave days and a longer heatwave season in future, resulting in greater risk of wildfires. There will also be periods of heavier rainfall increasing the likelihood of widespread flooding, as well as more extreme weather events.

How society is responding to climate change is also impacting on the types and locations of fires and other emergencies HWFRS is attending. For example, fires affecting recycling industries and the materials involved have resulted in some larger, more challenging incidents in recent years. It is important that HWFRS ensures its operational response capabilities keep pace with this risk.

- 1.10 More than nine-in-ten respondents (91%) agreed that HWFRS should review, and if necessary, develop its water and flood rescue capabilities. Only 3% disagreed, while 6% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 1.11 Around four-in-five respondents (82%) agreed that HWFRS should review, and if necessary, further develop its wildfire capability. Only 2% disagreed, while 16% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 1.12 A few questionnaire comments were received directly in relation to climate change, most of which were supportive of HWFRS's focus in this area. Participants in both focus groups also agreed that climate change is exacerbating the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, flooding in particular. As such, they fully agreed that adapting to its effects should be a priority for HWFRS.

## Protection

### *Meeting the challenges of new energy systems*

As society attempts to keep pace with the challenges presented by climate change, there is increased investment in new renewable energy related technologies and recycling processes: for example, energy storage in Lithium-ion battery systems, a relatively flexible and inexpensive system. However, these technologies can present unique challenges when involved in fire.

- 1.13 Almost nine-in-ten respondents (89%) agreed that HWFRS should invest in understanding the risks in relation to existing and emerging energy technology. Three per cent disagreed, while eight per cent neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 1.14 Over four-in-five respondents (86%) agreed that HWFRS should invest in understanding the risks in relation to recycling processes. Five per cent of respondents disagreed, while around one-in-ten (9%) neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 1.15 Almost two thirds of respondents (66%) agreed that the Fire Authority should be involved in a greater range of planning applications. Around one-in-six (16%) disagreed, while approximately one-in-six (17%) neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 1.16 The questionnaire respondents who commented on this issue were strongly supportive of HWFRS focusing on the risks associated with existing and emerging energy sources, especially given the increasing prevalence of lithium-ion battery technology.
- 1.17 Importantly, though, it was suggested that more investment may be required to ensure prevention work keeps pace with the constant evolution of technology.
- 1.18 This was echoed in both focus groups, where there was strong support in for HWFRS enhancing its understanding of risk in this area given the growing prevalence of lithium-ion battery technology and the challenging nature of the fires that result from its inappropriate disposal. Participants in both groups also commented on the need for people to be able to dispose of small appliances containing lithium-ion batteries appropriately and easily (i.e., in supermarkets).

### *Housing growth*

While building development plans across Herefordshire and Worcestershire occur over different time periods and often over decades, there are currently local and national proposals to significantly increase the provision of new housing across both counties. Indeed, the current Government's proposed reforms to planning regulations could lead to a significant rise in housebuilding targets across Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

Whilst this proposed increase in residential properties does not automatically mean an increase in dwelling fires or a need for more fire engines/stations, HWFRS feels that installing sprinklers in new-build housing would dramatically reduce risk to local communities and firefighters.

- 1.19 Three quarters of respondents (75%) agreed that HWFRS should lobby for and support the installation and maintenance of residential sprinklers in new housing developments. Over one-in-ten (12%) disagreed, while 13% neither agreed nor disagreed.

- 1.20 Only one questionnaire respondent commented on this issue, questioning whether sprinkler systems were compatible with an increasing number of domestic fires caused by lithium-ion battery technology. This was echoed in the focus group for residents of rural areas, where there was also a lingering perception that sprinkler system activation can cause significant water damage; and that the cost of installing 'smarter' systems could add a significant amount to the price of a new build home.
- 1.21 The proposal was better supported at the group for people with learning disabilities, who asked whether the provision of sprinklers could also apply to re-developed buildings, *"especially as town centre/older buildings are being converted into housing/flats."* A couple of participants at the rural group also acknowledged that there is little cost attached to lobbying for sprinkler systems, and said they would support HWFRS doing so if it considers their installation in new build properties to be a significant benefit.

## Prevention

Alongside the potential increase in housing development, there may also be a need for an associated increase in local infrastructure, such as roads and highways, across both counties. With this comes the likelihood that there will be more people and more cars on our roads. It is, therefore, possible that there may be a need for more Prevention and Response activity in relation to road safety. Based on robust data analysis, HWFRS currently targets those people most at risk of having a serious collision on our roads; primarily younger drivers.

- 1.22 Over four-in-five respondents (85%) agreed that HWFRS should consider developing its road safety initiatives to a wider range of road users, subject to available resources. Only 5% disagreed, while one-in-ten (10%) neither agreed nor disagreed. A few questionnaire respondents also commented on the importance of road safety education, particularly considering the likely future increase in road traffic, and the apparently poor condition of local roads.
- 1.23 While acknowledging that young drivers remain most likely to have a serious road traffic collision, both focus groups agreed with the principle of widening out road safety initiatives to a wider group of road users; older people in particular. Some members of the rural group considered road safety to be more of a police responsibility than an FRS one however; and it was suggested that it may be better addressed (and indeed funded) on a national rather than a local level.
- 1.24 In his written submission, the PCC for West Mercia said he welcomes the focus on partnership-led interventions and dedicated risk-reduction road safety initiatives targeted at young drivers and other vulnerable road users.

## Equalities issues

- 1.25 Questionnaire respondents were asked whether they felt that any particular groups or people might be positively or negatively affected by any of the possible changes to services being considered. Suggestions were HWFRS staff; vulnerable and seldom heard people/communities (including older people and low-income people/families; and people living in rural areas.

## Overall thoughts

- 1.26 Almost four-in-five respondents (79%) agreed with HWFRS's overall approach to the draft CRMP 2025-2030. Four per cent disagreed with HWFRS's overall approach, while 17% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 1.27 Three quarters of respondents (75%) agreed that HWFRS's draft CRMP 2025-2030 is clear and easy to understand. Over one-in-ten (12%) disagreed, and 13% neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 1.28 In the comments, several questionnaire respondents agreed that the draft CRMP is comprehensive and easy to follow. However, a few complaints were made about the length and complexity of the main document, as well as the number of links to supporting documentation.
- 1.29 Both focus groups agreed that the direction of the CRMP seems sensible, and that HWFRS is concentrating on the right issues.
- 1.30 In the written submissions, while the FBU highlighted several errors/discrepancies in the draft CRMP and recommended that HWFRS address these in the final version, the PCC for West Mercia expressed his full support for HWFRS's CRMP, which he describes as a "*clear, well-evidenced, and up-to-date assessment of the fire and rescue-related risks facing communities across Hereford and Worcester*" that will provide "*a robust and transparent basis for local planning and operational delivery.*"

## 2. Project Overview

### The commission

- 2.1 Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service (HWFRS) is required to produce a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) to identify risks within its areas of responsibility and set priorities for mitigating these risks and improving community safety. It is designed to assist the Service identify the range of risks in its communities, and what it can do to keep people, communities, staff, and the environment safe from fire and other emergencies.
- 2.2 In January 2025, HWFRS launched a consultation on its draft CRMP for 2025-2030, which provides an overview of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks across Herefordshire and Worcestershire and sets out HWFRS's high-level plans for tackling these through its Prevention, Protection, and Response strategies. Based on our experience of the fire and rescue service and many statutory CRMP consultations, Opinion Research Services (ORS) was commissioned by HWFRS, under the governance of the Fire Authority (FRA), to offer independent advice on the design and conduct of the consultation programme, undertake a programme of key consultation activities, and provide an interpretative report of findings.

### The consultation

- 2.3 HWFRS' consultation period ran from 13 January to 7 April 2025, and was widely publicised, including on social media. The Service's communications campaign spanned Facebook, X, Instagram and LinkedIn and, including static and video post views, it had 33,088 views and 341 Link Clicks.
- 2.4 The consultation included elements conducted by ORS as an independent organisation - for example, designing and analysing responses to an open consultation questionnaire; designing presentation material for, and recruiting, facilitating, and reporting two deliberative focus groups with residents; and writing this report.

#### *Open questionnaire*

- 2.5 The open consultation questionnaire was available online and in paper format between 13 January and 7 April 2025 to residents, representatives of business, public and voluntary organisations, and HWFRS employees.
- 2.6 In total, 152 questionnaires were completed, all of which were submitted online. Of the 113 respondents who completed the profiling section, most (95) responses were from individuals, but 18 valid responses were received from representatives of organisations.
- 2.7 It should be noted that while open questionnaires are important consultation routes that are accessible to almost everyone, they are not 'surveys' of the public. Whereas surveys require proper sampling of a given population, open questionnaires are distributed unsystematically; and are more likely to be completed by motivated people. However, this does not mean that the open questionnaire findings should be discounted: they are analysed in detail in this report and must be considered as a demonstration of the strength of feeling of residents who were motivated to put forward their views.

### *Focus groups with seldom heard residents*

- 2.8 To understand the views of seldom heard groups of residents who may be affected by HWFRS’s activity, two deliberative focus groups were undertaken: one with people living in very rural areas; and one with people with learning disabilities. ORS worked in collaboration with HWFRS to prepare informative stimulus material for the groups before facilitating the discussions and preparing an independent report of findings.
- 2.9 The focus groups were designed to inform and ‘engage’ participants with the issues set out in the CRMP. This was done by using a ‘deliberative’ approach to encourage people to question and reflect on the issues in detail. The meetings lasted for between one and one-and-a-half hours and were attended as below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Focus groups (time and date, and number of attendees)**

Group	Time and Date	Number of Attendees
People with learning disabilities (Worcester)	Monday 17 March 2025 11am – 12pm	16 (10 people with learning disabilities; two support workers; and four SpeakEasy staff members)
People living in very rural areas (Burley Gate, Herefordshire)	Thursday 3 April 11am – 12:30pm	11
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>27</b>

- 2.10 The group for people with learning disabilities was arranged by [SpeakEasy N.O.W.](#) and the group for people in rural areas by a Herefordshire Council Community Development Officer and a prominent local resident. As standard good practice, the rural residents were recompensed for their time and efforts in taking part; and in accordance with the preference of SpeakEasy N.O.W. an equivalent donation was made to the organisation.

## Written submissions

- 2.11 During the formal consultation period, two written submissions were received from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), and the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia. Full versions of these will be provided to the Fire Authority to aid its decision-making.

## The report

- 2.12 This report summarises the feedback on HWFRS’s draft CRMP for 2025-2030. In order to differentiate verbatim quotations from other information, they are in indented italics within text boxes.
- 2.13 ORS is clear that its role is to analyse and explain the opinions and arguments of the many different interests participating in the consultation, but not to ‘make a case’ for any point of view. In this report, we seek to profile the opinions, views and arguments of those who have responded, but not to make any recommendations as to how the reported results should be used. Whilst this report brings together a wide range of evidence for HWFRS to consider, decisions must be taken based on all the evidence available.

# 3. Open consultation questionnaire

## Introduction and methodology

- 3.1 This chapter reports the findings from the open questionnaire which was available on the CRMP consultation page of HWFRS’s website from 13 January to 7 April 2025. Paper copies were also available on request; however, no paper responses were received.
- 3.2 Information summarising HWFRS’s overall plans and objectives for the period 2025-2030 was included in the questionnaire. Respondents were invited to read the accompanying draft CRMP for further details, before answering questions around risk and intelligence gathering; HWFRS’s proposed focus in relation to response, protection, and prevention; and the CRMP overall. In addition, all questionnaire respondents were invited to provide comments about the Plan and to identify any positive or negative equalities impacts they felt should be considered.
- 3.3 In total, 152 responses were received, of which 118 were complete responses and 34 were partial responses where the respondent had answered at least one question. Eighteen questionnaires were completed by representatives of organisations, and 95 were completed by respondents providing a personal response (including 40 HWFRS staff members and 55 other individuals). The source of the remaining 39 responses is unknown.

## Profile tables

- 3.4 The tables below and on the following page show the unweighted profiles of the responses to the survey from all respondents. Note that the figures may not always sum to 100% due to rounding.
- 3.5 Not all respondents reached the profiling information section of the questionnaire.

**Table 2: Age – All respondents**

Age	Number of respondents (Unweighted)	% of respondents (Unweighted)
16 - 24	5	5
25 - 34	11	12
35 - 44	18	19
45 - 54	19	20
55 - 64	21	22
65 - 74	12	13
75 - 84	6	6
85 or over	2	2
Not Known	58	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3: Gender – All respondents**

Gender	Number of respondents (Unweighted)	% of respondents (Unweighted)
Male	67	72
Female	26	28
Not Known	59	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4: Disability – All respondents**

Disability	Number of respondents (Unweighted)	% of respondents (Unweighted)
Yes	10	11
No	80	89
Not Known	62	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 5: Ethnic Group – All respondents**

Ethnic group	Number of respondents (Unweighted)	% of respondents (Unweighted)
White British	87	96
Non-White British	4	4
Not Known	61	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 6: Respondent Type – All respondents**

Do you work for Hereford and Worcester FRS?	Number of respondents (Unweighted)	% of respondents (Unweighted)
Yes	40	47
No	45	53
Not Known	67	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 7: Nature of work for HWFRS – All HWFRS staff**

Role	Number of respondents (Unweighted)	% of respondents (Unweighted)
Wholetime	17	43
On-Call	8	20
Non-operational (Support)	15	38
Not Known	112	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 8: Area – All respondents**

Area	Number of respondents (Unweighted)	% of respondents (Unweighted)
Herefordshire	40	41
Worcester/Worcestershire	51	52
Other	7	7
Not Known	54	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100</b>

3.6 Eighteen valid responses were received from the following organisations<sup>1</sup>:

- » Alvechurch Parish Council
- » Grimley Parish Council
- » Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service x3<sup>2</sup>
- » Hartlebury Parish Council Planning Advisory Group
- » Leigh and Bransford Parish Council
- » Leominster Town Council
- » Norton-Juxta-Kempsey Parish Council
- » Ross-on-Wye Town Council
- » Severn Stoke and Croome D'Abitot Parish Council
- » Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service x2
- » Steiner Academy, Hereford
- » West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner
- » Weston under Penyard Parish Council
- » Worcestershire County Council.

3.7 Responses submitted on behalf of organisations can differ in nature to those submitted in personal responses from members of the public if, for example, they represent the collective views of a number of different people or raise very specific issues. However, given the low number of responses provided by organisations (18), we have on this occasion reported the consultation responses from organisations together with those of individuals.

## Interpretation of the data

3.8 As the questionnaire was available for anybody with an interest in the subject to complete, the achieved sample is not considered to be representative of any set population. As such, the text refers to 'respondents' throughout the report, as opposed to 'residents' or 'organisations'.

3.9 Graphics are used in this report to make it as user-friendly as possible. The pie charts show the proportions (percentages) of respondents making relevant responses. Where possible the colours used in the charts have been standardised with a 'traffic light' system in which:

- » Green shades represent positive responses – for example, 'agree'
- » Beige shades represent neither positive nor negative responses
- » Red shades represent negative responses – for example, 'disagree'
- » The darker shades are used to highlight responses at the extremes – for example, 'strongly agree' or 'strongly disagree.'

3.10 'Don't know' responses have been treated as invalid when calculating percentages.

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<sup>1</sup> One organisation did not provide a name.

<sup>2</sup> One response from HWFRS specifically stated HR department.

- 3.11 Please note that where percentages do not sum to 100 and proportions of charts may not look equal, this is due to rounding. Moreover, in some cases, due to rounding, the grouped result shown on charts, or noted in the text, is not equal to that of the individual results which make up the grouped figure.
- 3.12 Findings highlighted in this report focus on the overall results; however, where possible, analysis by sub-groups (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, location, and whether they work for HWFRS or not) has been included. To test whether apparent differences between sub-groups are statistically significant, statistical tests are applied. These consider the sizes of the samples that are being compared and the level of confidence we need to have in our testing. In line with standard social research practice, we have used a 95% confidence level. In other words, we can be 95% certain that the difference has not occurred by chance. Only differences that are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level are highlighted in the text commentary.

## Duplicate and co-ordinated responses

- 3.13 It is important that engagement questionnaires are open and accessible to all, whilst being alert to the possibility of multiple completions (by the same people) distorting the analysis. Therefore, while making it easy to complete the questionnaire online, ORS monitors the IP addresses through which questionnaires are completed. A similar analysis of 'cookies' was also undertaken – where responses originated from users on the same computer using the same browser and the same credentials (e.g., user account). Following this analysis, no duplicate responses were identified.

## Main findings

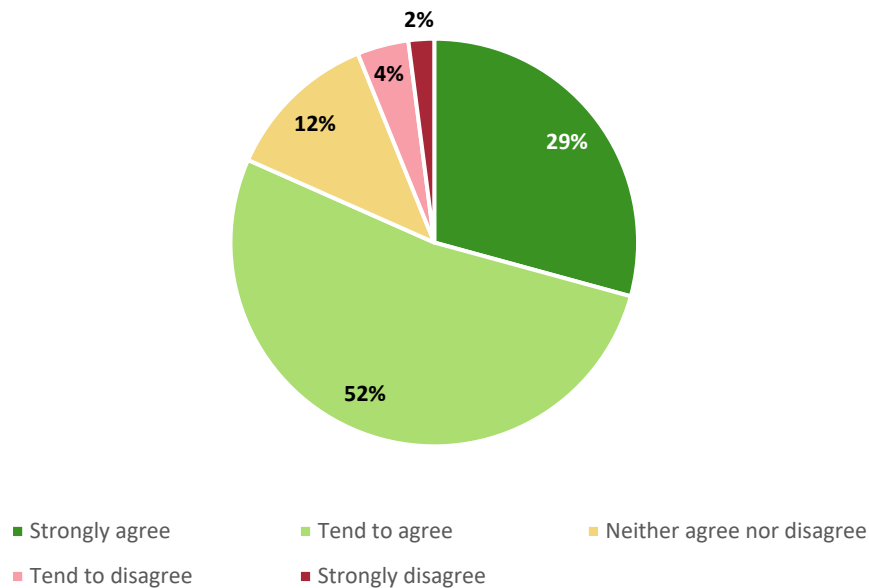
### Risk

Many factors influence and shape how HWFRS operates, from government policy and legislative requirements to societal change. To provide a structure for assessing and understanding the factors that may influence the operating context, an extensive PESTEL analysis has been conducted. PESTEL is an acronym that stands for Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal. This is known as the Strategic Understanding of Risk.

<https://www.hwfire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/SUoR-PESTEL-c3.pdf>

- 3.14 Figure 1 overleaf shows that over four-in-five respondents (82%) agreed that HWFRS had identified all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks within the draft CRMP, with around three-in-ten (29%) strongly agreeing. Less than one-in-ten (6%) disagreed that all relevant risks had been identified in the CRMP, while 12% neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Figure 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that HWFRS have identified all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks within the draft CRMP?**



**Base: All respondents (147)**

- 3.15 If the results for this question are analysed by sub-group, it can be seen that women and those who work for HWFRS were significantly more likely than all respondents to agree that HWFRS has identified all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks within the draft CRMP.
- 3.16 Respondents were also asked if they felt there were any areas that had not been covered in the draft CRMP, several of whom commented that HWFRS had considered all foreseeable risk, both across the Service area as a whole and within their local area.

*“Overall, HWFRS’s draft CRMP aligns well with the Fire and Rescue National Framework. The plan successfully identifies foreseeable risks and outlines appropriate strategies for mitigation. HWFRS appears to comply with this requirement through its Strategic Understanding of Risk, which identifies key risks.” (Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia)*

*“You have considered all the risks which affect our county/area and your assessments looks good. For our parish flooding, road traffic accidents and fire in buildings (no high rise) are covered. The challenge is about wild fires on the Malverns and the question about the level of cover that can be quickly provided if one should occur.” (Leigh and Bransford Parish Council)*

*“The Draft Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) appears to contain a relevant and up to date assessment of fire and rescue related risks that could affect the area of the authority and sufficiently demonstrates how Prevention, Protection and Response activities will best be used to mitigate the impact of identified risks within the local community...” (Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia)*

- 3.17 Only a couple of respondents explicitly disagreed that HWFRS had considered all foreseeable risk within its CRMP, but did not elaborate on what they felt had been omitted.

*“While I agree with the methodology, I don't agree that its application has identified all of the future risks. The output is reflective of what has been identified, but remains inadequate.”  
(Member of the public)*

- 3.18 Others, while generally agreeing that most risks were covered, made some suggestions around other possible inclusions, as below.

*“Societal breakdown and unrest...” (Unknown respondent type)*

*“Possibly pandemic threat/response?”  
(Member of the public)*

*“... unsafe cladding on residential buildings for low, medium and high-rise buildings.”  
(Member of HWFRS staff)*

*“Reduce EDI spend. Each force shouldn't have to invest in emerging tech research etc this needs to be done nationally or every force will be doing it separately which is highly inefficient.” (Member of the Public)*

*“Big risk waiting for defibs/emergency first aid from ambulance service - very long waits. It would be great if, like in other areas, fire teams could be deployed if they can arrive faster...” (Steiner Academy, Hereford)*

*“The very great respect the Fire Service have, as with all planning, I feel is best placed in prevention and not cure. So, I am strongly suggesting the Fire Service's experience is used in nearly all Planning for: 1. Roads 2. Footpaths 3. Cycle paths 4. Rainwater reservoirs 5. Fresh water pipes and hydrants 6. Sewage water drainage 7. Management of poisoned waters and soil (oil spills/battery pollution, nitrates and phosphorates, lead, asbestos, etc.)... 8. Housing - types of insulation, heated or passive.” (Member of the Public)*

- 3.19 It should be noted that a couple of respondents questioned why members of the public were being asked to comment on the issue of foreseeable risk, given the Service's expertise on the matters in question.

*“I don't understand why you are asking the public where to spend money and about 'resourcing risk' when you have all the data telling you about the emerging risks...” (Member of HWFRS staff)*

## Response

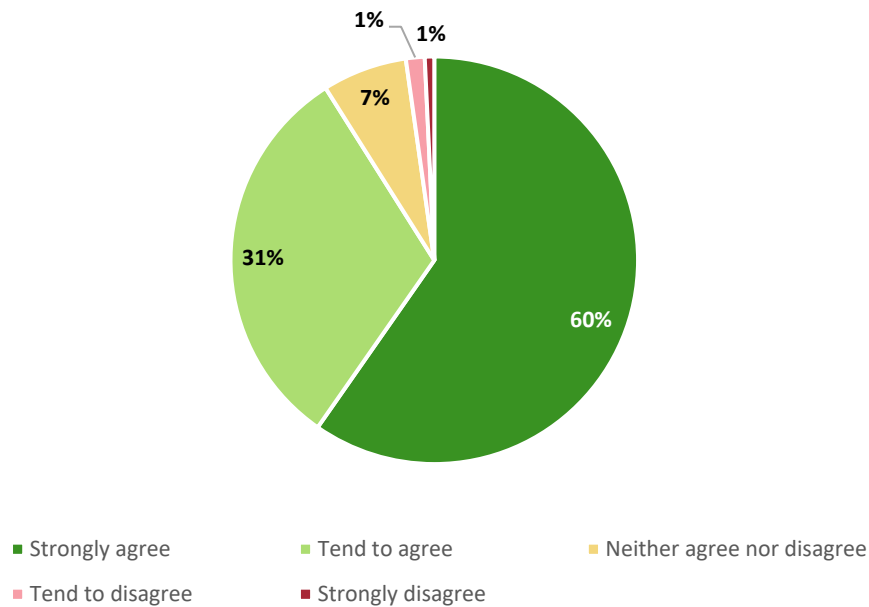
### The 'Intel' programme

To resource to risk appropriately, HWFRS must ensure it has relevant and up-to-date information on the risks communities may face. It does this by gathering intelligence or risk information (known as the 'Intel' programme), which is a requirement in law under the Fire Services Act.

Areas on which HWFRS has not traditionally focussed are becoming more likely to present new or changing risks in an emergency situation. For example, the expansion of light industry, diversification in agriculture and waste recycling are considered emergent risks and the Service may need to better understand these potential hazards.

- 3.20 Figure 2 shows that over nine-in-ten respondents (91%) agreed that HWFRS should develop its risk information gathering programme (Intel) to look at different type of risks, with three fifths (60%) strongly agreeing with this. Only 2% of respondents disagreed that HWFRS should develop its risk information gathering programme (Intel), while 7% neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Figure 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that HWFRS should develop its risk information gathering programme (Intel) to look at different types of risks?**



**Base: All respondents (134)**

- 3.21 If the results for this question are analysed by sub-group, it can be seen that those living in Herefordshire and those who are White British were significantly more likely than all respondents to agree that HWFRS should develop its risk information gathering programme (Intel) to look at different type of risks.
- 3.22 A couple of respondents commented on the importance of HWFRS taking measures to protect itself and its systems from cyber-attacks, and to ensure it has proper business continuity arrangements in place in the event of such an incident. It was suggested that:

*“... We are [lagging] behind other countries in terms of simple laws to protect, not only our utilities infrastructure, but also local government infrastructure from international terrorism. Learning from other countries' failures should be fully considered.” (Member of the Public)*

### *Meeting the challenges of climate change*

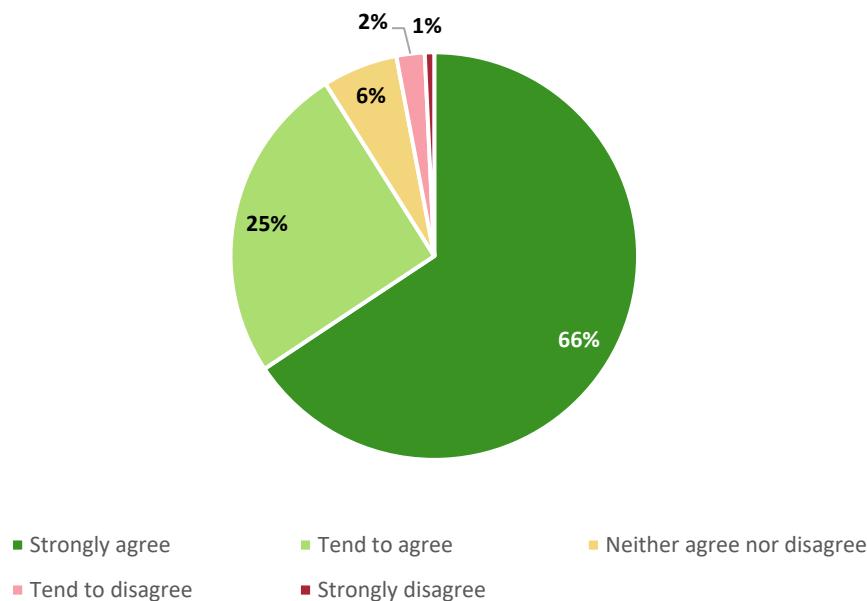
Climate change is a significant challenge across the UK, and for Fire and Rescue Services.

The challenges and impacts of climate change across Herefordshire and Worcestershire are becoming more severe. Research suggests that there may be an increase in heatwave days and a longer heatwave season in future, resulting in greater risk of wildfires. There will also be periods of heavier rainfall increasing the likelihood of widespread flooding, as well as more extreme weather events.

How society is responding to climate change is also impacting on the types and locations of fires and other emergencies HWFRS is attending. For example, fires affecting recycling industries and the materials involved have resulted in some larger, more challenging incidents in recent years. It is important that HWFRS ensures its operational response capabilities keep pace with this risk.

- 3.23 Figure 3 shows that more than nine-in-ten respondents (91%) agreed that HWFRS should review, and if necessary, develop its water and flood rescue capabilities, with around two thirds (66%) strongly agreeing with this. Only 3% disagreed that HWFRS should review, and if necessary, develop its water and flood rescue capabilities, while 6% neither agreed nor disagreed.

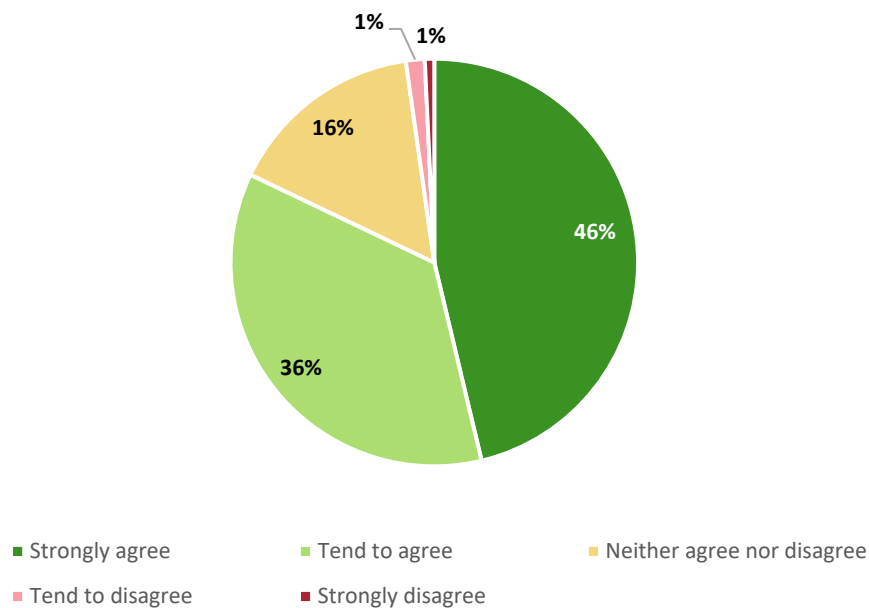
**Figure 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that HWFRS should review and if necessary, develop its water and flood rescue capabilities?**



**Base: All respondents (134)**

- 3.24 If the results for this question are analysed by sub-group, it can be seen that those living in Herefordshire and those who are White British were significantly more likely than all respondents to agree that HWFRS should review, and if necessary, develop its water and flood rescue capabilities.
- 3.25 Figure 4 shows that around four-in-five respondents (82%) agreed that HWFRS should review, and if necessary, further develop its wildfire capability, with 46% strongly agreeing with this. Only 2% disagreed that HWFRS should review, and if necessary, further develop its Wildfire capability, while 16% neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Figure 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that HWFRS should review and if necessary, further develop its wildfire capability?**



**Base: All respondents (134)**

- 3.26 There are no significant differences by sub-group for this question.
- 3.27 A few comments were received directly in relation to climate change, most of which were supportive of HWFRS's focus in this area.

*"Feel like there needs to be a greater focus on the impact climate change will have over this time period and the stress this will put on resources in Herefordshire and Worcestershire." (Member of HWFRS Staff)*

- 3.28 One respondent, though, said that:

*"Your flood risk data only goes back 10 years and does not include the major floods of 2007 and 1998, both of which were more severe than 2019/20." (Member of the Public)*

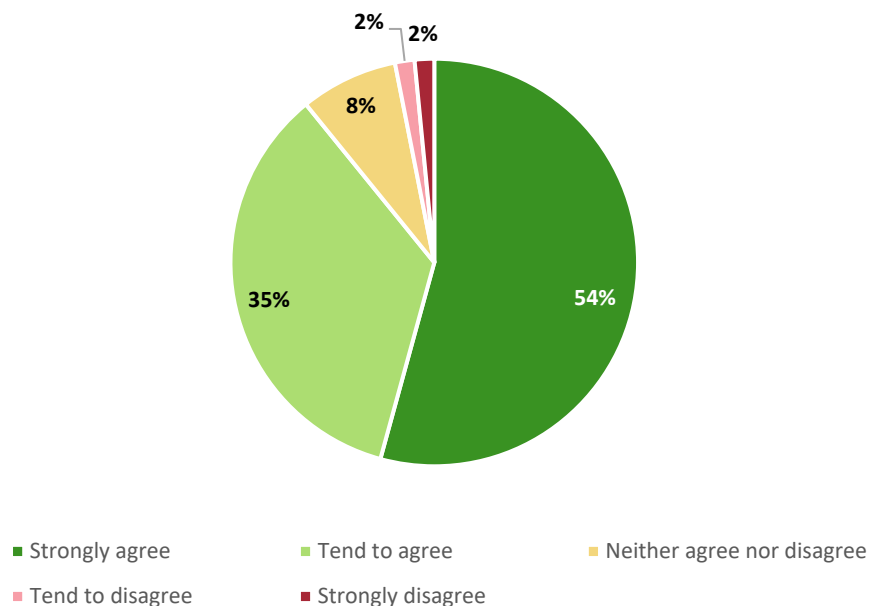
## Protection

### *Meeting the challenges of new energy systems*

As society attempts to keep pace with the challenges presented by climate change, there is increased investment in new renewable energy related technologies and recycling processes: for example, energy storage in Lithium-ion battery systems, a relatively flexible and inexpensive system. However, these technologies can present unique challenges when involved in fire.

- 3.29 Figure 5 shows that almost nine-in-ten respondents (89%) agreed that HWFRS should invest in understanding the risks in relation to existing and emerging energy technology, with over half (54%) strongly agreeing with this. Three per cent disagreed that HWFRS should invest in understanding the risks in relation to existing and emerging energy technology, while 8% neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Figure 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree that HWFRS should invest in understanding the risks in relation to existing and emerging energy technology?**



**Base: All respondents (129)**

- 3.30 If the results for this question are analysed by sub-group, it can be seen that those aged 55-64 years and those who work for HWFRS were significantly more likely than all respondents to agree that HWFRS should invest in understanding the risks in relation to existing and emerging energy technology.
- 3.31 Those who commented on this issue were strongly supportive of HWFRS focusing on the risks associated with existing and emerging energy sources, especially given the increasing prevalence of lithium-ion battery technology.

*“Our main current concern is the increasing use of Lithium-ion batteries and their inherent risk... From vapes to battery powered bikes and scooters and then industrial scale lithium-ion storage facilities for balancing the grid...” (Hartlebury Parish Council Planning Advisory Group)*

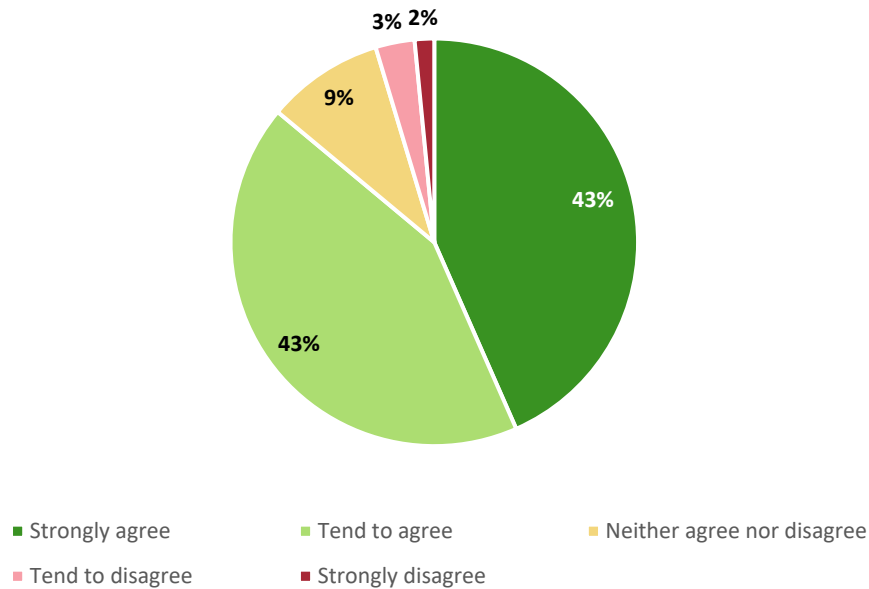
- 3.32 It was suggested, though, that more investment may be required to ensure prevention work keeps pace with the constant evolution of technology; and one respondent suggested that the CRMP could offer more detail around the adequacy of water supplies in dealing with fires involving new technologies.

*“It is an ongoing challenge to identify all foreseeable F&R related risks when the advance in technology increases pace exponentially. I do feel that it is vital to work closely with all partners to ensure that prevention also keeps pace with this...” (Member of the Public)*

*“The plan seems to be thorough and detailed. The section on new technology especially on dealing with Lithium-ion fires at storage facilities could do with more detail and seems to rely on an adequate supply of water. There are already 3 planning applications within 3 miles of Hartlebury for Battery storage facilities, at various stages of planning!” (Hartlebury Parish Council Planning Advisory Group)*

- 3.33 Figure 6 shows that over four-in-five respondents (86%) agreed that HWFRS should invest in understanding the risks in relation to recycling processes, with over two-in-five (43%) strongly agreeing with this. Five per cent of respondents disagreed that HWFRS should invest in understanding the risks in relation to recycling processes, while around one-in-ten (9%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

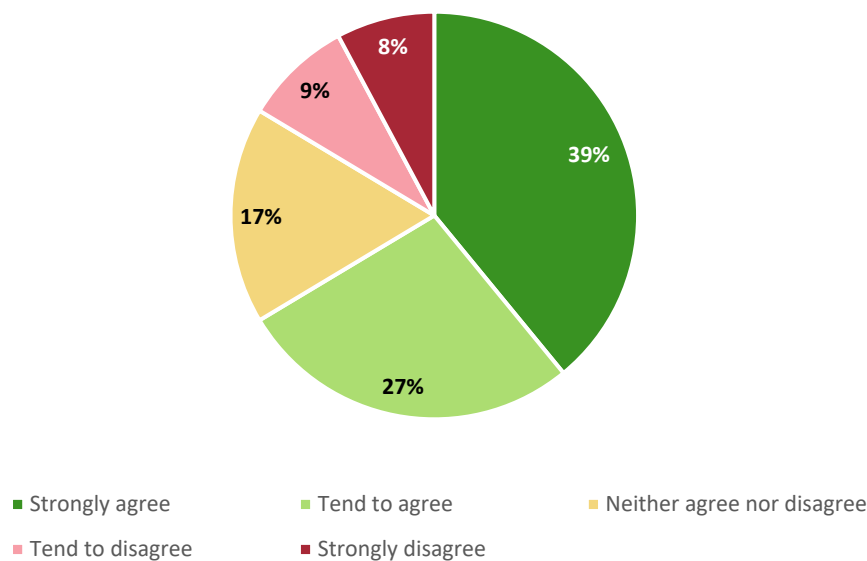
**Figure 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree that HWFRS should invest in understanding the risks in relation to recycling processes?**



**Base: All respondents (129)**

- 3.34 If the results for this question are analysed by sub-group, it can be seen that those who work for HWFRS were significantly more likely than all respondents to agree that HWFRS should invest in understanding the risks in relation to recycling processes.
- 3.35 Figure 7 shows that almost two thirds of respondents (66%) agreed that the Fire Authority should be involved in a greater range of planning applications, with almost two fifths (39%) strongly agreeing. Around one-in-six (16%) disagreed that the Fire Authority should be involved in a greater range of planning applications with almost one-in-ten (8%) strongly disagreeing. Approximately one-in-six (17%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Figure 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Fire Authority should be involved in a greater range of planning applications?**



**Base: All respondents (128)**

- 3.36 If the results for this question are analysed by sub-group, it can be seen that women and those aged 55 years or over were significantly more likely than all respondents to agree that the Fire Authority should be involved in a greater range of planning applications.

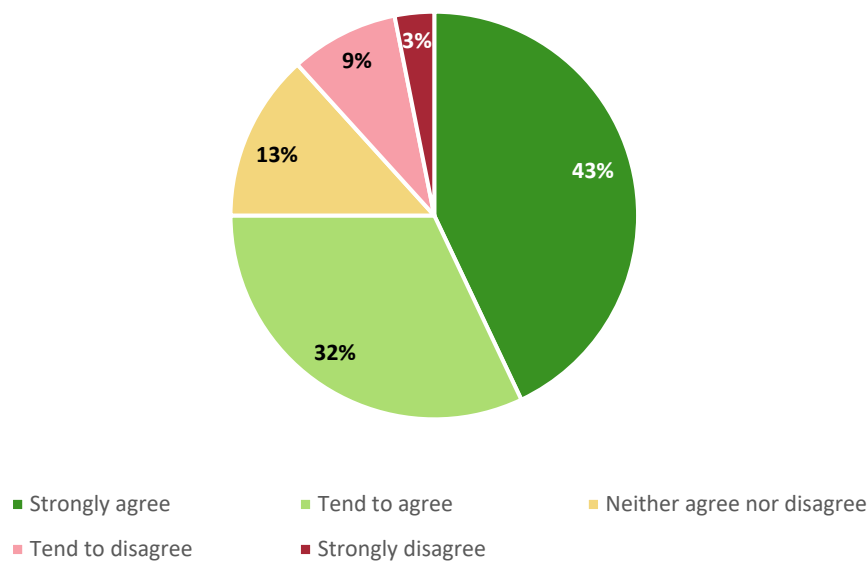
### *Housing growth*

While building development plans across Herefordshire and Worcestershire occur over different time periods and often over decades, there are currently local and national proposals to significantly increase the provision of new housing across both counties. Indeed, the current Government's proposed reforms to planning regulations could lead to a significant rise in housebuilding targets across Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

Whilst this proposed increase in residential properties does not automatically mean an increase in dwelling fires or the need for more fire engines or new fire stations, HWFRS believes that the installation of sprinklers in new-build housing would dramatically reduce the risk to local communities and firefighters.

- 3.37 Figure 8 shows that three quarters of respondents (75%) agreed that HWFRS should lobby for and support the installation and maintenance of residential sprinklers in new housing developments, with over two fifths (43%) strongly agreeing with this. Over one-in-ten (12%) disagreed that HWFRS should lobby for and support the installation and maintenance of residential sprinklers in new housing developments, while 13% neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Figure 8: To what extent do you agree or disagree that HWFRS should lobby for and support the installation and maintenance of residential sprinklers in new housing developments?**



**Base: All respondents (128)**

- 3.38 If the results for this question are analysed by sub-group, it can be seen that those who live in Worcester/Worcestershire and those who are White British were significantly more likely than all respondents to agree that HWFRS should lobby for and support the installation and maintenance of residential sprinklers in new housing developments.
- 3.39 Only one respondent commented on this issue, questioning whether sprinkler systems were compatible with an increasing number of fires caused by lithium-ion battery technology.

*"... Concerns have been raised about the fire risks of electric car/bike chargers. With sprinkler systems in new housing developments, what happens if it is an electrical fire? ..." (Leominster Town Council)*

## Prevention

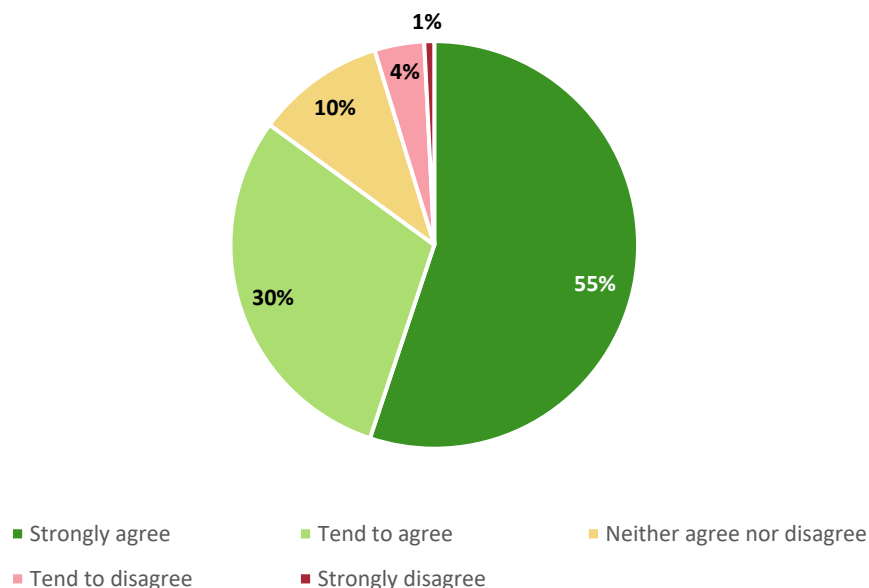
Alongside the potential increase in housing development, there may also be a need for an associated increase in local infrastructure, such as roads and highways, across both counties. With this comes the likelihood that there will be more people and more cars on our roads. It is, therefore, possible that there may be a need for more Prevention and Response activity in relation to road safety. This does not necessarily mean local roads are becoming less safe, however with increased prevention activity, safer vehicles with better safety technology, and improved road infrastructure, HWFRS would aim to help make roads safer for everyone.

Based on robust data analysis, HWFRS currently targets those people most at risk of having a serious collision on our roads; primarily younger drivers.

- 3.40 Figure 9 shows that over four-in-five respondents (85%) agreed that HWFRS should consider developing its road safety initiatives to a wider range of road users, subject to available resources, with over half

(55%) strongly agreeing. Only 5% disagreed that HWFRS should consider developing its road safety initiatives to a wider range of road users, while one-in-ten (10%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Figure 9: To what extent do you agree or disagree that HWFRS should consider developing its road safety initiatives to a wider range of road users, subject to available resources?**



**Base: All respondents (127)**

- 3.41 If the results for this question are analysed by sub-group, it can be seen that women and those who work for HWFRS were significantly more likely than all respondents to agree that HWFRS should consider developing its road safety initiatives to a wider range of road users.
- 3.42 A few respondents commented on the importance of road safety education, particularly considering the likely future increase in road traffic, and the apparently poor condition of local roads.

*“Injuries from road related issues are much greater than those of fire, flooding etc so maximum focus needs to be on road traffic etc.” (Member of the Public)*

*“Especially in rural Herefordshire, the growing number of young adult men that are danger to themselves and others on the road. Also, in rural Herefordshire, the roads are in an appalling condition, I had a near miss last week when an oncoming car swerved to miss a massive pothole. The condition of the roads is going to increase the number of RTCs.” (Member of the Public)*

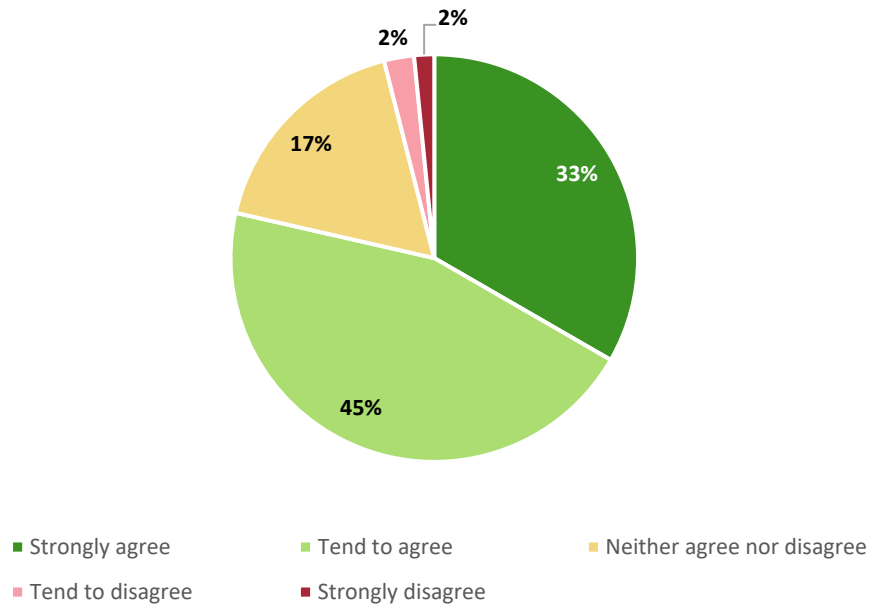
*“... The Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia fully supports the draft CRMP document and in particular the endeavour to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads. This is both in the efforts to assist partners to reduce the risks associated with our roads and risk reduction initiatives for young drivers and other at-risk road users.” (Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia)*

- 3.43 On a related note, Severn Stoke and Croome d’Abitot Parish Council said it was “seeing an increase in the number of [e-scooters] on rural roads and remain concerned about the lack of legislation governing them...”

## Overall thoughts

- 3.44 Figure 10 shows that almost four-in-five respondents (79%) agreed with HWFRS's overall approach to the draft CRMP 2025-2030, with a third (33%) strongly agreeing. Four per cent disagreed with HWFRS's overall approach, while 17% neither agreed nor disagreed.

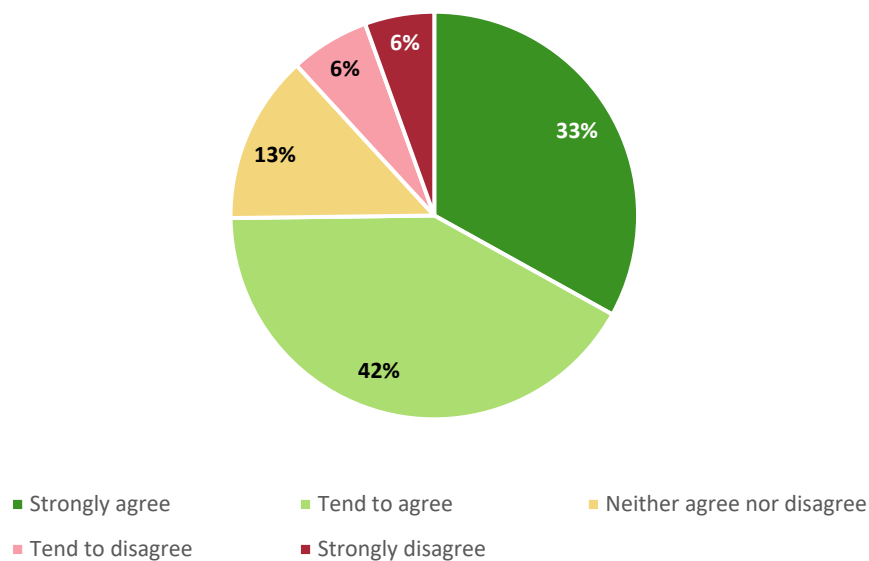
**Figure 10: To what extent do you agree or disagree with HWFRS's overall approach to the draft CRMP 2025-2030?**



**Base: All respondents 126**

- 3.45 If the results for this question are analysed by sub-group, it can be seen that those who work for HWFRS were significantly more likely than all respondents to agree with HWFRS's overall approach to the draft CRMP 2025-2030.
- 3.46 Figure 11 shows that three quarters of respondents (75%) agreed that HWFRS's draft CRMP 2025-2030 is clear and easy to understand, with a third (33%) strongly agreeing with this. However, over one-in-ten (12%) disagreed that the draft CRMP is clear and easy to understand, with 6% strongly disagreeing, while 13% neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Figure 11: To what extent do you agree or disagree that HWFRS’s draft CRMP 2025-2030 is clear and easy to understand?**



**Base: All respondents (127)**

3.47 If the results for this question are analysed by sub-group, it can be seen that those living in Worcester/Worcestershire and those who work for HWFRS were significantly more likely than all respondents to agree that HWFRS’s draft CRMP 2025-2030 is clear and easy to understand.

3.48 In the comments, several respondents agreed that the draft CRMP is comprehensive and easy to follow.

*“Extensive research documentation to support the main document. Clearly a very thorough CRMP.” (Member of the Public)*

3.49 However, a few complaints were made about the length and complexity of the main document, as well as the number of links to supporting documentation.

*“It is extremely well put together and comprehensive but when following links to other areas of interest the amount of information is vast. The length of time for the survey therefore extends to hours.” (Member of the Public)*

*“With regard to this consultation, the links should open in new tabs to make it more accessible. It was difficult to identify the full extent of the changes.” (Leominster Town Council)*

3.50 A couple of respondents also commented on potential implementation challenges, and the possible need to prioritise risks and mitigations in the current economic climate.

*“I feel that the draft is clear, easy to understand and covers all the relevant areas. The task facing the Fire Service is considerable and will have a considerable potential bearing on the workload of the Fire Service and needs to be planned for carefully with some areas prioritised, an unenviable task.” (Alvechurch Parish Council)*

*“Agree with the majority of proposals. The challenge will be the priority of resourcing, given the current economic limitations.” (Member of HWFRS staff)*

## Equalities issues

3.51 Finally, questionnaire respondents were asked whether they felt that any particular groups or people might be positively or negatively affected by any of the possible changes to services being considered. Suggestions were:

- » HWFRS staff, especially those on the ‘front line’
- » Vulnerable and seldom heard people/communities (including older people and low-income people/families)

*“Continued multi-agency working to support those more vulnerable communities or those who are seldom heard. For example older, more frail population. Or individuals with hoarding tendencies / disorders. Working with the HWFRS is crucial to providing a timely response.” (Worcestershire County Council)*

- » People living in rural areas

*“Clearly your resources are being stretched at a time of increasing demand and complexity. HWFRS seems to have a good grasp of where the risks are especially in poorer urban areas. The more distant rural areas with elderly residents may be left behind in this digital age. Access to reliable communications will be crucial to the delivery of HWFRS services.” (Hartlebury Parish Council Planning Advisory Group)*

# 4. Resident focus groups

## Introduction

- 4.1 This chapter reports the views from two deliberative focus groups with seldom heard residents (people with learning disabilities and residents in very rural areas), which were independently facilitated by ORS.
- 4.2 The meeting format followed a pre-determined topic guide which allowed space for a general discussion of the key questions under consideration. A series of information slides were shared at set points during the sessions, which ensured that participants had sufficient background information to actively deliberate on the issues.
- 4.3 This is not a verbatim transcript of the two sessions, but an interpretative summary of the issues raised by participants - and as the focus groups did not differ materially in their views, this report combines the findings in a single account. Any differences have been drawn out where appropriate.
- 4.4 All participants were encouraged to express their opinions freely and to ask questions throughout, and both meetings were successful in stimulating wide-ranging and informed debate on the issues under consideration.

## Main findings

### Risk

#### *The 'Intel' Programme*

- 4.5 Prior to discussion, participants were shown the following information and asked for their views on whether HWFRS should keep investing in its 'Intelligence (Intel) Programme' to ensure it is aware of all emergent risks in areas like agriculture, light industry, heritage sites and areas of outstanding natural beauty - and why.

### Priorities for the next 5 years...

#### **Making sure these types of places are as safe as they can be...**



**Farms (changing practices → new risks e.g., stockpiling ammonium-nitrate fertilisers)**



**Workplaces (like 'light industry' factories/offices)**



**Heritage sites e.g., Hereford and Worcester Cathedrals**



**Areas of outstanding natural beauty e.g. [Malvern Hills](#)/[Lickey Hills Country Park](#)**

**... and that the systems it uses are as safe from cybercrime as they can be**



- 4.6 Identifying emergent risks in this way was considered eminently sensible by participants in both groups. Other suggested areas of focus were:

- » Solar farms

*“Do they have many fires on solar farms? Because they're increasing in the area as well.” (Group for residents of rural areas)*

- » Disused buildings that are used by young people to ‘hang out’ and by rough sleepers as shelter

*“Disused buildings like shops etc. are often used by younger people. There will be an increase in these as more shops close which could bring increased risk of fire. And you don't know who might be in the building; like people rough sleeping” (Group for people with learning disabilities)*

- » Fuel stations/garages, in the context of the increasing prevalence of electric chargers

*“What about garages and petrol stations? If there are more electric charging points at petrol stations, could this be a new risk? The Government want more electric cars so this could be more of a risk” (Group for people with learning disabilities)*

## Response

### *Meeting the challenges of climate change*

- 4.7 Prior to discussion, participants were shown the following information and asked for their views on whether meeting the challenges of climate change should be a priority for HWFRS, and particularly whether the Service should review and develop its capabilities for water and flood rescue, and wildfires.

## Priorities for the next 5 years...

### Climate change

- **Weather is changing, which is a significant challenge across the world/for HWFRS**
- **Range of challenges and their impact becoming more severe**



**More very hot weather  
= more wildfires**



**More heavy rain  
= more floods**



**More ‘extreme  
weather’ (e.g., storms/  
strong winds)**

**HWFRS needs to  
make sure it can  
keep dealing  
with the impacts  
of these**

- 4.8 All participants in both focus groups agreed that climate change is exacerbating the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, flooding in particular. As such, they fully agreed that adapting to its effects should be a priority for HWFRS.

*“It's happening more often” (Group for people with learning disabilities)*

*“Incidents like flooding and wildfires were quite unusual. And they are far more common now. I mean, you hear about flooding... They are supposed to be one in 100-year events... and it's happened twice in a fortnight or something like that. So these things are becoming more extreme. They're occurring far more... So we need to ensure there's an organisation that can do whatever is necessary because it's not going to get any better, is it?” (Group for residents of rural areas)*

- 4.9 It should also be noted that participants in the rural group were surprised to learn that some HWFRS activity (flooding and water rescue especially) is non-statutory. They clearly associated the Service with these types of incidents, not least as they could not think of what other service or organisation might attend them instead.

*“Nobody else can do it... They have the skills, the discipline, the training and the kudos and the ability to get to situations where [others] would not be capable of doing so.” (Group for residents of rural areas)*

## Protection

### *Meeting the challenges of new energy systems*

- 4.10 Prior to discussion, participants were shown the following information and asked for their views on whether HWFRS should invest in understanding the risks of existing and emerging energy technology and the recycling processes used to dispose of it; and whether the Service should be involved in a greater range of planning applications.

## Priorities for the next 5 years...

### Fires in rubbish/recycling sites

- **More of these happening (locally/nationally)**
  - 17 waste & recycling centres in H&W → 16 fires over last five years
  - Number of illegal waste storage/disposal sites not fully known = additional risks due to how they operate)
- **Many fires happening (48%) because of batteries in e.g., mobile phones, laptops, tablets, vapes, electric toothbrushes, earbuds, electric vehicles, solar panels etc.**
  - Very safe to use, but can catch fire if the batteries are crushed (e.g., in bin lorries)
  - Fires burn for a long time/need a lot of resource (i.e., fire engines/firefighters)



- 4.11 There was strong support in both groups for HWFRS enhancing its understanding of risk in this area given the growing prevalence of lithium-ion battery technology and the challenging nature of the fires that result from its inappropriate disposal.

*“This will be something that will increase as more and more batteries are used” (Group for people with learning disabilities)*

*“It takes a lot of time to put out these fires, like the one in Kidderminster” (Group for people with learning disabilities)*

- 4.12 Participants in both groups also commented on the need for people to be able to dispose of appliances containing lithium-ion batteries appropriately and easily. It was said that most supermarkets already have facilities for 'ordinary' battery disposal; and could have the equivalent for lithium-ion technology like mobile phones, tablets, vapes, electric toothbrushes, earbuds etc.

*"Do supermarkets have places to dispose of batteries? Where can you take other batteries?"  
(Group for people with learning disabilities)*

*"I think it's having somewhere you can safely dispose of them because there's so many... You're going to a supermarket... and you'll see a battery tub... There needs to be more places in little community shops and places like that where you can take your batteries because I think that's the key to it. All these people have got the disposable vapes and stuff, they're going to just throw them away because where do you take them?" (Group for residents of rural areas)*

- 4.13 There was also a strong sense that more prevention activity is needed on both a local and national level around the potential impacts of purchasing, using, and disposing of new energy technology inappropriately.

*"Chargers are much cheaper on places like Shein; and if people don't know they haven't been safety tested, they'll buy the cheaper one. Realising what the risks are... it comes back to that education." (Group for residents of rural areas)*

*"... Perhaps there needs to be a campaign of national adverts, just to bring things to the public consciousness that they've got more responsibility to take here." (Group for residents of rural areas)*

- 4.14 Other comments and suggestions on this issue were around:

- » The need to work with and learn from other countries in addressing technological risk

*"All these potential causes of the fire are not peculiar just in the UK, so what ideas... are [other countries] coming up with to sort all these things out? Don't try and reinvent the wheel" (Group for residents of rural areas)*

- » The safety of electric vehicles when they are scrapped (Group for people with learning disabilities)
- » The need for FRSs to work with car manufacturers *"to tell them how to make things safer."* (Group for people with learning disabilities)

## Housing growth

- 4.15 Prior to discussion, participants were shown the following information and asked for their views on whether HWFRS should lobby for and support the installation and maintenance of sprinklers in new housing developments.

### Priorities for the next 5 years...

#### Lobbying for sprinklers in new houses

- **Local/national proposals to significantly increase provision of new housing across both counties**
- **Does not automatically mean an increase in dwelling fires or need for more fire engines/new fire stations (new houses are usually very safe) ...**
- **... but HWFRS → installation of sprinklers in new-build housing would reduce risk to local communities, HWFRS firefighters, and environment**



Sprinkler systems → 99% effective at suppressing fires and give people a greater chance of getting out if there is a fire

- 4.16 This was supported at the group for people with learning disabilities, who asked whether the provision of sprinklers could also apply to re-developed buildings, *“especially as town centre/older buildings are being converted into housing/flats.”*
- 4.17 The residents of rural areas were less convinced, however, not least due to their concerns that sprinkler systems may be incompatible with the number of lithium-ion battery powered appliances/goods households typically own.

*“If you install sprinklers and you had your electric bike, your scooter, whatever, inside; would it be an issue?” (Group for residents of rural areas)*

- 4.18 Moreover, despite participants being told otherwise, there remains a lingering perception that sprinkler system activation can cause significant water damage; and that the cost of installing smarter systems that target the area around the fire only could add a significant amount to the price of a new build home.

*“I can see the theory behind it, but you'd want it to be smart and go off where you needed it to be; and you want it to be affordable and not cost you all this extra money for it to not work or potentially damage something if it's not working properly.” (Group for residents of rural areas)*

*“I don't think I'd want one in my house... There's no point in having one that suddenly goes off and drenches everything...” (Group for residents of rural areas)*

- 4.19 A couple of participants acknowledged that there is little cost attached to lobbying for sprinkler systems, and said they would support HWFRS doing so if it considers their installation in new build properties to be a significant benefit.

*“There's no cost in lobbying, is there? If there's no cost, if you're not stealing the funds from something, then there's no harm in doing that if they think it's a good idea. If they put it up there, then they obviously think it's worth it...” (Group for residents of rural areas)*

## Prevention

- 4.20 Prior to discussion, participants were shown the following information and asked for their views on whether HWFRS consider developing its road safety initiatives to include a wider range of road users.

### Priorities for the next 5 years...

#### 4. Undertake more road safety education

- **More houses = more roads = more cars/people on the roads = possible need for more road safety education**
- **Doesn't necessarily mean local roads becoming less safe...**
- **... but with increased prevention, safer vehicles, and improved road infrastructure → HWFRS would aim to help make roads safer for everyone**
- **At the moment, HWFRS targets road safety education at people most likely to have a serious crash → mainly young people**



Do you agree or disagree that HWFRS should consider developing its road safety initiatives to include a wider range of road users? Why?

- 4.21 While acknowledging that young drivers remain most likely to have a serious road traffic collision, both groups agreed with the principle of widening out road safety initiatives to a wider group of road users; older people in particular.

*“Someone was hit by an elderly driver recently; she was in a very serious condition” (Group for people with learning disabilities)*

- 4.22 On a related note, some suggestions were made as to the type of road safety education that might be beneficial:

- » Changes to things like headlights, and the effect these can have on driving conditions

*“I no longer drive at night because of issues with the reflective lights. I made this decision as I got older. Education is needed with older people that things have changed like the lights” (Group for people with learning disabilities)*

- » The dangers of driving through floodwater

*“Education is also needed about not driving through floodwater. There's a lack of understanding about what is under the water and how deep it is” (Group for people with learning disabilities)*

» Agricultural driving

*“I think the worst problem around here is because we're an agricultural community, we end up with huge amounts of tractors, massive trailers going down our roads... Going up lanes that are so narrow that the wheels of the vehicles actually just push the soil out into the ditch, filling the ditch up. It's just a very dangerous problem.”*

- 4.23 It should be noted that some members of the rural group considered road safety to be more of a police responsibility than an FRS one; and it was again suggested that it may be better addressed (and indeed funded) on a national rather than a local level.

*“I don't think it's really a Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service issue. I think it's all departments because for every accident you've got the likelihood of hospitals involved, pharmacies involved, the drug bill for the country going up, you've got to redo the road, you've got to strip it all off, shut it down, divert the traffic. So you've got all sorts of different modalities involved. So it's more a government national campaign that's required... I agree that they should be heavily involved but they shouldn't be funding it. They should be funded nationally.” (Group for residents of rural areas)*

## Overall thoughts

- 4.24 Both groups agreed that the focus of the CRMP seems sensible, and that HWFRS is concentrating on the right issues; albeit the group of rural residents said that:

*“We don't know what else they could be doing, to be honest.” (Group for residents of rural areas)*

- 4.25 In the group for people with learning disabilities, it was suggested that once HWFRS has identified the range of foreseeable risks across the two counties through its CRMP process, it must focus on the most appropriate ways of getting the ‘prevention message’ across in relation to these.

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