



Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

Day Crewing Plus Consultation 2019

Report of findings



Opinion Research Services
August 2019



Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service



Day Crewing Plus Consultation 2019

Report by Opinion Research Services

Opinion Research Services

The Strand • Swansea • SA1 1AF

01792 535300 | www.ors.org.uk | info@ors.org.uk

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1. Executive Summary

Summary of main findings

Background and commission

- 1.1 Day Crewing Plus (DCP) is a duty system that has operated in Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) since 2014. It has been used to staff three full-time fire engines that have a lower frequency of response activity, particularly during the night.
- 1.2 Based on a recent High Court ruling that found a similar DCP system operating elsewhere to be unlawful, and following unsuccessful talks with the Fire Brigades Union, HWFRS believes it needs to replace the DCP system currently used for the three DCP fire engines with an alternative that is legally compliant, affordable and proportionate to manage the current level of risk in the community. HWFRS believes the change of duty system will need to be funded from the existing resources allocated to the DCP system as no sustainable additional revenue is available, and are now considering options for its replacement.
- 1.3 Opinion Research Services (ORS) is a spin-out company from Swansea University with a UK-wide reputation for social research and major statutory consultations. ORS was appointed by HWFRS to advise on and independently manage and report a formal consultation programme, as outlined below.

The consultation

- 1.4 The formal consultation period of six weeks began on 7th May 2019 and ended on 14th June 2019. During this period, residents and stakeholders were invited to provide feedback through the following:
 - A consultation questionnaire available for any interested party to complete, which attracted 521 responses;
 - Three deliberative focus groups (one in Bromsgrove, one in Hereford and one in Worcester) with 29 local residents;
 - Written submissions: these were received from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the Bromsgrove Liberal Democrats and a local resident (retired staff member); and
 - Petitions: 3,401 people signed an online petition organised by a group of retired watch commanders from HWFRS entitled 'stop dangerous cuts of 60% to fulltime fire cover in Herefordshire and Worcestershire'.

The report

- 1.5 ORS does not endorse any opinions reported here but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly. While offering guidance on the consultation methodology and its interpretation, we seek to profile the opinions and arguments of those who have responded; but we make no recommendations on the decisions to be taken by the Fire Authority.

Key Findings

The proposed options

The current situation

Hereford and Worcester Fire Stations house three fire engines each; these use a number of different duty systems to ensure they are available to the public 24-hours a day. The current duty systems are: traditional Shift Duty (also known as 2,2,4); Day Crewing Plus (DCP); and On-call. The difference between the duty systems is as follows:

Shift and DCP duty systems enable fire engines to mobilise in 90 seconds, 24-hrs a day; and

The On-call duty system enables the fire engine to mobilise in approximately six minutes, 24-hours a day.

Bromsgrove currently operates 24-hours per day with one fire engine immediately available (DCP), and one On-call.

Future proposal

With the removal of the DCP system, HWFRS believes it is no longer possible to provide fire engines that are immediately available 24-hours a day at all three fire stations, and instead are proposing two different options.

Under both options, HWFRS proposes that **Hereford and Worcester** would operate a combination of Shift and Day Duty system, meaning each station would have the following:

Daytime: two fire engines immediately available, one being crewed by staff working the traditional Shift Duty system (2-2-4) and the other day-staffed for 12 hrs - plus one On-call fire engine; and

Night-time: one fire engine immediately available by staff working the traditional Shift Duty system (2-2-4) and two fire engines On-call.

For **Bromsgrove**, there are two options - Day Duty or Shift Duty system:

Option 1 (Day Duty)

Daytime: one fire engine immediately available (Day Duty) and one fire engine On-call; and

Night-time: two fire engines On-call.

Option 2 (Shift)

24 hours per day: one fire engine immediately available by staff working the traditional Shift Duty system (2-2-4) and one fire engine On-call.

Open Questionnaire

- ^{1.6} Just over two thirds (68%) of questionnaire respondents preferred option two, while only 6% preferred option one. Around a quarter (26%) felt that an alternative option would be better.
- ^{1.7} Those resident in Bromsgrove were significantly more likely to say they preferred option two (91%). Only 5% of Bromsgrove residents preferred option 1.

- 1.8 Those resident in the County of Herefordshire, Malvern Hills or Worcester were significantly more likely to say they preferred an 'alternative option' (71%, 81% and 59% respectively). The most commonly suggested 'alternatives' were: 24/7 appliances - one each at Hereford, Worcester and Bromsgrove - with staff working a 2-2-4 Shift pattern; and having more services available in surrounding areas to provide better coverage (i.e. Malvern, Droitwich and Evesham).

Focus Groups

- 1.9 The balance of opinion in the three focus groups was as follows:

Option 1	Option 2	Don't Know
Hereford = 3	Hereford = 6	Hereford = 1
Bromsgrove = 0	Bromsgrove = all (9)	Bromsgrove = 0
Worcester = all (10)	Worcester = 0	Worcester = 0

- 1.10 Those who chose to endorse option 1 (three of the ten participants at Hereford and all nine at Worcester) did so primarily as it releases the most amount of savings to be reinvested into the Service's prevention and protection functions - though Worcester participants in particular sought reassurances that any money released would be used appropriately and in the right areas. Moreover, though there was recognition that night-time turn-out times would be lengthier - and that this would have more of an impact in Bromsgrove given the current DCP engine is the first responding appliance there - those preferring option 1 argued that this would make little difference to response times in practice given the traffic delays faced by crews during the daytime. Indeed, this was also recognised by some Bromsgrove participants.
- 1.11 Those who chose option 2 (six of the ten participants at Hereford and all at Bromsgrove) did so largely on the basis of the greater number of night-time incidents in Bromsgrove, the town's current and proposed housing growth and its proximity to the motorway network. Furthermore, there was recognition that Option 2 also releases some money (albeit a smaller amount) for reinvestment into prevention and protection, while at the same time satisfying Bromsgrove's fire cover requirements.

2. The Consultation Process

Overview of the Consultation

Background

- 2.1 Day Crewing Plus (DCP) is a duty system that has operated in Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) since 2014. HWFRS considers it a more cost-effective way of providing a 24/7, immediately available fire engine than the more traditional full-time Shift system, as it only requires about half the number of firefighters to provide the same level of response. DCP has been used to staff three full-time fire engines that have a lower frequency of response activity, particularly during the night.
- 2.2 However, based on a recent High Court ruling that found a similar DCP system operating elsewhere to be unlawful, and following unsuccessful talks with the Fire Brigades Union, HWFRS believes it needs to replace the DCP system currently used for the three DCP fire engines with an alternative that is legally compliant, affordable and proportionate to manage the current level of risk in the community. HWFRS believes the change of duty system will need to be funded from the existing resources allocated to the DCP system as no sustainable additional revenue is available, and are now considering options as follows.

The current situation

Hereford and Worcester Fire Stations house three fire engines each; these use a number of different duty systems to ensure they are available to the public 24-hours a day. The current duty systems are: traditional Shift Duty (also known as 2,2,4); Day Crewing Plus (DCP); and On-call. The difference between the duty systems is as follows:

Shift and DCP duty systems enable fire engines to mobilise in 90 seconds, 24-hrs a day; and

The On-call duty system enables the fire engine to mobilise in approximately six minutes, 24-hours a day.

Bromsgrove currently operates 24-hours per day with one fire engine immediately available (DCP), and one On-call.

Future proposal

With the removal of the DCP system, HWFRS believes it is no longer possible to provide fire engines that are immediately available 24-hours a day at all three fire stations, and instead are proposing two different options.

*Under both options, HWFRS proposes that **Hereford and Worcester** would operate a combination of Shift and Day Duty system, meaning each station would have the following:*

Daytime: two fire engines immediately available, one being crewed by staff working the traditional Shift Duty system (2-2-4) and the other day-staffed for 12 hrs - plus one On-call fire engine; and

Night-time: one fire engine immediately available by staff working the traditional Shift Duty system (2-2-4) and two fire engines On-call.

*For **Bromsgrove**, there are two options - Day Duty or Shift Duty system:*

Option 1 (Day Duty)

Daytime: one fire engine immediately available (Day Duty) and one fire engine On-call; and

Night-time: two fire engines On-call.

Option 2 (Shift)

24 hours per day: one fire engine immediately available by staff working the traditional Shift Duty system (2-2-4) and one fire engine On-call.

The commission

- 2.3 Opinion Research Service (ORS) was commissioned to host, analyse and report the responses to an open online consultation questionnaire and focus groups with residents of the three affected areas (one group was held in each of Bromsgrove, Hereford and Worcester). ORS has also summarised the written submissions and petition received by HWFRS at the end of this report.

Quantitative engagement: open questionnaire

- 2.4 A consultation document outlining the issues and proposals under consideration was produced by HWFRS. With that foundation, ORS and HWFRS then designed a questionnaire inviting respondents to express a preference for one of the two options, or to specify an alternative proposal. The questionnaire was, in principle, available for anyone to complete between 7th May and 14th June 2019 - either via the dedicated consultation page on HWFRS's website or through requested paper versions. In total, 512 responses were received (respondent profiles can be found in the following chapter).
- 2.5 Open questionnaires are not random sample surveys of a given population - so they cannot normally be expected to be representative of the general balance of opinion. For example, the more motivated groups are typically over-represented compared with others. However, they are extremely important forms of engagement in being inclusive and in giving people an opportunity to express their views.

Deliberative engagement: resident focus groups

- 2.6 ORS undertook three focus groups with members of the public: one in Bromsgrove, one in Hereford and one in Worcester. Taken together these meetings are best understood as 'deliberative' meetings in which HWFRS's proposals to replace the DCP system were 'tested' against residents' opinions - in order to see the extent to which they are acceptable or otherwise.

- 2.7 In this context, ORS' role was to design, recruit and facilitate the focus groups in May 2018. We worked in collaboration with HWFRS to prepare informative stimulus material for the meetings before facilitating the discussions with support from FRS officers who were on hand to answer participants' 'technical questions' about the Service and its proposals.

Attendance and representativeness

- 2.8 The focus groups were designed to inform and 'engage' the participants both with the issues and with HWFRS - by encouraging them to reflect in depth about the fire and rescue service, while both receiving and questioning background information and discussing important issues in detail. The meetings lasted for two hours.
- 2.9 In total, there were 29 diverse participants at the focus groups. The dates of the meetings and attendance levels were as below:

AREA	TIME AND DATE	NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
Hereford	6:30pm – 8:30pm Monday 20 th May 2019	10
Bromsgrove	6:30pm – 8:30pm Tuesday 21 st May 2019	9
Worcester	6:30pm – 8:30pm Wednesday 22 nd May 2019	10

- 2.10 The attendance target for the focus groups was around eight to 10 people, so the recruitment programme was successful. Participants were recruited by random-digit telephone dialling from ORS' Social Research Call Centre. Such recruitment by telephone is an effective way of ensuring that the participants are independent and broadly representative of the wider community. As standard good practice, people were recompensed for their time and efforts in travelling and taking part.
- 2.11 Overall, participants were a broad cross-section of residents from the local areas: for example, across the three groups there were:
- 16 males and 13 females;
 - Fairly evenly split age ranges (8 x 16-34; 10 x 35-54 and 11 x 55+);
 - 10 people in the AB social grade bracket, nine in C1, four in C2 and 6 in DE;
 - Four people whose daily activities are limited by a disability or limiting illness; and
 - Two people from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background.
- 2.12 In recruitment, care was taken to ensure that no potential participants were disqualified or disadvantaged by disabilities or any other factors, and the venues at which the focus groups met were readily accessible.
- 2.13 Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, focus groups cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the meetings reported here gave diverse groups of people in

the three affected areas the opportunity to participate. Because the recruitment was inclusive and participants were diverse, we are satisfied that the outcomes of the meeting (as reported below) are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.

Discussion agenda

- 2.14 ORS worked in collaboration with HWFRS to agree a suitable agenda and informative stimulus material for the meeting, which covered the following topics:
- HWFRS's activity and resource levels;
 - The workings of the DCP duty systems;
 - HWFRS's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and Fire Cover Review;
 - Reasons for needing to discontinue DCP;
 - HWFRS's financial constraints; and
 - The proposals for change.
- 2.15 The presentation was designed to inform and stimulate discussion of the issues - and participants were encouraged to ask any questions they wished throughout.

Written submissions and a petition

- 2.16 During the formal consultation process, three organisations and individuals provided written submissions. ORS has read all the written submissions carefully and summarised them in the full report. The contributors were:
- Fire Brigades Union (FBU);
 - Bromsgrove Liberal Democrats; and
 - A local resident (retired staff member).
- 2.17 Moreover, 3,401 people signed an online petition organised by a group of retired watch commanders from HWFRS entitled 'stop dangerous cuts of 60% to fulltime fire cover in Herefordshire and Worcestershire'.

Nature of consultation

- 2.18 Accountability means that public authorities should give an account of their plans and take into account public views: they should conduct fair and accessible engagement while reporting the outcomes openly and considering them fully. This does not mean that the majority views should automatically decide public policy; and the popularity or unpopularity of draft proposals should not displace professional and political judgement about what is the right or best decision in the circumstances. The levels of, and reasons for, public support or opposition are very important, but as considerations to be taken into account, not as factors that necessarily determine authorities' decisions.
- 2.19 Above all, public bodies have to consider the relevance and cogency of the arguments put forward during public engagement processes, not just count heads. In this context, it was helpful that the consultation programme included both 'open' and deliberative elements, to allow many people to take part via the open questionnaire while promoting informed engagement via the deliberative focus groups.

Interpreting the outcomes

- 2.20 Importantly, the different consultation methods cannot just be combined to yield a single point of view that reconciles everyone's differences and is acceptable to all stakeholders involved. There are two main reasons why this is not possible. First, the engagement methods differ in type: they are qualitatively different and their outcomes cannot be just aggregated into a single result. Second, different areas and sub-groups will inevitably have different perspectives on the proposals and there is no formula in the consultation process that can reconcile everyone's differences in a single way forward.
- 2.21 It is also important to recognise that the outcomes of the consultation process will need to be considered alongside other information available to HWFRS. Whilst the process highlights aspects of this information that stakeholders consider to be important, appropriate emphasis should be placed on each element. In this sense there can be no single 'right' interpretation of all the consultation elements and other information in the decision-making process.

The report

- 2.22 This report reviews the sentiments and judgements of open questionnaire respondents and focus group participants on HWFRS's proposals to replace the DCP duty system. Verbatim quotations are used, in indented italics, not because we agree or disagree with them – but for their vividness in capturing recurrent points of view. ORS does not endorse the opinions in question, but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly.
- 2.23 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 proposal. In this report, we seek to profile the opinions and arguments of those who have responded to the consultation, 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 the Fire Authority to consider, decisions must be taken based on all the evidence available.

3. Consultation Questionnaire

Introduction

- 3.1 A consultation document outlining the issues under consideration was produced by HWFRS, who also worked with ORS to develop a consultation questionnaire with questions intended to capture the reasons for choosing a particular option. Additional questions allowed respondents to make any further comments, and captured information about the type of response being submitted and (where relevant) respondents' demographic information.
- 3.2 The consultation documents and open questionnaire were available online on the dedicated consultation page on HWFRS's website between 7th May and 14th June 2019, and respondents could also request a paper copy by contacting ORS. In total 512 responses were received, all coming via the online questionnaire.

Respondent profile

- 3.3 Respondents were asked to state whether they were responding personally or on behalf of an organisation. Only one response was identified as being on behalf of an organisation, with the remainder of those who answered this question stating that it was a personal response.
- 3.4 All individuals were asked to provide some basic demographic information. The tables that appear without commentary on the following pages show the unweighted profiles of the responses to the survey (please note that the figures may not always sum to 100% due to rounding).
- 3.5 It is important to note here that open questionnaires are not random sample surveys of a given population - so they cannot normally be expected to be representative of the general balance of opinion. For example, the more motivated groups are typically over-represented compared with others. However, they are extremely important forms of engagement in being inclusive and in giving people an opportunity to express their views.

All Respondents

Please note that * denotes a percentage which is less than 1% after rounding.

Figure 1: Gender - All Respondents

Gender	Unweighted Count	Unweighted Valid %
Male	200	48
Female	214	52
Not Known	98	-
Total	512	100

Figure 2: Age - All Respondents

Age	Unweighted Count	Unweighted Valid %
16 to 24	16	4
25 to 34	98	22
35 to 44	118	27
45 to 54	83	19
55 to 64	66	15
65 +	55	13
Not known	76	-
Total	512	100

Figure 3: Disability - All Respondents

Disability	Unweighted Count	Unweighted Valid %
Yes	56	14
No	332	86
Not Known	124	-
Total	512	100

Figure 4: Sexual Orientation - All Respondents

Sexual Orientation	Unweighted Count	Unweighted Valid %
Heterosexual or Straight	334	94
Gay or Lesbian	12	3
Bisexual	10	3
Not Known	156	-
Total	512	100

Figure 5: Ethnicity - All Respondents

Ethnicity	Unweighted Count	Unweighted Valid %
White British	355	95
BME	20	5
Not Known	137	-
Total	512	100

Figure 6: Work for Hereford & Worcester FRS - All Respondents

Work for HWFRS	Unweighted Count	Unweighted Valid %
Yes	27	7
No	383	93
Not Known	102	-
Total	512	100

Figure 7: Local Authority - All Respondents

Local Authority	Unweighted Count	Unweighted Valid %
Birmingham	12	3
Bromsgrove	209	58
County of Herefordshire	51	14
Malvern Hills	28	8
Redditch	10	3
Rushmoor	1	*
Stratford-on-Avon	1	*
Worcester	22	6
Wychavon	15	4
Wyre Forest	9	3
Not Known	154	-
Total	512	100

Organisations in the consultation questionnaire

- 3.6 Organisations were asked to explain who their organisation represents, what area the organisation covers and how views of members were gathered. The following organisations (including businesses) identified themselves as part of a response to the questionnaire:
- Rubery Neighbourhood Watch – covering Rubery Area (Bromsgrove), with 450+ members (no further information given)

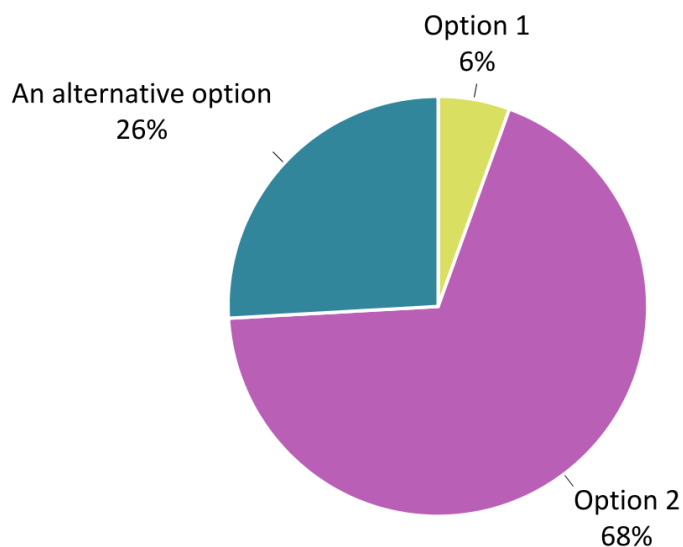
Interpretation of the data

- 3.7 Results are presented in a largely graphical format. The numbers on pie charts and bar charts are percentages indicating the proportions of residents or respondents who agree/disagree on a particular question.
- 3.8 The number of valid responses recorded for each question (base size) are reported throughout. As not all respondents answered every question the valid responses vary between question ('don't know' responses have been treated as invalid).

The proposed options

- 3.9 In relation to the proposed options (detailed in chapter 2), just over two thirds (68%) of respondents would prefer option two, while only 6% would prefer option one. Around a quarter (26%) feel that an alternative option would be better (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Which option would you prefer?
Base: All Respondents (501)

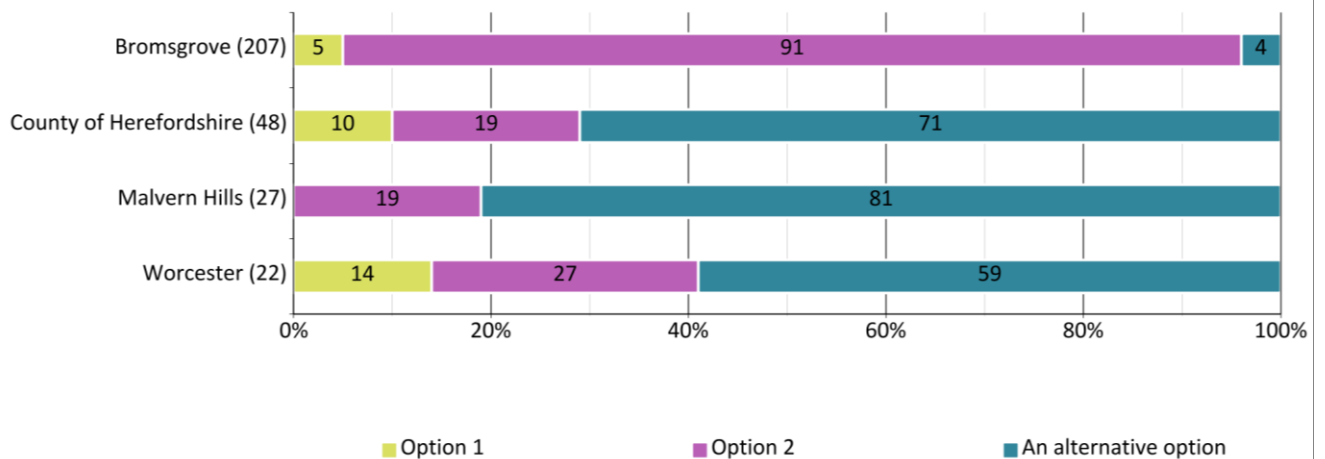


- 3.10 Figure 9 below shows how responses to this question differ by the local authority the respondent lives in. Those who are resident in **Bromsgrove** are significantly more likely to say they **prefer option two** (91%), which would mean that no changes were made to the current system at Bromsgrove fire station (one fire engine immediately available and one fire engine On-call 24 hours a day). Only 5% of those who are resident in Bromsgrove prefer option 1 whereby at night both fire engines would be On-call only at Bromsgrove fire station.
- 3.11 Those who are resident in the **County of Herefordshire, Malvern Hills** or **Worcester**, who would be affected by the changes made at Hereford and Worcester fire stations, are significantly more likely to say they **prefer an alternative option** (71%, 81% and 59% respectively) indicating that the proposed change to Hereford and Worcester fire stations (which is the same for option one and option two) is not popular with the majority of respondents in these areas or that they would like to be given a choice of options.

Figure 9: Which option would you prefer?

Base: All respondents (number of respondents shown in brackets)

Sub-group results: By Local Authority



- 3.12 It is also interesting to note that, while not all respondents gave a postcode, of those identified their location around three fifths (59%) are resident in Bromsgrove, suggesting that the proposed changes at Bromsgrove fire station are more contentious or perhaps that there is more of a feeling that their response could influence the final decision.
- 3.13 The charts below show which sub-groups are significantly¹ more or less likely to prefer option two, or an alternative option (note: owing to a small sample size there are no significant differences evident between sub-groups for option one).

Figure 10: Which option do you prefer? Option two - sub-group breakdown. Base: All respondents (number of respondents shown in brackets). Note: Only sub-group results which are significantly different to the overall result are shown in the chart. Green shading indicates a result that is significantly higher than the overall result, red shading indicates a result that is significantly lower than the overall result.

¹ Results which are said to be significantly different are significant at a 95% confidence level.

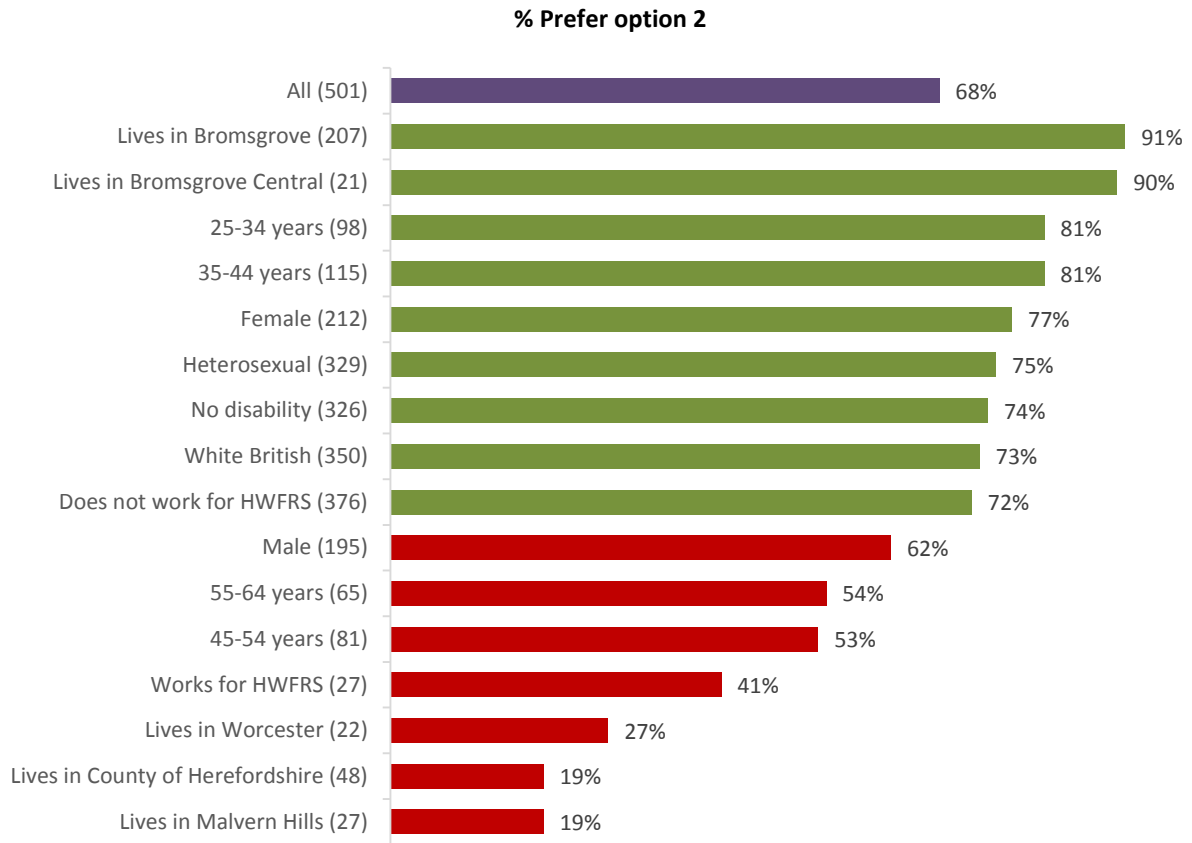
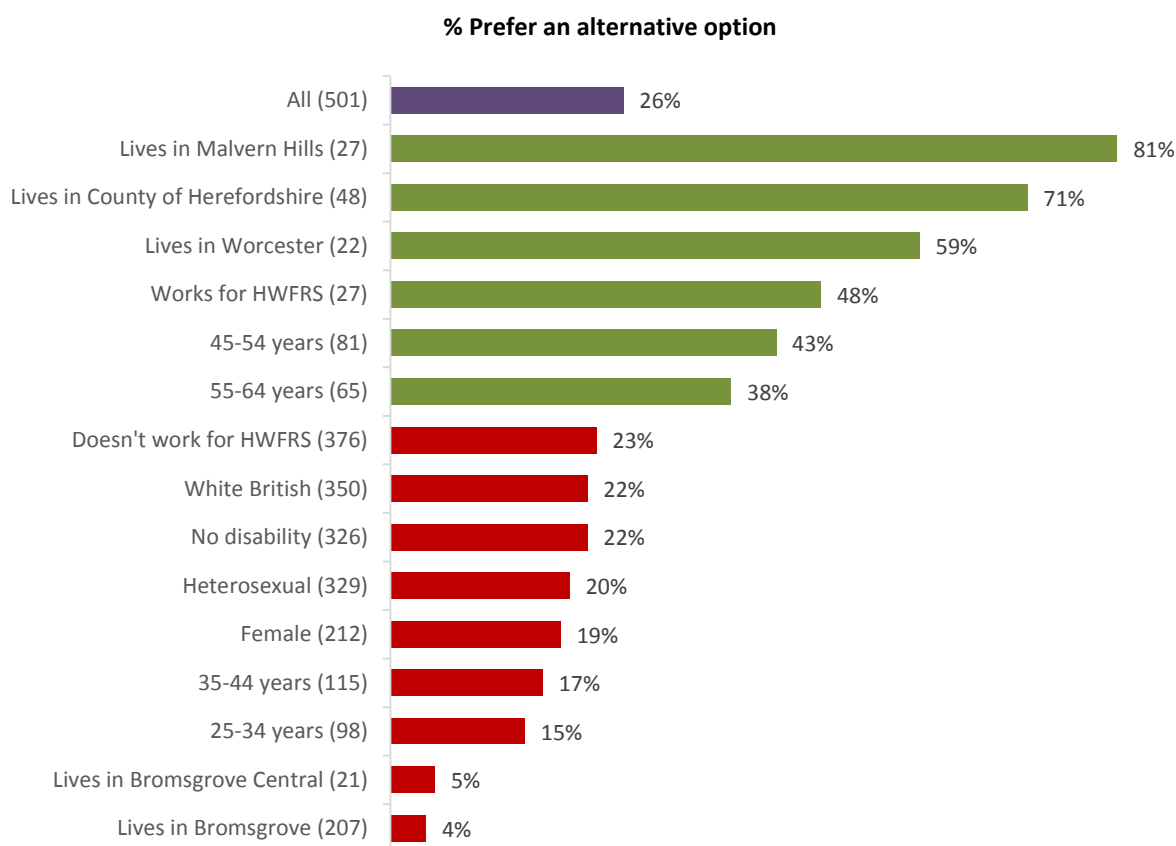


Figure 11: Which option do you prefer? An alternative option - sub-group breakdown. Base: All respondents (number of respondents shown in brackets). Note: Only sub-group results which are significantly different to the overall result are shown in the chart. Green shading indicates a result that is significantly higher than the overall result, red shading indicates a result that is significantly lower than the overall result.



Open-ended comments

3.14 The questionnaire provided respondents with three opportunities to comment on the proposals in their own words, specifically:

Q2. To outline their reasons for their answer to which option they would prefer, and to explain any alternative option they prefer.

Q3. Whether there were any further comments they would like to make.

Q4. Whether there were any positive or negative impacts (in relation to human rights and protected characteristics) that HWFRS should take into account.

3.15 Questions 2 and 3 were themed (question 4 was not as the majority of responses were not relevant to the question asked) and it can be seen that, in practice, there was a lot of commonality in the themes raised across the two questions. For example, a number of respondents used the open-ended responses to express their general disagreement with the proposals arguing that a fully equipped/fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7 (generally and specifically in relation to all three fire stations) and that the proposals will lead to slower response times generally.

- 3.16 Other specific key arguments against the proposals in general (and mentioned specifically with regard to all three fire stations) relate to safety concerns and that the proposals 'should not be about money':

Reducing the FRS's capability to respond to incidents in an area with an increasing population, housing and traffic density etc. is reckless and dangerous;

A reduction in crewing will result in increased danger/risk of injury or death to both firefighters and the general public;

It will make people more vulnerable at night as fires remain undiscovered for longer and have more time to spread;

Proposals should not be about money/the emergency services are there to save lives, not money/money should not be put before people's safety.

- 3.17 On the contrary, there was a general agreement with the proposals from some respondents, and more specifically, an agreement that savings do need to be made and the proposals are the best way to save money. However, while some felt that services should remain the same as they are still paying the same amount of council tax, others said they would be happy to pay more to retain the current level of service.
- 3.18 Reasons given for choosing **option 1** were varied, with negative comments relating to safety concerns/against a change in service and positive comments agreeing with the proposals/saving money. Some comments appear to contradict a preference for option 1 though, suggesting perhaps some confusion when responding to the questions.
- 3.19 With regard to **option 2** the main reasons given for selecting this option were a need to maintain a 24/7 service at Bromsgrove (and generally), and concerns around response times and crewing leading to an increased risk to firefighters and the general public. It was also felt to be the safest option presented. The themes most frequently mentioned are similar regardless of whether the respondent is resident in Bromsgrove or elsewhere.
- 3.20 While **option 2** was the preferred option for two thirds of respondents, and over 9 in 10 respondents who are resident in Bromsgrove, it is clear that there is still a general disagreement with any proposed changes to the current service. There is a sense of a need to be reassured that longer response times will not compromise safety and firefighters' ability to deal with incidents. Further explanation of costs and budgets would also help members of the public understand the reasons for the proposed changes, with some feeling that they are seemingly getting a reduced service for the same cost, and that the changes are just to save money overall.
- 3.21 Proposals suggested by those selecting '**an alternative option**' were: 24/7 appliances, one each at Hereford, Worcester and Bromsgrove with staff working a 2-2-4 Shift pattern; and having more services available in surrounding areas to provide better coverage (i.e. Malvern, Droitwich and Evesham). Those selecting an alternative option also argued strongly that generally a fully equipped and fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7. It should be noted, though, that the majority of those selecting an alternative option live outside of Bromsgrove.
- 3.22 A full summary of the themes raised for Q2 and Q3 is provided in the following tables. Responses have been filtered by which option was preferred and then broken down by area (Bromsgrove, elsewhere, or unknown).

Figure 12: Q2. Please outline your reasons for your answer and explain any alternative option you prefer. Those who chose option 1

Reasons for choosing <u>option 1</u> - Comment	%		
	Bromsgrove	Elsewhere	Unknown
Base (Number of respondents making comments in each group):	7	7	0
It is the safest option presented	14.3	14.3	-
Disagree generally with proposals/keep things as they are	14.3	-	-
A fully equipped/fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7 in Bromsgrove	14.3	-	-
Reducing FRS capability to respond to incidents in an area with an increasing population/housing/traffic density etc. is reckless and dangerous	14.3	-	-
Reducing FRS capability to respond to incidents in an area with an increasing population/housing/traffic density etc. like Bromsgrove is reckless and dangerous	14.3	-	-
Need more information/not enough information available	14.3	-	-
Agree generally with Option 2	14.3	-	-
Agree that savings need to be made generally/proposals are the best way to save money	-	14.3	-
A fully equipped/fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7 generally	-	14.3	-
Alternative proposal: 24/7 appliances, one each at Hereford, Worcester, Bromsgrove ; staff should work 2-2-4 Shift pattern	-	14.3	-
Other	42.9	42.9	-

Figure 13: Q2. Please outline your reasons for your answer and explain any alternative option you prefer. Those who chose option 2

Reasons for choosing <u>option 2</u> - Comment	%		
	Bromsgrove	Elsewhere	Unknown
Base (Number of respondents making comments in each group):	127	32	31
A fully equipped/fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7 generally	32.3	31.3	22.6
Proposals will lead to slower response times generally	22.8	6.3	22.6
Reduction of crewing will result in an increased danger/risk of injury or death to both firefighters and general public	21.3	21.9	6.5
A fully equipped/fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7 in Bromsgrove	18.9	18.8	25.8
It is the safest option presented	15.7	15.6	9.7
Agree generally with Option 2	8.7	3.1	22.6
Reducing FRS capability to respond to incidents in an area with an increasing population/housing/traffic density etc. like Bromsgrove is reckless and dangerous	7.9	3.1	6.5
A fully equipped/fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7 in Hereford and Worcester	-	6.3	6.5
It will make people more vulnerable at night/fires have more time to spread and/or remain undiscovered for longer	6.3	-	3.2

Reasons for choosing <u>option 2</u> - Comment	%		
	Bromsgrove	Elsewhere	Unknown
Base (Number of respondents making comments in each group):	127	32	31
Already pay high council tax/services should still be provided as we pay the same tax	6.3	6.3	-
Reduction of crewing in Bromsgrove will result in an increased danger/risk of injury or death to both firefighters and general public	5.5	-	-
Reducing FRS capability to respond to incidents in an area with an increasing population/housing/traffic density etc. is reckless and dangerous	4.7	3.1	6.5
Agree generally with proposals	3.9	6.3	-
Proposals will lead to slower response times in Bromsgrove	3.9	-	3.2
Proposals should not be about money/the emergency services are there to save lives, not money/money should not be put before people's safety	3.9	12.5	3.2
Disagree generally with proposals/keep things as they are	3.1	6.3	-
Happy to pay higher council tax/increased council tax to maintain service levels	2.4	-	-
Savings should be made in alternative ways	1.6	3.1	-
Proposals will lead to slower response times in Hereford and Worcester	0.8	-	-
Need more information/not enough information available	0.8	-	3.2
In will make people in Hereford and Worcester more vulnerable at night/fires have more time to spread and/or remain undiscovered for longer	0.8	-	-
It will make people in Bromsgrove more vulnerable at night/fires have more time to spread and/or remain undiscovered for longer	0.8	-	-
Reduction of crewing in Hereford and Worcester will result in an increased danger/risk of injury or death to both firefighters and general public	0.8	-	-
The FRS is already underfunded/under resourced/don't need a further reduction in service	0.8	-	-
Reducing FRS capability to respond to incidents in an area with an increasing population/housing/traffic density etc. like Hereford and Worcester is reckless and dangerous	-	3.1	-
Alternative proposal: 24/7 appliances, one each at Hereford, Worcester Bromsgrove ; staff should work 2-2-4 Shift pattern	0.8	3.1	-
Criticism of questionnaire/consultation i.e. minds already made up/paper exercise etc.	-	-	-
Other	4.7	9.4	9.7

Figure 14: Q2. Please outline your reasons for your answer and explain any alternative option you prefer. Those who chose an alternative option

Reasons for choosing an alternative option - Comment	%		
	Bromsgrove	Elsewhere	Unknown
Base (Number of respondents making comments in each group):	8	79	37
Alternative proposal: 24/7 appliances, one each at Hereford, Worcester, Bromsgrove ; staff should work 2-2-4 Shift pattern	-	43.0	40.5
A fully equipped/fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7 in Hereford and Worcester	-	19.0	16.2
A fully equipped/fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7 generally	25.0	17.7	18.9
Reduction of crewing will result in an increased danger/risk of injury or death to both firefighters and general public	25.0	16.5	5.4
A fully equipped/fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7 in Bromsgrove	-	15.2	16.2
Criticism of questionnaire/consultation i.e. minds already made up/paper exercise etc.	-	7.6	10.8
Disagree generally with proposals/keep things as they are	12.5	6.3	10.8
It will make people more vulnerable at night/fires have more time to spread and/or remain undiscovered for longer	12.5	6.3	8.1
Proposals should not be about money/the emergency services are there to save lives, not money/money should not be put before people's safety	-	6.3	-
Need more information/not enough information available	12.5	5.1	-
Alternative proposal: Have more services available at surrounding areas to provide better coverage i.e. like previous services at Malvern, Droitwich, Evesham etc.	-	5.1	2.7
Agree generally with Option 2	-	2.5	-
Reducing FRS capability to respond to incidents in an area with an increasing population/housing/traffic density etc. is reckless and dangerous	12.5	2.5	-
Reduction of crewing in Hereford and Worcester will result in an increased danger/risk of injury or death to both firefighters and general public	-	2.5	-
Savings should be made in alternative ways	12.5	2.5	-
It is the safest option presented	12.5	1.3	-
Proposals will lead to slower response times generally	12.5	-	-
Proposals will lead to slower response times in Hereford and Worcester	-	1.3	-
Reducing FRS capability to respond to incidents in an area with an increasing population/housing/traffic density etc. like Hereford and Worcester is reckless and dangerous	-	1.3	-
Already pay high council tax/services should still be provided as we pay the same tax	-	1.3	-
Agree generally with proposals	-	-	2.7
Reduction of crewing in Bromsgrove will result in an increased danger/risk of injury or death to both firefighters and general public	-	-	2.7
Reducing FRS capability to respond to incidents in an area with an	-	-	2.7

Reasons for choosing an alternative option - Comment	%		
	Bromsgrove	Elsewhere	Unknown
Base (Number of respondents making comments in each group):	8	79	37
increasing population/housing/traffic density etc. like Bromsgrove is reckless and dangerous			
Other	62.5	17.7	21.6

3.23 The quotes presented below highlight some of the suggested alternative options.

As a minimum, 24-hour immediate guaranteed fire cover at Bromsgrove, Hereford and Worcester.

Full time fire engines available day and night immediately. 1 on call for Worcester. Gives options for specialist appliances option 2 for Bromsgrove.

All stations to have 24-hour cover with 2 fire (engines) at Worcester and 1 at Bromsgrove

Based on the Fire Rescue Service advice I suggest: two 24-hour crewed fire appliances at both Hereford and Worcester with crews of 5. Bromsgrove to have one 24-hour crewed fire appliance with a crew of 5. Staff at all three locations to work the nationally agreed 2-2-4 shift duty system.

For Worcester and Bromsgrove option 1, Hereford 1 fire engine immediately available 2-2-4 and 1 fire engine on call all day and night. No need for 3rd fire engine in Hereford, use surrounding fire stations, more cost effective.

For Bromsgrove and Worcester option 1 but Hereford why not follow the Redditch model and have 2 retained pumps in the day/night if it works in a bigger city. This would free up some £550,000 which could be spent on fire safety.

Continue the same as currently running the HWFRS DCP system has not been challenged in a UK court so it is not illegal.

Maintain the current system until fuller information on response times under the new proposals is available.

Figure 15: Q3. Are there any further comments you would like to make? All respondents

Further comments	%		
	Bromsgrove	Elsewhere	Unknown
Base (Number of respondents making comments in each group):	60	69	24
Reduction of crewing will result in an increased danger/risk of injury or death to both firefighters and general public	23.3	18.8	12.5
A fully equipped/fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7 generally	18.3	11.6	12.5
Proposals should not be about money/the emergency services are there to save lives, not money/money should not be put before people's safety	16.7	11.6	-
Proposals will lead to slower response times generally	11.7	-	8.3

Further comments	%		
	Bromsgrove	Elsewhere	Unknown
Base (Number of respondents making comments in each group):	60	69	24
Disagree generally with proposals/keep things as they are	11.7	5.8	-
A fully equipped/fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7 in Bromsgrove	8.3	4.3	-
The FRS is already underfunded/under resourced/don't need a further reduction in service	6.7	4.3	4.2
Already pay high council tax/services should still be provided as we pay the same tax	5.5	2.9	12.5
Reduction of crewing in Hereford and Worcester will result in an increased danger/risk of injury or death to both firefighters and general public	-	5.8	8.3
Reducing FRS capability to respond to incidents in an area with an increasing population/housing/traffic density etc. like Hereford and Worcester is reckless and dangerous	-	5.8	4.2
Reducing FRS capability to respond to incidents in an area with an increasing population/housing/traffic density etc. like Bromsgrove is reckless and dangerous	3.3	1.4	-
A fully equipped/fully staffed station needs to be operational 24/7 in Hereford and Worcester	-	4.3	12.5
It will make people more vulnerable at night/fires have more time to spread and/or remain undiscovered for longer	3.3	1.4	-
Reduction of crewing in Bromsgrove will result in an increased danger/risk of injury or death to both firefighters and general public	3.3	2.9	-
Savings should be made in alternative ways	3.3	5.8	-
Criticism of questionnaire/consultation i.e. minds already made up/paper exercise etc.	1.7	7.2	8.3
Reducing FRS capability to respond to incidents in an area with an increasing population/housing/traffic density etc. is reckless and dangerous	1.7	2.9	4.2
Need more information/not enough information available	3.3	4.3	-
Proposals will lead to slower response times in Bromsgrove	3.3	-	-
Happy to pay higher council tax/increased council tax to maintain service levels	3.3	-	-
Alternative proposal: 24/7 appliances, one each at Hereford, Worcester Bromsgrove ; staff should work 2-2-4 Shift pattern	-	1.4	4.2
Other	23.3	34.8	37.5

- 3.24 As a public body, Hereford and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Service has a duty to take into account the impact of its decisions on human rights, under the Human Rights Act 1998, and also on people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation).
- 3.25 Respondents were asked if they felt there was any positive or negative impacts in relation to this that should be taken into account (Q4.). Only a few responses were received that were in relation to impacts on people with protected characteristics with the majority of comments relating to general impacts and reiterating comments made on previous questions.

- ^{3.26} Those whose comments did relate to impacts on protected characteristics generally felt that cutting response times would negatively impact vulnerable residents, i.e. the elderly and disabled, as they are less likely to be able to escape fires themselves, which will lead to an increase in the number of deaths.

Article 2 of the HRA (Human Rights Act) provides for a right to life – the reduction of immediate cover impacts on that right, delaying response times will lead to more deaths. In relation to those people with disabilities, again any delay in rescuing them will cost lives – if there is any chance of escape/self rescue, people with disability are less likely to be able to do so. A longer response time makes them more vulnerable.

If fire engines take longer to respond, it will have a negative impact on disabled and elderly people who are unable to physically escape buildings.

4. Focus Groups

Introduction

- 4.1 The focus group sessions considered in-depth the consultation issues as reported fully below. The views of the three meetings have been merged to give an overall report of findings, rather than three separate and rather repetitive mini-reports – but significant differences in views have been drawn out where appropriate.

Issues raised

- 4.2 During the initial presentation, participants were invited to ask questions and make comments on the information given.
- 4.3 One of the most common questions asked was why the FBU is unwilling to enter into a collective agreement with HWFRS to enable the retention of the DCP system locally. While understanding that the union is a national body that is fighting for what it considers to be the best interests of its members, participants generally felt it should recognise the constraints within which the service is working, and demonstrate some flexibility - particularly given the firefighters working the system wish to continue doing so.

My concern is the union position. I understand their worries around how it's run and the hours the firefighters are doing but do they not understand the financial position and that there's no money to fund a different system. Have they come up with any ideas on how to solve the issue? (Hereford)

If the team is willing and happy to do it, why change it? I appreciate that the Unions are looking at it from a national perspective, but they should look at it regionally as it's a different situation here (Hereford)

Is the trade union not there to represent its workers? If the firefighters want to keep working it why has an agreement not been able to be reached? (Bromsgrove)

- 4.4 A few participants acknowledged at least some of the FBU's concerns though, especially in relation to firefighter strain and the impact of 80 hours spent technically 'on station' and away from home and family.

But playing devil's advocate, the Union will be made up of people who know what it's like to do the job and what firefighters are capable of (Hereford)

There must be much more strain on the 12 firefighters doing DCP than the 22 doing wholetime Shift (Bromsgrove)

80 hours and having to deal with some of the incidents they have to face...it's got to have an impact. And it's a long time to be in one place (Bromsgrove)

- 4.5 Another concern for participants across all three groups was the loss of the 25% salary enhancement for the DCP firefighters. This, it was felt, will have a significant impact on these individuals and their families - even if it will also mean a better work-life balance.

So the firefighters will lose their 25% extra money? (Hereford)

I feel sorry for the individuals working the DCP. It's going to have a big impact on their lives as we all live within our means and they are losing a lot of money (Worcester)

The firefighters will have a better work-life balance but 25% of their salary is a hell of a lot to lose (Bromsgrove)

- 4.6 The issue of firefighter fatigue was raised at each group, with participants seeking reassurances around how HWFRS manages this - especially in relation to On-call firefighters working full-time jobs elsewhere.

With the On-call, they could be working 40 hours a week and then On-call for any number of hours...don't you have the same issues with working hours regulations and health and safety? (Bromsgrove)

How do you work the firefighter fatigue thing with the On-call if they've been working all day in their other jobs? It is concerning if they've been doing a 12-hour Shift with one company and then are On-call with the fire service and could be called out to some long incidents (Hereford)

- 4.7 Other questions and comments were around: the potential impacts of longer response times; the standard to which On-call firefighters are trained (relative to full-time firefighters); the comparative seriousness of daytime and night-time incidents; and the feasibility of sending smaller fire engines to certain incidents.

What are the consequences of getting out in 90 seconds and getting out in 6 minutes? (Worcester)

How crucial is the extra 3½ minutes response time? (Hereford)

Are the On-call firefighters trained to the same standard as full-time firefighters? (Bromsgrove)

Are the standards required of the wholetime and On-call exactly the same? (Worcester)

Although the incident numbers are far lower at night, are the incidents themselves much worse? (Bromsgrove)

Does it always need a fire engine to go out to every incident? Would it be worth looking at smaller vehicles with essential equipment to go to certain incidents? (Bromsgrove)

The proposed options

- 4.8 In considering the two proposed options, the balance of opinion in the three groups was as follows:

Option 1	Option 2	Don't Know
Hereford = 3	Hereford = 6	Hereford = 1
Bromsgrove = 0	Bromsgrove = all (9)	Bromsgrove = 0
Worcester = all (10)	Worcester = 0	Worcester = 0

- 4.9 It should be noted that, of course, the proposals for Hereford and Worcester fire stations are the same under both options, which was accepted by participants in those areas because:

We have essentially got two full-time engines; it's just that night-time coverage that changes. But there's not enough incidents overnight to warrant two full-time engines (Hereford)

- 4.10 As such, people tended to make their decisions on which option they preferred largely on the basis of two factors: the impact of the proposed changes in Bromsgrove; and the amount of money available to be re-invested into prevention and protection (approximately £400,000 for option 1 and £90,000 for option 2).

Option 1

- 4.11 Those who chose to endorse option 1 (three of the ten participants at Hereford and all nine at Worcester) did so primarily as it releases the most amount of savings to be reinvested into the Service's prevention and protection functions - though Worcester participants in particular sought reassurances that any money released would be used appropriately and in the right areas.

They should go for the option that allows the biggest amount of money for reinvestment into prevention and protection (Hereford)

It seems like there's more of a package in terms of releasing more money for prevention and protection...it's like you're getting more for your money (Worcester)

The money would be better spent on the preventative work (Worcester)

The preventative money...it would have to go to where it's really needed. Sprinkler systems and things like that, especially in the areas where response will be longer (Worcester)

- 4.12 Moreover, though there was recognition that night-time turn-out times would be lengthier - and that this would have more of an impact in Bromsgrove given the current DCP engine is the first responding appliance there - those preferring option 1 argued that this would make little difference to response times in practice given the traffic delays faced by crews during the daytime. Indeed, this was also recognised by some Bromsgrove participants.

I'd go for Option 1 purely because of the preventative spending. And the response times in Bromsgrove would likely be very similar to the daytime anyway because of the traffic (Worcester)

At night-time you're not going to have the traffic hold-ups you get during the day. So it's swings and roundabouts really (Worcester)

I'm sure if there was an incident on the other side of Bromsgrove in the middle of the night the On-call engine would be able to get there as quickly as the full-time one during the day because of the congestion (Bromsgrove)

Option 2

- 4.13 Those who chose option 2 (six of the ten participants at Hereford and all at Bromsgrove) did so largely on the basis of the greater number of night-time incidents in Bromsgrove, the town's current and proposed housing growth and its proximity to the motorway network. Some typical comments were:

Living in Bromsgrove it would be better to have a manned engine 24/7. Slightly greedy perhaps but the stats that there are more incidents overnight here support it (Bromsgrove)

The motorway network here is a significant issue around here and with the new build will come more cars (Bromsgrove)

Option 2 is fairest from Bromsgrove's perspective and it delivers on what's required. It also gives us that safety at night (Bromsgrove)

The biggest decision is whether the Service gets an extra £400,000 a year or maybe risk a few lives. It's five to seven night-time incidents per week in Bromsgrove so nearly 500 per year...how many of those are going to die because the vehicle took a few extra minutes to get there? (Hereford)

The growth of Bromsgrove has been significant, but we've had minimal schools, loss of hospitals and reduced fire services. And going forward there are proposals for hundreds of new houses in various areas (Bromsgrove)

Bromsgrove have more incidents and I think having a full-time Shift vehicle there would be good, especially as it's so near the motorway (Hereford)

- 4.14 Furthermore, there was recognition that Option 2 also releases some money (albeit a smaller amount) for reinvestment into prevention and protection, while at the same time satisfying Bromsgrove's fire cover requirements.

Option 2 has the minimum impact county-wide and satisfies the legal requirements that need to be addressed. It also supports some freeing up of resources for prevention and protection which is important (Bromsgrove)

It delivers on the legalities as well as offering some savings (Bromsgrove)

Overall views

Arguments rather than numbers

- 4.15 In deliberative meetings it is not appropriate to 'count heads' in an apparent numbers game - because the results cannot be certified as statistically significant because of the numerically small samples. However, such meetings are effective and important in revealing issues, arguments, considerations, implications, assumptions and experiences that deserve to be taken into account by those making decisions.

Overall summary of findings

- 4.16 Focus group participants understood that HWFRS's hands are somewhat tied as a result of its inability to reach a collective agreement with the FBU in relation to the continuation of Day Crewing Plus and so were prepared to fully consider the two different options on the table to replace it.
- 4.17 In relation to the two options, opinion was split. Understandably, option 2 was wholly favoured at Bromsgrove whereas the converse was true at Worcester: all participants there endorsed option 1 on the grounds that it would release more money to be invested into prevention and protection activity. At Hereford, around two-thirds favoured option two and a third preferred option 1. Taking all this into consideration, there was marginally more support for option 2 than option 1.

5. Written Submissions/Petition

Written submissions: introduction

- 5.1 During the formal consultation process, three organisations and individuals provided written submissions. The contributors were:
- Fire Brigades Union (FBU);
 - Bromsgrove Liberal Democrats; and
 - A local resident (retired staff member).
- 5.2 ORS has read all the written submissions and summarised them in this chapter; none have been disregarded even if they are not expressed in a 'formal' way. It is important to note the following section **is a report of the views expressed by submission contributors**. In some cases, these views may not be supported by the available evidence - and while ORS has not sought to highlight or correct those that make incorrect statements or assumptions, this should be borne in mind when considering the submissions.

Written submissions: summaries

Fire Brigades Union (FBU)

- 5.3 The FBU has submitted a detailed 26-page document of which HWFRS will take full account. The executive summary, conclusions and recommendations are summarised here.
- 5.4 The main points made by the FBU are that:
- HWFRS's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) timespan is far too long and any such mid-cycle consultation should revisit the tenets of the IRMP so that the action plan consultation can be put into context. Otherwise, this consultation is likely to seem abstract to the general public;
 - HWFRS's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) cuts from 2014 have already left the Service vastly under resourced. The removal of fire engines and loss of firefighters from communities means its counties would be less safe should further cuts be implemented;
 - Numbers of staff in Emergency Fire Control, Training and Fire Safety departments are too low. The aim of HWFRS should be to refill these departments in order that they are able to deliver a coherent service for the public of Herefordshire and Worcestershire;
 - Investment in personnel numbers is required to provide a fire service for the future in response to increasing incident numbers received by HWFRS and in readiness for the extra activities firefighters will undertake as a result of national negotiations to broaden their work;
 - The increase in emergency calls in Hereford and Worcester has been substantial and potential growth to firefighter's work activities is 'juxtaposed to these proposals'. Increases in attendance

times to homes on fire, road traffic collisions and incidents involving flood water mean an increase in a threat to life - to both the person(s) involved and the firefighters sent to intervene;

There are two specific options provided in the consultation questionnaire (with an option to submit an alternative), both of which fail to provide necessary fire cover, and to provide adequate details on what the 'Day Duty' system will look like. There is no agreement between the FBU and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority on any Day Duty system, and therefore it is inappropriately presumptuous to include this as part of a public consultation; and

Residents deserve a fire and rescue service which is fit for purpose, not one that is continually slashed. Fewer firefighters on fewer fire appliances, put firefighters and the public they serve at greater risk from fire and rescue incidents.

5.5 The FBU's conclusions are that:

HWFRS is already under-resourced due to central government funding cuts;

HWFRS's intervention service delivery model is over-estimated, where the reality identifies significant gaps in fire cover; and

The further cuts proposed by this consultation will leave HWFRS further under resourced - which will lead to: longer first attendance times and delays to subsequent fire engines' arrival; fewer resources available for large scale or protracted incidents; greater potential for firefighter injury/fatality; and greater losses/injuries/fatalities for the communities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

5.6 The FBU's recommendations are that:

HWFRS need to carry out a full IRMP to identify the current risks and trends in conjunction with changing forecasts of future risk. It needs to address the shortfall in its emergency intervention response and make plans to invest in the service;

HWFRS should address the issue of on-call availability as 'this will need a large increase in resources to ensure recruitment and retention are significantly improved, in order to bridge the deficiency in the intervention service delivery model';

HWFRS should desist from attempts to pressure local officials to enter a collective agreement on DCP and unsettling members currently working DCP through misinformation regarding its legitimacy;

The Fire Authority should set HWFRS a much-improved response standard and embark on a strategy to achieve it. This should include, in conjunction with the national employers, lobbying of the Home Office and central government to increase funding to HWFRS;

For the safety of firefighters and for an effective response to all incidents, all fire engines should be staffed at five with a well-trained and competent crew; and

In buoying the numbers on watches as described in the previous recommendation, HWFRS need to reinstate Watch Commanders to the watch establishment.

5.7 The Bromsgrove Liberal Democrats say that residents in Bromsgrove and the surrounding area expect to see a highly responsive service maintained in Bromsgrove 24 hours a day, which must be the priority for any reforms to the crewing system.

5.8 The other key points are that the Bromsgrove Liberal Democrats:

Regret that the DCP system (which was 'working well' in Bromsgrove) has had to be abandoned because of legal action by the Fire Brigade Union at a national level;

Recognise the advantages of DCP in terms of ensuring 24-hour a day immediate response - and would like to see this approach emulated as far as possible in any new arrangements (especially the continued presence of a 24/7 fire engine at Bromsgrove); and

Support Option 2 as it 'offers the best protection for Bromsgrove'.

Local resident (retired staff member)

5.9 The respondent understands the financial environment in which H&WFRA finds itself and the industrial relations constraints with which it is presented. However, they feel that the consultation document missed a real opportunity to present the true impacts of the proposals in such a way as to help respondents advise the Service of their preferences.

5.10 The respondent says that when it comes to discussing operational cover with the public, issues of budget and industrial unrest tend to be of little or no interest to them - and that it is these that come over clearly in this document rather changes to emergency cover.

5.11 The respondent suggests that HWFRS should have focused on the impact of proposed changes for consultees by demonstrating the 'pro's and cons' of each option which 'has been done in such a way as not event to mention key facts'. In this context they noted:

The effect on response times of first and second appliances in a range of situations;

The effect of staff availability in the cities (retained);

Projections of increased property damage/loss;

Effect on local business and employment of increased fire loss;

Projections of likely effects on casualty numbers and severity; and

Projections of likely effects on fatality numbers.

5.12 Without this basic information, the respondent suggests that it's almost impossible for a member of the public to provide an informed response.

Petition summary

5.13 3,401 people signed an online petition organised by a group of retired watch commanders from HWFRS entitled 'stop dangerous cuts of 60% to fulltime fire cover in Herefordshire and Worcestershire'. The petition statement was as follows.

On the advice of the Chief Fire Officer, Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority are proposing to cut the number of full time firefighters on duty at night, across the 2 counties, from 40 to just 16 - a reduction of 60%. These proposals will leave the cities of Hereford and Worcester with just 4 full time firefighters on duty at night instead of the current 8, and Bromsgrove will lose their full time guaranteed and immediate night time cover completely.

Again on the advice of the Chief Fire Officer, without public consultation, the Fire Authority are currently changing duty systems at Malvern, Evesham and Droitwich. These changes remove 12 full time and guaranteed available firefighters On-call at night, significantly worsening the fire cover available for the residents of these 3 large and ever growing towns.

We are a group of retired Fire Service Watch Commanders who fully understand the impact of these dangerous cuts, and are deeply concerned by the reduction of full time fire cover at night in our 2 counties.

We believe the lives of our firefighters, and the people they serve, will be put at risk if the Fire Authority push on with these drastic cuts, which will mean relying too heavily on the already overstretched retained staff.

For the sake of public and firefighter safety we urge the Fire authority to:

Increase the number of full time firefighters on duty at night in both Hereford and Worcester to 10, to maintain the immediate availability of 2 fire appliances in each city;

Keep immediate and guaranteed full time night time fire cover at Bromsgrove;

Reinstate the Day Crewing duty system at Malvern, Evesham and Droitwich to provide full time, guaranteed firefighters On-call at night.

Note on petitions

- 5.14 This petition is clearly important in indicating public anxiety about important aspects of the DCP proposals and HWFRS must treat it seriously. Nonetheless, it should also be noted that petitions can exaggerate general public sentiments if organised by motivated opponents – for example, the statement ‘we believe the lives of our firefighters, and the people they serve, will be put at risk if the Fire Authority push on with these drastic cuts, which will mean relying too heavily on the already overstretched retained staff’ is a highly emotive one.
- 5.15 Moreover, there is no reference within the petition statement to the FBU legal challenge that is necessitating change, the financial constraints within which the Service is operating or the relatively low number of night-time calls in Hereford and Worcester especially. The inclusion of proposed changes at Malvern, Evesham and Droitwich - which are outside the scope of this consultation - also makes it difficult to unpick exactly what those signing the petition are protesting against. Furthermore, as with all online petitions of this nature, it is very difficult to verify that those signing are resident within the two counties and thus directly affected by the proposals.
- 5.16 Petitions should never be disregarded for they show local feelings. However, while these observations do not discredit the petition submitted in any way, they do provide a context within which it should be interpreted.