

ISLE OF WIGHT FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

PUBLIC CONSULTATION on the options for MERGER OR COLLABORATION with HAMPSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE



**Dale Hall
Opinion Research Services
Spin-out company of the University of Wales**

ISLE OF WIGHT FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Public Consultation on the Options for Merger or Collaboration with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service

Facilitator and Author
Dale Hall, MD, ORS

Opinion Research Services Ltd
The Strand
Swansea
SA1 1AF

Tel: (01792) 535300
Fax: (01792) 535301
E-mail: info@ors.org.uk

© Copyright 2007 Opinion Research Services Ltd

Contents

Preamble	2
1 Executive Summary and Conclusions	3
2 Consultation Process: An Evaluation	9
3 Residents' Survey	20
4 Focus Groups	25
5 Stakeholder and Staff Forums	30
6 Public Meetings	34
7 Representations Received	38

Preamble

ORS is pleased to have been commissioned by the Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service to facilitate and report the important consultations reported here. We trust that this report will inform the Isle of Wight Council's decisions in order to achieve the best outcome for the future of the Island's fire service.

We thank the Isle of Wight's Fire and Rescue Service for the commission. At all stages of the project, ORS' status as an independent organisation consulting stakeholders and the public as fairly as possible was recognised and respected.

In particular, we should like to thank the following for their support and contribution to the public consultation arrangements: Paul Street, Acting Chief Fire Officer, and Jan Alexander, Strategic Planning Manager, ably assisted by Ann Bailey, Sam Harbour and Kelly O'Brien. All were enthusiastic and helpful in partnering ORS on this project.

It should also be noted that senior Cabinet members, elected Members of the Isle of Wight Council, and senior IoWFRS officers attended all of the stakeholder and public meetings to answer essential questions and listen to the debates. Their commitment to the process was commendable and very much appreciated, particularly because they sought not to lead or influence the outcomes of the discussions, but only to listen to the debates in a neutral manner.

Of course, we are also grateful to all the many staff, stakeholders and public who took part in the interesting and often lively meetings to share their views with us. Many of the participants were patient in listening to background information before engaging in animated question and answer sessions and open discussions. Some meetings were very animated indeed, but the exchanges never exceeded the proper boundaries of robust public debate.

1. Executive Summary and Conclusions

1.1 Introduction

ORS was commissioned by both the Isle of Wight and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services (respectively IoWFRS and HFRS) to consult with residents in both areas concerning the options identified in the September, 2006, report, entitled, *Appraisal of Options for Greater Collaboration or Full Merger*. This report assessed the strategic, operational and financial benefits of various options for both fire services before recommending that they should merge or (as a second best) collaborate closely.

This report provides a full and independent account of the outcomes of the Isle of Wight's substantial programme of stakeholder and public consultation about the future of the Island's fire service.

Initially, both the IoWFRS and HFRS intended to consult on only two options: whether to merge or develop systematic and contractual collaboration. However, this approach to the issues was shown to be distinctly unpopular with stakeholders on the Isle of Wight, and to have continued with only the two options would have brought the consultation process into disrepute – so, in accordance with ORS' advice, the range of options was widened also to include the status quo of retaining two stand-alone fire services. On behalf of the IoWFRS, ORS undertook the following consultations:

- Public opinion survey via County Press (distributed to 45K homes), some direct distribution and on-line survey
- Four focus groups in Brighstone, Newport, Ryde and Cowes
- Eleven public meetings (in date order) in Ventnor, Yarmouth, Newport, Cowes, East Cowes, Bembridge, Ryde, Shanklin, Freshwater, Sandown and Brading
- Four stakeholder forums with business, voluntary and statutory sectors
- Two employee forums with whole-time and retained fire-fighters, and support staff.

The IoWFRS also received many written representations and the results have been included also.

The consultation programme sought to test the acceptability of the three options for the future of the IoWFRS by presenting them for discussion by a wide cross section of stakeholders and members of the public. The IoWFRS, Council and ORS took great care to ensure that the consultation was inclusive and fair in both explaining the issues and registering people's opinions conscientiously. ORS believes that the findings reported here are soundly based on conscientious consultations with wide cross-sections of people. There is no reason to doubt that when the issues affecting the future of the IoWFRS are fully explained to Islanders, the predominant opinions are as described in this report.

1.2 Residents' Survey

ORS undertook a self-completion questionnaire survey of IoW residents between January 12th and February 8th 2007. The questionnaire was distributed to about 45K households via the County Press, and about 200 questionnaires were distributed directly by the IoWFRS. There was also an on-line survey. A total of 3,482 completed questionnaires were returned to ORS, 3,308 by post and 174 on-line – yielding a response rate of 8%. The data has been weighted by age and tenure.

The great majority of respondents to the survey were well informed about the options and the reasons for their consideration. For example, their responses showed that:

- 92% knew the IoW Council is considering three options for the future of the FRS

Merger

- 93% knew a merger would create a new CFA and single FRS
- 80% knew the IoW would have proportionate representation on the new CFA
- 91% knew the Island's own fire-fighters and fire-engines would remain on the IoW
- 78% knew a merger could save IoW Band D households up to £24.77 in Council Tax per year

Collaboration

- 87% knew collaboration would involve formal agreements between the IoW and Hampshire FRSs
- 77% knew collaboration could save IoW Band D households between £4.69 and £9.39 in Council Tax per year

Status Quo

- 83% knew the IoWFRS has been assessed unfavourably, as 'poor' in terms of Management,

Organisation and Finance (March 2005) and as only 'adequate' in terms of Operational Service Delivery (July 2006)

- 89% status quo would involve the Island and Hampshire retaining their separate FRSs.

The following tables summarises the important survey results.

	Best Option		Worst Option		Net 'Scores'
	Count	Valid%	Count	Valid%	
Combination/Merger	242	7	2,791	87	- 80
Collaboration	577	17	101	3	+ 14
Status Quo	2,510	75	310	10	+ 65

Figure 1: Taking everything into account, please indicate which options you think are the best and worst overall? By all respondents

Figure 1 shows that the status quo is both the most popular and also the least disliked option – leading to a high net score of +65 (when its percentage as the worst option is subtracted from its percentage as the best option to yield a net score (that may be a negative or positive (+/-) number)).

The merger option is the most unpopular option in terms of the relative few who think it best and the very large absolute majority who think it worst – leading to a net score of –80. The collaboration option attracts a reasonable level of support and is considered the worst option by only a few – so its net score is +14.

1.3 Focus Groups

The four focus groups (in Brighstone, Ryde, Newport and Cowes) were not as massively in favour of the status quo as the other forms of consultation – but overall the groups clearly favoured the status quo. In two groups there was a big majority in favour of the status quo; in one group there was a smaller majority; and only in Cowes did the focus group unanimously favour collaboration (with half thinking the status quo is the worst option). Overall, then the focus groups confirm the residents' survey outcomes (and other forms of consultation – see below) in supporting the status quo (but while also showing a level of support for collaboration). Above all, the focus groups confirmed the general importance in the public mind of having a stand-alone FRS that is locally accountable.

1.4 Stakeholder and Staff Forums

The four forums with business, voluntary and statutory sector stakeholder expressed overwhelming support for the status quo – while acknowledging in many cases that the fire service has to demonstrate its capacity to improve. Participants agreed that the prospect of formal collaboration with Hampshire is a *bad second choice* option – and that a merger with Hampshire is *not worth thinking about!*

The two staff forums were clear that:

We want to manage our own performance – to remain a central community service for the Island – as a driving force to community safety for local people.

Both forums were unanimously opposed to the prospect of a merger with Hampshire and saw no advantages in formal collaboration. The status quo was their preferred option – as with all the other staff the author met around the Island.

1.5 Public Meetings

The 11 public meetings held across the Island showed overwhelming support for the status quo, while acknowledging, in some cases, that the fire service should improve. The prospect of formal collaboration with Hampshire was relegated to a very distant second place – though still well ahead of a merger which was massively rejected. There remains no doubt of the meetings' underlying belief in an independent FRS for the Island. All the meetings unanimously supported the status quo.

1.6 Other Representations

The IoWFRS received many other representations during the public consultation period. All except one were in favour of the status quo and against any merger. Those arguing for the status quo included:

- 3,318 standard FBU-prepared letters from members of the public
- 41 letters from members of the public responding individually
- 17 representations from parish and town councils, and management committees, including

Northwood Village Management Committee

Newchurch Parish Council

Fishbourne Parish Council

Shanklin Town Council

Cowes Town Council

Ventnor Partnership

Bembridge Parish Council

Newport Town Management Committee
 Ventnor Town Council
 Lake Parish Council
 Yarmouth Harbour Commissioners
 Godshill Parish Council
 Gurnard Parish Council
 Brighstone Parish Council
 St. Helens Parish Council
 Wroxall Parish Council
 Brading Town Council

- Letter from the IoW MP
- Letter from Prison Officers Association, (Camp Hill Branch).
- Letter from Cowes and District Trades Union Council supporting the status quo.
- Fire Brigades Union Submission: Review of Scoping Study, prepared by IPF Essential Services for the Public Sector (December 2006)
- Fire Brigades Union Submission: *Think Again: Fire Appraisal Options*

The only other letter received was from the Falck Organisation offering an out-sourcing service.

1.7 Conclusions and Reasons

The conclusions to this report are very simple: the extensive public consultation process:

- Overwhelmingly rejected the prospect of a merger of the IoW and Hampshire FRSs – mainly because people:
 - Fear the loss of local democratic control
 - Consider an extra £24.77 per year (Band D) to be a reasonable additional cost for keeping the Island's own FRS
 - Believe that transitional costs will be substantial
 - Fear a merger would lead to service cuts and redundancies on the Island
 - Blame the Police forces merger for a deterioration in services to the Island
 - Fear that loss of the IoWFRS might be a precedent for the loss of other services
 - Do not want to be part of a *greater Hampshire*.

- Overwhelmingly endorsed the status quo as the only worthy option, while recognising the IoWFRS has room to improve its management and value for money – mainly because (in addition to the points just above) people also:
 - Feel the IoWFRS deserves the chance to put its house in order
 - Believe it has the capacity and commitment to do so following management changes
- Considered collaboration to be preferable to a merger – but to be so far behind the status quo that it was not considered a practical possibility – mainly because they:
 - Consider collaboration to be a back-door to future merger
 - Believe it will bring few, if any, tangible benefits
 - Felt the Options Appraisal report is very vague about how any formal arrangement would work in practice.

In summary, then, this large and detailed public consultation exercise has demonstrated almost unanimous views in the responses. While the focus groups showed that opinion on the Island is more diverse than the forums, public meetings and opinion survey would suggest, there still remains no doubt that Island opinion is massively against a merger and equally strongly in favour of the status quo (subject to making necessary improvements) – while largely ignoring (or dismissing) collaboration as at best ambiguous and at worst a back-door route to merger.

2. Consultation Process: An Evaluation

2.1 The Background and Commission

ORS was commissioned by both the Isle of Wight and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services to consult with residents in both areas concerning the options identified in the September, 2006, report, entitled, *Appraisal of Options for Greater Collaboration or Full Merger*. The *Options* report was jointly commissioned by the two Fire and Rescue services (FRSs) as a result of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) undertaken by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2005, in which the Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service (IoWFRS) was rated as poor while Hampshire's Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS) was rated as strong. In July 2006, a further Operational Service Assessment (OSA) was undertaken by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), in which the IoWFRS was rated as adequate overall (score of 2) while the HFRS was once more rated as performing strongly (maximum score of 4). In this context the *Options* report assessed the strategic, operational and financial benefits of various options for both services before recommending that they should merge or (as a second best) collaborate closely.

Following publication of the *Options* report, both the Isle of Wight and Hampshire resolved to consult widely with their respective staff, stakeholders and the public between October 2006 and January 2007.

Because of its experience with the UK fire service in general, and the Isle of Wight and Hampshire services in particular, ORS was appointed by both organisations to undertake and report on consultation programmes before the Isle of Wight Council and the Hampshire Combined Fire Authority (HCFA) take their respective decisions in the light of all the considerations. Both organisations collaborated closely with ORS to develop and commission common methodologies for the consultation programmes.

While taking the same approach as Hampshire's consultation programme, the IoWFRS' was more substantial in terms of its length, scale and the number of people consulted. This is a full and independent report of the outcomes of the Isle of Wight's stakeholder and public consultation. The findings of the Hampshire consultative process have been reported directly to the Hampshire Fire Authority.

2.2 Options for Consultation

Initially, both the IoWFRS and HFRS intended to consult on only two options: whether to merge or develop systematic and contractual collaboration. However, this approach to the issues was shown to be distinctly unpopular with stakeholders on the Isle of Wight, and to have continued with only the two options would have certainly brought the consultation process into disrepute – so, in accordance with ORS' advice, the range of options was widened also to include the status quo of retaining two stand-alone fire services. ORS recommended the change because we considered it was not feasible to exclude the third option from consideration without giving people the impression that the whole process was being manipulated. In other words, the attempt to restrict the consultation process to a choice between merger and collaboration would have jeopardised the reputation of the IoW Council (and ORS). Hence, the originally proposed consultation questionnaire was amended not only for the IoW but also for the Hampshire consultation programme.

2.3 Consultation Programme

This report outlines the details of the consultation programme thoroughly in order to demonstrate that it was conscientious not only in the sense of being large in scale but also because it was conspicuously fair in ensuring that staff, stakeholders and the public were fully informed about the issues leading to consideration of the merger and collaboration options.

As the sections below will demonstrate, the consultation programme did not just ask for a 'simple' choice between three options but dealt squarely (and in some cases bluntly) with the pros and cons of each. In some of the public meetings there was considerable resistance by some people to receiving information about the advantages of the merger and collaboration options before the 'audience' was invited to express its views; but in all the meetings and forums the financial and other reasons for considering a merger or collaboration were very clearly explained.

On behalf of the IoWFRS, ORS undertook the following consultations:

- Public opinion survey via
 - County Press (distributed to 45K homes)
 - Some direct distribution
 - On-line survey
- Four focus groups in
 - Brighstone
 - Newport

- Ryde
- Cowes
- Eleven public meetings (in date order) in
 - Ventnor
 - Yarmouth
 - Newport
 - Cowes
 - East Cowes
 - Bembridge
 - Ryde
 - Shanklin
 - Freshwater
 - Sandown
 - Brading
- Four stakeholder forums with
 - Business, voluntary and statutory sectors
- Two employee forums with
 - Whole-time and retained fire-fighters, and support staff.

The IoWFRS also received many written representations and the results have been reported to ORS for inclusion in this overall report. We have not formally audited the results provided, but we have seen examples of the submissions received and fully accept the veracity of the findings reported to us. Representations came from:

- Members of the public
- Town and Community Councils
- MP
- Private company offering contracted-out services.

2.4 Informed Consultation

ORS took great care to ensure that those consulted were as fully informed as possible about the meaning of the options and the background issues leading to their consideration. The IoWFRS and Council agreed with ORS that it was desirable to test the options for the future of the service with members of the public and stakeholders who were as far as possible well informed of the important issues. As we shall see, this approach was found to be somewhat provocative by some FRS fire-fighters who attended the public and employee meetings, but it was necessary nonetheless.

Public Opinion Survey

The public opinion survey used a detailed questionnaire that very clearly reminded or informed people of some of the main issues that they should take into account in reaching an informed judgement. In particular, the questionnaire contained the following text, presented as questions asking people to confirm that they were aware that:

Assessments

The Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service has been assessed unfavourably – as ‘poor’ in terms of Management, Organisation and Finance (March 2005) and as only ‘adequate’ in terms of Operational Service Delivery (July 2006).

Three Options

The Isle of Wight Council is considering three options for the future of the Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service – namely, to (i) Combine/Merge with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service *or* (ii) formally Collaborate with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service *or* (iii) maintain the Status Quo by continuing to modernise as an independent Fire and Rescue Service under the Isle of Wight Council.

Combination/Merger Option

A combination/merger of the Isle of Wight and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services would create a new Combined Fire Authority and single Fire and Rescue Service covering both the Isle of Wight and Hampshire.

The Isle of Wight Council would have proportionate representation through elected councillors on the new Combined Fire Authority.

The official *Options Appraisal* report says that a combination/merger with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service could save Isle of Wight households up to £24.77 in Council Tax per year (for Band D council tax payers).

The official *Options Appraisal* report says that a combination/merger with the Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service could cost Hampshire households up to £2.16 in additional Council Tax per year (for Band D council tax payers).

A combination/merger of the Isle of Wight and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services would mean the combined service being managed from Headquarters in Hampshire.

A combination of the two services would not mean fire engines being sent from Hampshire to fight fires on the Isle of Wight – fire engines and local fire officers would remain on the Island.

Collaboration

Collaboration would involve both the Isle of Wight and Hampshire retaining their own separate Fire and Rescue Services, but there would be formal agreements between the Island and Hampshire – for example, in sharing resources and good practice, joint purchasing and risk management planning.

The official *Options Appraisal* report says that it is difficult to estimate the savings that could be made through collaboration between the two Fire and Rescue Services, but collaboration with Hampshire could save Isle of Wight households between £4.69 and £9.39 in Council Tax per year (for Band D council tax payers).

The official Options Appraisal report says that collaboration with the Isle of Wight would involve no additional Council Tax costs for Hampshire households.

Status Quo

The Status Quo option would involve both the Isle of Wight and Hampshire retaining their own separate Fire and Rescue Services, and there would be no formal agreements between the authorities. There would be no cost savings for Isle of Wight Council Tax payers.

Only after people had answered questions about their awareness of the above, were they asked which are the best and worst of the three options, and about their advantages.

Focus Groups, Forum and Public Meetings

Just as important as the questionnaire survey were the focus groups with members of the public, business and stakeholder forums, public meetings and also the forums with IoWFRS personnel. These meetings were run by the ORS and in all cases began with clear and detailed presentations about the key issues leading to consideration of the merger and collaboration options for the IoW and Hampshire fire services. The informative ORS presentation covered all the material quoted above from the postal survey – and in particular explained the:

- Recent assessments of the Isle of Wight – including:
 - CPA assessments of Management, Organisation and Finance as 'poor' (March 2005) and as only 'adequate' in terms of Operational Service Delivery (July 2006)
 - Corresponding positive assessments for HFRS
- Comparison of the scale and resources of each FRS – including:
 - Clear economies of scale possible in HFRS – evident in being able to deal with about 12 times as many incidents with only about eight times the budget of the IoWFRS

- Merger option – including:
 - Creation of new Combined Fire Authority (CFA) and single FRS
 - IoW's proportionate representation through elected councillors on CFA
 - Savings to IoW Band D Council Tax payers of £24.77 per year – achieved not through budget cuts but by the redistribution of the precept costs following a merger
 - Corresponding increased cost to Hampshire Band D Council Tax payers of £2.16 per year
 - Merger would not mean fire engines being sent from Hampshire to fight fires on the Isle of Wight – fire engines and local fire officers would remain on the Island.
- Collaboration option – including:
 - Retention of two separate FRSs
 - Signing of formal agreements for some important joint activities – such as sharing resources and good practice, joint purchasing and risk management planning
 - Savings to IoW Band D Council Tax payers of between £4.69 and £9.39 per year
- Status Quo option – including:
 - Retention of two separate FRSs
 - No formal agreements for joint activities
 - No savings to IoW Council Tax payers
 - IoWFRS costs Islanders considerably more per household than HFRS
 - Need for IoWFRS to make efficiency saving to provide better value for money
 - Need for IoWFRS to address management, organisation, finance and service delivery issues in order to achieve improved assessment scores.

In order to ensure the meetings were as informed as possible (without shaping the participants' views), ORS prepared a PowerPoint presentation outlining the reasons for the *Options Appraisal* report, the key facts about the two FRSs, and the implications of the three options in terms of working arrangements and changes to Council Taxes – following the 'agenda' of issues set out in the bullets above.

The meetings were challenging for two main reasons. First, quite complex concepts, unfamiliar to most participants, had to be presented clearly and then discussed fairly. Second, in a number of meetings the author of this report faced criticism

from some interested parties who felt he was *selling the [IoW Fire] Service down the river* by giving information they felt was prejudicial to the case for a stand-alone IoWFRS.

Overall, the consultation process should be considered as 'testing' the acceptability of the three options for the future of the IoWFRS by presenting proposals for discussion and review by a very wide cross section of stakeholders and members of the public.

Of course, consultation is not a referendum since professional services and public bodies cannot simply abdicate their expertise and responsibilities. Accountability through consultation does not mean pursuing or abandoning proposals only because they are respectively popular or unpopular. Rather, it means that public bodies should *give an account* of their proposals, and the reasons for them – and then take seriously into consideration the views of those consulted.

2.5 Inclusiveness and Representativeness

Public Opinion Survey

The self-completion survey contacted about 45K households via its distribution with the County Press on Friday January 12th 2007. Up to about 200 additional questionnaires were distributed by the IoWFRS on the Island and the survey could also be completed on-line, via the ORS website.

A total of 3,482 completed questionnaires were returned to ORS (including 174 completed on-line) – an overall response rate of 8%. (The response rate cannot be calculated precisely since we do not know exactly how many additional questionnaires were distributed and how many people consulted the website without submitting a completed questionnaire.) The size and detail of this survey mean it was a conscientious consultation exercise that succeeded in registering the views of a large and diverse numbers of people. While not based a random sample of the IoW population, the survey results have been weighted against the Island's 2001 Census profile and they may be treated as soundly indicative of public opinion on the Island.

Focus Groups

ORS recruited, facilitated and reported four focus groups late in the consultation period (to allow time for the 'public debate' to have registered with them). As standard practice, participants were paid an allowance for their trouble and expenses in attending and taking part in the sessions. Serving and recent members of the IoWFRS and their family members were not recruited to the meetings.

The focus groups comprised a good cross-section of participants by age, gender and social background – and, while four groups comprising 34 people cannot be considered a 'scientific' sample

of the population, the researchers believe they fairly indicate the range of prevalent opinions (even though they cannot measure their statistical distribution in the wider population). Although, focus groups cannot be certified as statistically representative of public opinion, the four meetings reported here certainly gave a diverse range of people, from widely differing areas of the IoW, the opportunity to review the options in depth. The participants were diverse in terms of gender, age, social, economic and professional status, housing tenure and many other criteria. We are satisfied, therefore, that the outcomes of the meetings (as reported below) are broadly indicative of how 'informed public opinion' on the Island would react to similar information and discussions.

Public Meetings

The eleven public meetings gave many Islanders detailed information about the IoWFRS and involved them in constructive debate about the future of the service. However, before accepting the conclusions of such discussions we should briefly mention some factors that should be taken into account. While public meetings are an essential democratic feature, they can be poorly attended and/or not reflect the views of the wider population; where consultations concern important public services, highly organised workforces can mobilise not only their families and friends but also the local population to attend; and meetings are liable to domination by opinionated individuals.

Although these features applied to the IoW public meetings, to a limited extent, the author's impression was that the eleven meetings succeeded in involving diverse members of the public in informative and genuine debate about the issues.

Of course, some fire-fighters attended each meeting, and some spoke at each meeting they attended – but not to dominate by numbers or unduly influence the meeting by their force of personality. While the fire-fighters often felt that the author's explanation of the options unduly favoured the merger/combination option, their criticisms, though in some cases vigorous, did not prevent the facts taken from the *Options Appraisal* report being clearly presented to the audience.

The best attended meeting was in Yarmouth, with 75 people present (including about 12 fire-fighters, but excluding County Councillors and senior members of the IoWFRS attending as observers); and the smallest, with nine members of the public (plus six fire-fighters) was in East Cowes. The numbers attending each of the meetings was:

Ventnor	20 plus 6 fire-fighters
Yarmouth	63 plus 12 fire-fighters

Newport	22 plus 10 fire-fighters
Cowes	19 plus 8 fire-fighters
East Cowes	9 plus 6 fire-fighters
Bembridge	15 plus 9 fire-fighters
Ryde	24 plus 6 fire-fighters
Shanklin	22 plus 14 fire-fighters
Freshwater	31 plus 15 fire-fighters
Sandown	22 plus 9 fire-fighters
Brading	23 plus 7 fire-fighters.

Taking everything into account, the author can certify that in his opinion:

- Those attending the public meetings listened to a detailed explanation of the financial and organisational issues affecting the IoWFRS
- Were not in any way unduly influenced during the course of the meeting by the views of fire-fighters opposed to the merger
- Were diverse enough to be considered a reasonable cross-section of Islanders.

Stakeholder and Staff Forums

Four stakeholder forums were held with members of the business, voluntary and statutory sectors alongside IoW Council members. A total of 68 people attended the four meetings (with individual attendances of 15, 14, 25 and 14) and the participants took part readily in informed debates about the options. In the opinion of the author, there is no reason to think that these meetings do not provide a sound guide to the views of informed business and community groups on the Island.

The two employee forums attracted attendances of 43 and 13. Once more, there is no reason for the author to think that the views expressed at the meetings are not representative of IoWFRS employees generally. Indeed, having listened to many more employees across the Island, the author believes there is little doubt about what staff generally think of the three options.

Community Councils and Others

The IoWFRS received representations from the following:

Northwood Village Management Committee
 Newchurch Parish Council
 Fishbourne Parish Council
 Shanklin Town Council

Cowes Town Council
 Ventnor Partnership
 Bembridge Parish Council
 Newport Town Management Committee
 Ventnor Town Council
 Lake Parish Council
 Yarmouth Harbour Commissioners
 Godshill Parish Council
 Gurnard Parish Council
 Brighstone Parish Council
 St. Helens Parish Council
 Wroxall Parish Council
 Brading Town Council.

Representations were also received from:

Fire Brigades Union
 MP for the IoW
 Prison Officers Association (Camp Hill Branch)
 Cowes and District Trades Union Council
 Falck organisation
 Many IoW residents.

2.6 Positive Evaluation

The IoWFERS, Council and ORS took great care to ensure that the consultation reported here was large in scale, genuinely inclusive, and fair in both explaining the issues and registering people's opinions conscientiously.

ORS believes that these goals have certainly been achieved. We are sure that the findings reported here are soundly based on conscientious consultations with wide cross-sections of people. While no one element of the research is 'definitive' in revealing the exact statistical distribution of views, taken together the consultations undoubtedly provide a very clear picture of informed Islanders' opinions on the future of their FRS. There is no reason to doubt that when the issues affecting the future of the IoWFERS are fully explained to Islanders, the predominant opinions are as described in this report.

2.7 Organisation of the Report

Section 2 below gives a concise Executive Summary of the main findings from the consultation programme, while the following sections provide more detailed reports of the findings from each element. Some verbatim quotations are cited from the focus groups – not because ORS endorses them but to illustrate recurrent points of view. Whilst quotations are used, this report

is not a transcript of things said, but an interpretative summary of the issues raised. The report seeks to be faithful to what people said while summarising main themes and highlighting key points.

2.8 Alleged Bias

Working together, the IoWFRS, Council and ORS were conscientious in ensuring that the consultation process was ambitious, inclusive, and fair in explaining the issues and registering people's opinions. Nonetheless, the author of this report has been accused by the FBU of bias – for allegedly favouring the merger option in the public meetings. For example, as well as quoting the author's presentation to the public meetings inaccurately, in paragraph 3.2 the FBU submission *Think Again* declares:

The public meetings have been extremely well attended by IoW residents; comments expressed the disquiet of the presentation [sic] by Dale Hall of ORS. His presentation was deemed biased and misleading by some with a clear objective to focus on the full merger option [sic] rather than consider the validity of each available option.

The future of the IoWFRS is obviously an important and controversial topic, and the public meetings clearly reflected this. Not surprisingly, a number of fire-fighters felt so strongly that they attended most or all of the meetings and felt impelled to argue with the author's presentation regarding the merger option. In some meeting the process of argumentation not only lengthened the presentation but also ensured that more attention was devoted to the merger option than would otherwise have been the case. Throughout the process of consultation, the author's priority has been only to ensure that the *Options Appraisal's* arguments for the merger option were clearly and fully presented to the meetings – so Islanders could make their judgements in full knowledge of all the facts. We believe that this approach was generally widely and well understood.

3. Residents' Survey

3.1 Introduction

ORS undertook a self-completion questionnaire survey of IoW residents between January 12th and February 8th 2007. The questionnaire was distributed to about 45K households via the County Press, and about 200 questionnaires were distributed directly by the IoWFRS. There was also an on-line survey. A total of 3,482 completed questionnaires were returned to ORS, 3,308 by post and 174 completed online – yielding a response rate of 8%. The survey contained questions on the following topics:

- Awareness of the issues and options
- Views on best and worst options
- Personal profile section.

For analysis, the achieved sample was compared against the IoW population profile in the 2001 Census and as a result the data have been weighted to correct for age and tenure imbalances. All the findings reported in this chapter are based upon the weighted data (but the tables at the chapter end show the weighted and un-weighted respondents profiles).

3.2 Awareness of Issues

As Chapter 1 has demonstrated, respondents were provided with very full information about the three options for the future of the IoWFRS in the form of questions about whether they were fully aware of some key issues.

The great majority of respondents to the survey were well informed about the options and the reasons for their consideration. For example, their responses showed that:

- 92% knew the IoW Council is considering three options for the future of the FRS

Merger

- 93% knew a merger would create a new CFA and single FRS
- 80% knew the IoW would have proportionate representation on the new CFA
- 92% knew a combined FRS would be managed from headquarters in Hampshire

- 91% knew the Island's own fire-fighters and fire-engines would remain on the IoW
- 78% knew a merger could save IoW Band D households up to £24.77 in Council Tax per year

Collaboration

- 87% knew collaboration would involve formal agreements between the IoW and Hampshire FRSs
- 77% knew collaboration could save IoW Band D households between £4.69 and £9.39 in Council Tax per year

Status Quo

- 83% knew the IoWFRS has been assessed unfavourably, as 'poor' in terms of Management, Organisation and Finance (March 2005) and as only 'adequate' in terms of Operational Service Delivery (July 2006)
- 89% status quo would involve the Island and Hampshire retaining their separate FRSs.

3.3 Three Options

The following tables and graph summarise the important survey results.

	Best Option		Worst Option		Net 'Scores'
	Count	Valid%	Count	Valid%	
Combination/Merger	242	7	2,791	87	- 80
Collaboration	577	17	101	3	+ 14
Status Quo	2,510	75	310	10	+ 65

Figure 2: Taking everything into account, please indicate which options you think are the best and worst overall? By all respondents

Figures 1 and 2 show that the Status Quo is both the most popular and also the least disliked option – leading to a high net score of +65 (when its percentage as the Worst option is subtracted from its percentage as the Best option to yield a score that may be a plus or minus (+/-) number).

The same figures show clearly that Combination/Merger is the most unpopular option in terms of the relative few who think it best and the very large absolute majority who think it worst. Its net score is –80.

The Collaboration option attracts a reasonable level of support and is considered the worst option by only a few – so its net score is +14.

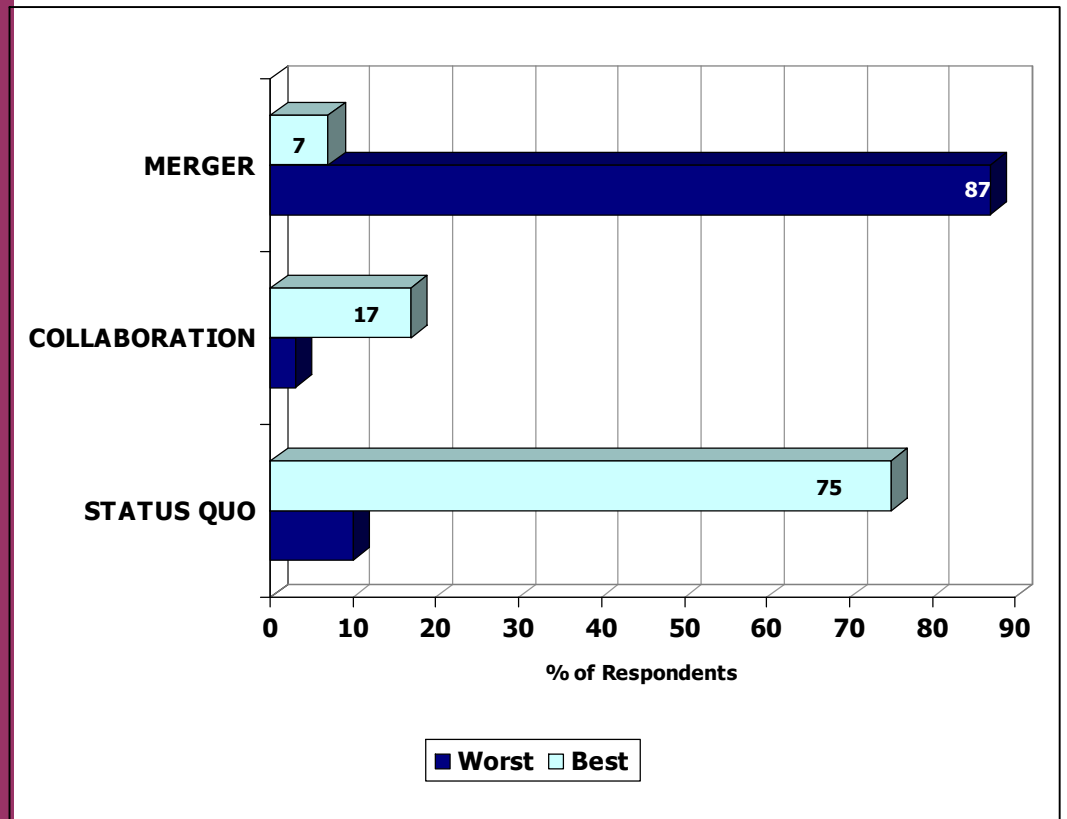


Figure 3: Taking everything into account, please indicate which options you think are the best and worst overall? By all respondents

Figure 4 shows the interesting correlation between the best and worst options selected by the respondents. It shows that:

- Those who select status quo as their best option typically select the merger option as the worst
- Those who select the merger option as the best are more likely to select status quo as the worst
- Those who select collaboration as the best option are nonetheless more likely to select a merger as their worst option.

		WORST OPTIONS		
		Combination /Merger	Collaboration	Status Quo
BEST OPTIONS	Combination/Merger	0	1	6
	Collaboration	14	0	3
	Status Quo	73	2	0

Figure 4: Cross-tabulation of support for Best and Worst options. For all respondents

3.4 Annex to Chapter: Respondent Profiles

Section 3.3 above provides the key findings from the residents' survey based upon weighted data. For completeness, this annex compares the achieved survey sample with the 2001 Census for the IoW. The following tables show the weighted and unweighted respondent profiles. (An * denotes a number less than 1%; and figures may not always sum to 100 due to rounding errors.)

Gender – All Respondents	Un-weighted cases	Un-weighted data (response)	Weighted data
Male	2017	59%	55%
Female	1383	41%	45%
Not known	82	-	

Figure 4: Gender – All Respondents

Age – All Respondents	Un-weighted cases	Un-weighted data (response)	Weighted data
16 to 24	37	1%	3%
25 to 34	116	3%	13%
35 to 44	236	7%	16%
45 to 54	457	13%	18%
55 to 64	977	29%	17%
65 or over	1600	47%	32%
Not known	59	-	

Figure 5: Age – All Respondents

Employment Status – All Respondents	Un-weighted cases	Un-weighted data (response)	Weighted data
Working full-time	877	26%	39%
Working part-time	458	13%	16%
Not working at all (including retired)	2073	61%	46%
Not known	74	-	

Figure 6: Employment Status – All Respondents

Housing Tenure – All Respondents	Un-weighted cases	Un-weighted data (response)	Weighted data
Owned by you	3059	90%	76%
Rented from the council	20	1%	1%
Rented from a Housing Association	114	3%	9%
Rented privately	149	4%	10%
Another type of housing	46	1%	4%
Not known	94	-	

Figure 7: Housing Tenure – All Respondents

4. Focus Groups with Members of the Public

4.1 Introduction

Four focus groups were convened late in the consultation period in order to allow the 'public debate' to have taken shape. The meetings were held in:

Brighston

Ryde

Newport

Cowes.

As standard practice, participants were paid an allowance for their trouble and expenses in attending and taking part in the sessions. Serving and recent members of the IoWFRS and their family members were not recruited to the meetings. The focus groups comprised a good cross-section of Islanders. The participants were diverse in terms of age, gender, social, economic and professional status, housing tenure and many other criteria. We are satisfied, therefore, that the outcomes of the meetings are broadly indicative of how 'informed public opinion' on the Island would react to similar information and discussions.

In contrast with some of the public meetings, the focus groups were dispassionate and reflective about the issues they discussed. If many eventually felt strongly about the issues, it was only as a conclusion – after examining the arguments; for few brought fixed opinions to the meeting and no one tried emotionally to influence others in the discussions.

4.2 Best and Worst Options

Brighstone

After a detailed and lengthy discussion, there was an almost equal division of opinion; but overall more people favoured the status quo, with collaboration a close second. There was no support for a merger with Hampshire. Above all, the group wanted to protect the independence and local accountability of the IoWFRS.

Ryde

The Ryde group also agreed unanimously that a merger was the worst option of the three. There was also a big majority in favour of the status quo over collaboration – mainly because

they felt the latter would be *a sneaky [route to a] merger*. While supporting the status quo, one or two group members said they thought the IoWFRS probably needs some management assistance from elsewhere.

Newport

The Newport group was also unanimous that a merger would be the worst outcome – though one person said they could *see the point of it* in the light of the IoWFRS' recent assessments. There was a division of opinion about the best option, but after lengthy discussion a clear majority favoured the status quo – while adding that the service should be monitored to ensure it improves and provides value for money. Those who favoured collaboration did so mainly because they felt the service would benefit from support from the mainland.

Cowes

The Cowes group was probably the most prosperous of the four groups and it is interesting that it was the only one to come down heavily in favour of collaboration as the best option. In fact, the group was unanimous that this was the best way forwards. With respect to the worst option, there was an equal division of opinion – with half thinking a merger and half thinking the status quo would be worst.

4.3 Overall Balance of Opinion

The focus groups were not as massively in favour of the status quo as the residents' survey, public meetings and employee and stakeholder forums – but overall the groups favoured the status quo. In two groups there was a big majority in favour, in one group there was a smaller majority; and only Cowes unanimously favoured collaboration (with half thinking the status quo is the worst option).

Although somewhat less emphatically, the focus groups confirm the outcomes of the other forms of consultation: they very clearly support the status quo, while also showing a level of support for collaboration. This is compatible with the findings of the residents' survey, where 17% expressed support for collaboration as the best option. Above all, the focus groups confirm the general importance of having a stand-alone FRS that is locally accountable.

4.4 Example Quotations

Following are some typical quotations from each of the four focus groups. It is noticeable that the groups tended to focus primarily on the *merger versus status quo* options rather than on collaboration. Some felt the collaboration option is unclear; others felt it would be a back-door to a merger.

Merger

A lot of CT payers would welcome a reduction in their tax! [Cowes]

You would lose local accountability – which is contrary to what the [national political] parties support in general [Brighstone]

Once you give away control you cannot get it back [Brighstone]

We are a unique place with maritime incidents and rescue problems for an island [Brightsone]

There is no problem at the user level for the fire service – we are proud of it – and it does not seem to be poor [Brighstone]

Everything costs more here because of the water – we are used to it and don't mind paying for the FRS. Anyway, I don't believe the savings – mergers always cost money [Brighstone]

They tried to take away our hospital A&E and Maternity services to the mainland – they try to merge into larger units [Ryde]

The government is constantly trying to remove our services to the mainland – things like the job centres are being closed gradually here [Ryde]

Will this be a precedent for a wholesale merger of both councils? The implication is that it would follow for the whole council [Newport]

We seem to be losing our own identity and services – everything is going to the mainland [Newport]

We don't want to send our money and jobs over to the mainland – we need to be more than just a manual workforce here [Newport]

We shall have only 2 members on the Combined Fire Authority [Ryde]

The first option is ludicrous because our Fire Authority members would be so outnumbered [Newport]

People on the mainland have no idea about island distances and what conditions are like [Ryde]

The management at Eastleigh would not understand the island – they might think we have far too many fire stations for our population (and we do seem to have a lot) [Ryde]

If we merged with Hampshire it would mean we were neglected and left until last [Ryde]

The police merger has led to deterioration in the service to the island [Ryde]

The police arrangement is awful – their control room is awful – they don't know where we are – and there is never anyone at the station after the minimal hours in Cowes [Cowes]

The island is too remote for the mainland to control [Cowes]

The fire service is a local service that does a good job – and we want to support employment on the island – we want to keep island services here on the island [Cowes]

There is a tendency for all public services to build empires – this is what Hampshire could be trying to do [Cowes]

Status Quo

We need to cut the bureaucracy and monitor our performance better [Brighstone]

This is capable of improving – we don't want to lose it. We don't need a merger to improve our performance [Brighstone]

Management and training could be improved with outside influence [Brighstone]

We need to improve our management standards properly [Ryde]

It we have a poor service, we should have a chance to improve it ourselves – we need to address the issues for ourselves [Ryde]

We have an excellent new fire station in Ryde [Ryde]

We don't mind paying for the fire service – and I would be happy to pay even more if necessary [Ryde]

We have one of the best ambulance services going – so why can't we get to have the best fire service as well? [Newport]

In 15 months we seem to have been making improvements – so we can do even more in this direction [Newport]

We are not really concerned with Hampshire – we want our own service to be as good as possible and if it is not good enough it should be put right [Cowes]

What proportion of the extra cost is bad management here? [Cowes]

Collaboration

Hampshire could give us management support without a full merger. This could be made to work well [Ryde]

I think the second option [collaboration] is the best – mainly because we lack the really top management level and skills on the island – but it lets us continue to run as we are now while still saving money on administration and management – the island is not big enough to produce the highest level of management skills – for example it is hard to get good consultants to come here [Newport]

Collaboration would keep the fire service here – but it would let us have better management guidance and information from Hampshire [Cowes]

The island mentality is a problem in terms of the lack of motivation – so collaboration could be a stimulus to improvement – we have something to learn [Cowes]

We could lose control gradually [Ryde]

What will it deliver really? It seems a bit vague [Ryde]

This could take jobs from people on the island [Ryde]

It is a merger in disguise [Ryde]

This should have been made much clearer if they really mean it seriously – it just seems to be presented as a kind of compromise with no specific examples of what will happen [Ryde]

It seems a kind of vague con [Ryde]

Collaboration could be the back door to a merger – it sounds like a good idea but it could weaken our independence [Cowes]

5. Stakeholder and Staff Forums

5.1 Introduction

Early in the consultation process ORS held four stakeholder forums with members of the business, voluntary and statutory sectors alongside IoW Council members. A total of 68 people attended the four meetings and the participants took part readily in informed debates about the options. In addition, two employee forums attracted attendances of 43 and 13. It is unnecessary to disaggregate individually the views of the four stakeholder meetings since they all reached very similar conclusions. Similarly, there were no significant differences between different categories of IoWFRS staff.

Before reporting the two sets of meetings, it should be noted that they all took place before the number of options available for consultation had officially been increased to three – with the inclusion of the status quo alongside the merger and collaboration option. Rather than encouraging people to focus on the relative merits of merger versus collaboration, the inclusion of only two options made participants indignant – and they did not fail to discuss the status quo option as well! As a result of the meetings reported in this chapter, the author advised the IoW Council to widen the scope of the consultation to include explicit reference to three options in order to avoid bringing the consultation process into disrepute.

It should be noted, though, that throughout these discussions it was stressed that the status quo option is not equivalent to *No change: all is well* – for it was generally recognised that the IoWFRS has to show itself capable of improvement.

5.2 Stakeholder Forums

On the basis of what has been written just above, it is really unnecessary to report further that participants unanimously urged the inclusion of the status quo option. They also stressed that the IoWFRS has made significant recent improvements and economies. Overall, the major concerns expressed in the meetings were that:

- A merger would really be a take-over with few safeguards for local control
- The real issue should be how to improve the service while keeping a local control

- The proposed changes will have no impact on public safety – unless there is a reduction in emergency cover, which might happen under mainland control
- There might be redundancies for IoWFRS staff
- Mergers usually prove more expensive than expected and bring service cuts
- The merged Police service seems remote and unresponsive to Islanders
- The ambulance service on the IoW has improved considerably
- The IoW will have very small representation on the new CFA
- £25 per Band D household per annum is not too much extra to pay for the Island's own fire service
- The IoWFRS should be able to benefit from collaborating with a range of FRSs, not just Hampshire
- The mainland will not understand the Island's needs so well
- Some of the Island's fire service assets might be stripped by the new CFA
- The prospect of formal collaboration is very vague
- There are no clear indications of how Hampshire FRS would manage a collaborative arrangement – would it try to dominate the IoWFRS?

As a result of these arguments, the business, voluntary and statutory sector stakeholders expressed overwhelming support for the status quo – while acknowledging in many cases that the service has to demonstrate the capacity to improve and should be ready to collaborate informally with whoever can assist.

They thought that the prospect of formal collaboration with Hampshire is a *bad second choice* option – though it would have the undoubted virtue of *retaining self-governance and local management control*. At the other extreme, a merger with Hampshire is *not worth thinking about!* In including these short quotations the author has not sought the most extreme positions, but just indicated the sentiments that seem most clearly to sum up the overall consensus.

5.3 Staff Forums

As with the stakeholder groups reported above, it is unnecessary to say again that the staff forums resented the exclusion of the status quo from formal consideration during the early stages of the consultation process.

In addition to the staff forums reported here, the author encountered many FRS personnel (especially retained fire-fighters) during the 11 public meetings across the Island. There is no doubt that their concerns match those stated in the staff forums – which were chiefly that:

- The projected savings per Band D households are very uncertain – and will not lower Council Tax
- There will be considerable transition costs – and these have not been allowed for in the Options Appraisal report
- The Options Appraisal report is biased in favour of a merger
- A merger with Hampshire is likely to lead to service cuts and the loss of resources – such as high lift appliances
- The 'independence', democratic control and the future of Island-based services is vitally important
- The IoW would have very small membership on the CFA, even if proportionate
- The Police merger has led to a deterioration in services to the Island
- Loss of the IoWFRS could be a precedent for the loss of other services – or even for a complete merger of the IoW and Hampshire
- People do not want to be part of a *greater Hampshire*
- A merger would lead to service cuts and redundancies
- Collaboration happens already – informally – with a number of FRSs
- A commitment to self-improvement under the status quo is the lowest risk strategy for the Island
- Under new management there have been recent improvements
- The status quo can yield savings

While many of the arguments used by staff against the Options Appraisal report were mainly critical rather than constructive, there is no doubt that the underlying aspiration of staff in the forums:

We want to manage our own performance – to remain a central community service for the Island – as a driving force to community safety for local people.

In contrast with this rousing prospect, it was claimed by fire-fighters that:

Hampshire has done some assessment of our needs here – and they think the number of appliances could be reduced. Savings would be delivered through service cuts!

The staff forums were unanimously opposed to the prospect of a merger with Hampshire and saw no advantages in formal collaboration. The status quo was their preferred option – as with all the other staff the author met around the Island.

6. Public Meetings

6.1 Introduction

Eleven public meetings were organised very effectively by the IoWFRS and held (in the following order) in Ventnor, Yarmouth, Newport, Cowes, East Cowes, Bembridge, Ryde, Shanklin, Freshwater, Sandown and Brading. All the meetings were facilitated by ORS, using a detailed presentation about the key issues covered by the Options Appraisal report. Many of the sessions were challenging because complex and new ideas had to be properly explained to participants, even while some fire-fighters were arguing that the information provided was prejudicial to the case for a stand-alone IoWFRS. Nonetheless, although public meetings risk domination by opinionated individuals, the author's impression is that the eleven IoW meetings succeeded in involving diverse members of the public in informative and genuine debate about the issues. Some fire-fighters attended each meeting, and some spoke each time they attended – but not to dominate by numbers or unduly influence the meeting. The best attended meeting was in Yarmouth, with 75 people present (including about 12 fire-fighters, but excluding County Councillors and senior members of the IoWFRS attending as observers); and the smallest, with nine members of the public (plus six fire-fighters), was in East Cowes.

6.2 Summary

It would be redundant to report each of the 11 meetings separately – so the following summary draws together the main arguments and conclusions. All the meetings showed overwhelming support for the status quo – while acknowledging, in some cases, that the service should improve. The prospect of formal collaboration with Hampshire was relegated to a distant second place – though still well ahead of a merger. As with the staff forums, many of the arguments were critical of the Options Appraisal report rather than making a constructive defence of the Island's FRS – but, nonetheless, there remains no doubt of the meetings' underlying belief in an independent FRS for the Island. Indeed, in the history of public consultation, rarely can so many meetings have been so unanimous: the prospect of a merger with Hampshire FRS was massively rejected; and there was almost no support at all for the prospect of formal collaboration. In effect, all the meetings unanimously supported the status quo.

6.3 Main Arguments for Status Quo

The main arguments and considerations were as follows:

- The Options Appraisal report does not acknowledge sufficiently the improvements and savings made recently by the IoWFRS
- The senior IoWFRS management has changed recently and the new regime should be given a chance to prove itself
- The FRS provides an excellent service to the Island – and is even now improving
- The fire-fighters' morale is badly affected by this issue
- Neither merger nor collaboration will make the Island safer in practice
- The government is too keen on promoting mergers and larger service units – it should interfere less
- Mergers typically do not save money but bring bigger management/administration costs – as well as service cuts
- The cost savings are insignificant in the context of keeping an Island-based service
- The combined police service for Hampshire and the IoW does not work well
- The most important thing is to have local control – over the service and budget through democratically accountable elected members
- The IoW's proportionate representation on a new CFA would be insufficient to protect its interests
- There would be a risk that service levels would be reduced and the Island's fire service assets stripped for the benefit of the mainland
- The IoW could never get out of a merger once entered into
- Instead of merging or collaborating formally with the mainland, the Island's emergency services should collaborate together more
- The Options Appraisal report ignores the Island's status and character as an island
- Money is not the main issue in determining how important public services should be run

6.4 Some Typical Quotations

The following quotations are drawn from all over the Island.

What you lose with a combined fire authority is proper political representation for the island – we could not defend ourselves with our small voice from undesirable changes – and 50p [extra per week] per household is not too much to pay for this

We are part of the Council here – and as such we are an important part of the community – so we link with many other organisations and have mutual involvement throughout the community. We want to remain a part of the community in which we live and work – this is a key argument for the status quo

We know who our political representatives are – and we recognise them and can talk to them

The idea of a merger is really a take-over

The status quo is best – providing it means continuous improvement for the sake of local democracy

We are talking about an important public service! Our fire brigade is part of our community – we know our fire-fighters and interact with them regularly

We have a community fire service within the community – and this does not always show up in statistics – but it is still real

This is an emotional issue of principle and democracy for the Island

We must not sell our birthright local service for potential possible savings – that none of us can absolutely trust for the future – and we would lose our local service to our overall detriment – a short term possible saving should not justify a long term loss of local service – in which we become a department or area of Hampshire

We are an Island – the government has to recognise that – and economies of scale don't work here – and we know that and pay for it in order to live here

We need a rapid and efficient response to emergencies – we have that now – and the cost is of secondary importance!

Nothing makes me think the new service would be safer under a merger

We should give the current system a proper chance

The emergency services on the Island should collaborate together more effectively

Who will own any assets released in future – for example, fire stations and fire engines – could they go to Hampshire?

Hampshire is not necessarily the best partner for us to collaborate with – the report is too constraining in focusing only on Hampshire

Mergers rarely save money – but best practice should always be shared from whatever bases are current

Reorganisation always costs more! Never less!

There are no benefits for the Island except the small amount of money

The police force merger has not worked well for the Island

The status quo does not mean we shall not change and improve – we should talk of a 'stand-alone FRS' – this is a more positive description

We would be very perturbed if the improvements were not already taking place – so the 2005 assessment is already out of date

The government should not dictate to us!

The government ministers should come here to see how well the service is now doing. We need to take the government on about this – to show what we want!

We don't mind the £25 per year for our own FRS – the Council could make a special levy for our own FRS – and they could explain this openly

The money is not the main thing! It is not worth losing the local accountability

We have replaced the bad management – we have the capacity for change – this is a key criteria

Collaboration would reduce our ability to run our own affairs effectively

7. Representations Received

7.1 Introduction

The following communications were received by the IoWFRS during the public consultation period which ended on 31 January 2007. All of the communications supported the status quo option.

7.2 Standard Public Letters (Designed by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU))

The IoWFRS reports that two standard letters, both designed and supplied to Islanders by the FBU, have been in widespread circulation. Letter 'A' was mostly handed out, ready-printed, with residents needing only to add their addresses and signatures. Letter 'B' was available to download from the joint FBU and Unison "fireservicemerger.com" web-site, and some were also printed, signed and addressed as letter A. The Council decided to treat both these groups of letters as constituting a 'petition' and so it did not respond to them individually.

The essential points of Letter A are that:

- The IoWFRS is making significant savings
- The current IoW administration is pledged to maintain an Island-based service

Letter A concludes

I wish to register my view that I do not want the islands Fire Service to fully merge with Hampshire Fire Service [sic].

Letter A does not mention the Collaboration option. 2,503 copies of Letter A were received by the Council.

The essential points of Letter B are that:

- The IoWFRS is making significant savings while meeting its attendance time targets
- HFRS costs are (allegedly) increasing

Letter B concludes

I consider the best way forward would be to continue as we are, collaborating with the most cost effective Fire Services nationally (the status quo option). I do not want the Island's Fire Service to merge with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service.

815 copies of Letter B were received by the Council.

7.3 Individual Communications

41 members of the public responded individually to support the status quo. Some example quotations follow.

It is unacceptable to have a fire service over which the Island Council and Island residents have no control

Instead of cutting back our services and amalgamating with another county we should be enhancing the services

We are an Island and must be treated as such being allowed to plan our own future

I feel safe, knowing that if need be the Fire Services are local, the fire-fighters know the Island

We don't want a reduction in our rates while our properties burn down

Please listen to the public on this, Islanders will be put at risk if this merger happens. We need to be independent

We have seen what control from Hampshire has done to the Police (lack of) Service on the Island. We do not want the same with the Fire & Rescue Service

Extended networks and over centralisation doesn't necessarily lead to a more efficient and reactive organisation

Morale will not improve with a merger

This (Home Fire Safety Checks) is an excellent service and another reason for IW Fire Service to retain its independence

The least we can do is show some loyalty to the present team, who are doing so well

I have worked closely in the past with the service as Injury Prevention Co-ordinator and knowing the skills and training the Fire and Rescue Services perform, and their intimate knowledge of the IOW I would regard a merger as a disastrous step for Emergency services for the IOW and its population

Our Fire and Rescue service on the Island do much more for the community than many people realise and to merge with Hampshire will be costly to all council tax payers, resulting in higher council tax and a fractured service

Keep our local knowledge here. Save our Fire and Rescue Service for us, with men who know their patch, their people and enjoy the respect from the public they deserve. This is a political decision, which does nothing for the Island, and even less for the politicians

There seem to be so many reasons to retain a service unchanged, when it is delivering quite satisfactorily and thriftily.

It is not as if on our Island we have not already experienced less efficiency in services transferred from here to the mainland

Reverse the trend of "bigger is better", when usually the result is more costly, reduced efficiency and increased unaccountability

Savings are not everything when it comes to preservation of life and property!

7.4 Parish Councils, Town Councils and Management Committees

17 organisations from across the Island reported the views of their members as representing the view of their communities. All supported the status quo option. Correspondence was received from the following.

Northwood Village Management Committee
 Newchurch Parish Council
 Fishbourne Parish Council
 Shanklin Town Council
 Cowes Town Council
 Ventnor Partnership
 Bembridge Parish Council
 Newport Town Management Committee
 Ventnor Town Council
 Lake Parish Council
 Yarmouth Harbour Commissioners
 Godshill Parish Council
 Gurnard Parish Council
 Brighthstone Parish Council
 St. Helens Parish Council
 Wroxall Parish Council
 Brading Town Council

All the above expressed the concern that their letters should be treated as representative of their communities and not treated as an individual response. Their overriding concern was the loss of local control and the feeling that the Island's voice would not be heard. Some example quotations are shown below.

The Isle of Wight will become like a small village...our voice will not be heard!

The main reason for this decision is that similar membership to that of the Police Authority would result in the same situation we currently have with that body – the small membership that the Island representatives might just as well not be there as their voice would hardly be heard

The proposed financial benefits do not outweigh the need to retain local control over the Fire and Rescue Service

We point out that the present service is providing a high level of expertise and equipment with a detailed knowledge of Island requirements and the programme of rationalisation and improvement being currently undertaken by IW Council is producing good results and this should be maintained

We have an excellent service and should be allowed to continue in the same way

The residents of Brading have made us aware that the £25 saving per household in Council Tax for the merger option, will not compensate for having to lose their local fire and rescue service

The Town Council feels that with either of these two options (one and two), we would lose local control and would be poorly represented on the proposed Hampshire and Isle of Wight Service Board

7.5 Member of Parliament for the Isle of Wight

Below are extracts from a letter from the MP for the Isle of Wight.

Firstly I do not believe that the savings estimates that have been put forward in the Financial Case will necessarily be achieved. Many mergers of public bodies have cost a great deal more than was originally envisaged and have not led to anticipated savings.

Although the document does not say explicitly that there would be a reduction in equipment and personnel based on the Island that is clearly the source of some of the projected savings. In my view the operational case has not been made for such a change. Experience shows (most recently in the removal of the police control room to Netley) that when services are moved to the mainland there is insufficient understanding of the Island's needs. I have seen nothing in this document to convince me that the proposed merger of the Fire and Rescue services would be handled any better.

However, other than seeing some benefits from sharing best practice Hampshire do not see any great benefit arising from greater collaboration. It is clear that there may be other authorities, perhaps particularly smaller ones where there may be greater opportunities for both parties to benefit from collaboration.

The report acknowledges the significant improvements that have been made recently on the Isle of Wight but does not touch on any possible downgrading in performance that may come about due to the local workforce becoming demoralised

by being subsumed into a much larger organisation with no local identity.

I also deplore the loss of democratic control of such an important service. At the moment the Isle of Wight taxpayers are able to express their view through the ballot box on how their Council and associated services are run – as they did so emphatically in 2005. As a very small cog in Hampshire’s wheel they would effectively lose that control within a merged service.

7.6 Others Communications

Two further letters supporting the status quo were also received from:

Prison Officers Association, (Camp Hill Branch).

Cowes & District Trades Union Council supporting the status quo.

7.7 Fire Brigades Union Submission: *Review of Scoping Study*, prepared by IPF Essential Services for the Public Sector (December 2006)

The Executive Summary and Conclusions are reproduced immediately below.

Executive Summary

The Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Authority (part of the Isle of Wight Council) and Hampshire Fire & Rescue Authority (an existing combined FRA covering Hampshire, Southampton and Portsmouth) have formulated proposals for increased collaboration and partnership working to address a number of key issues and drivers.

These include the modernisation agenda in Fire and Rescue Services, increasing financial pressures and addressing issues of capacity and value for money, raised in previous external inspections, including the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in 2005.

A scoping study, including appraisal of options has been prepared to look in detail at three key options:

Status quo (i.e. no change)

Expansion of collaborative working

Full combination of the two authorities

IPF have been commissioned to review this scoping study and to challenge (where appropriate) the methodology, assumptions and reasoning used within it to arrive at the recommended option...The main findings of the review are as follows:

Best practice principles and methodologies have been followed in developing the business case, although risk management and sensitivity analysis elements are necessary to provide additional robustness

There is major concern over the speed of the decision making process and consultation, since the scoping study itself cites the need for further work to be done on examining costs and implications before any major decisions are made

Issues of...democratic accountability need further consideration as they could have a significant impact on how services are developed in the Isle of Wight

Key assumptions on areas of savings should be clarified or challenged in some circumstances

Further consideration of the status quo option is needed, taking account ongoing efficiency savings

There is concern over how planned rationalisation and major change in control room arrangements for the two authorities is aligned with the wider national agenda of regional control centres, with potential for redundant investment and a disregard for recent investment in control room systems by the IOWFRA.

Conclusions

In summary, the options appraisal report is accessible and understandable, with a logical flow and it makes its points well. The report has followed best practice principles in relation to both financial and non-financial aspects, although more explicit sections on the important areas of risk management or sensitivity analysis are needed to provide additional robustness.

The report and its findings are not the main area of concern. What is more worrying is the speed of the decision making process, when the report has explicitly recommended further investigative work prior to any decisions.

If at all possible, any key decisions should be delayed or deferred until the recommended additional work and reviews have been carried out. In this way, decisions will be based on a far more robust set of judgements and information, giving stakeholders and decision-makers more confidence in choosing the most suitable option for improvement and change.

It is clear that both the representative bodies and the authorities themselves are both seeking the same outcomes – namely a more effective and efficient service to be provided to the local communities of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

In summary, the essential point in the IPF report is concern about the speed of the decision making process.

7.8 Fire Brigades Union Submission: Think Again: Fire Appraisal Options

The Summary and Conclusions of the FBU submission are reproduced immediately below.

1. *The Scoping Study report is to be considered as a Draft Business case.*
2. *Major concern over the speed of decision making process and consultation.*
3. *Any Key decision should be delayed or deferred until:
Further additional work and reviews have been carried out
Full Business case is undertaken
Other options considered and reasons for rejection
Explanation of criteria for options appraisal and why they were chosen
Comparisons with other FRA's, other 'blue light' services such as the Ambulance Service
Risk management or sensitivity analysis
Detailed costs of re-branding required
Burden of pensions to a new CFRA not explored by scoping study
Transfer of assets to new CFRA.*
4. *Key assumptions within Scoping study of savings if Full merger option were undertaken requires more detailed study and understanding.*
5. *Status Option is treated as a 'static option'.*
6. *Concern over the rationalisation of Control Rooms:
Ahead of Regional Control Centre, defer rationalisation,
Loss of key Council functions and provisions,
Value for Money of recent investment in the IoW Control of £60,000
Resilience (from a technical and counter-terrorism perspective)
Problems experienced with Hampshire Police Control Rooms
Potential for 'cul-de-sac' investment prior to RCC*

Savings are based on 2001 figures, further review of technical requirements, costs and potential savings are required.

7. *Issue of Democratic accountability.*
8. *Government Revenue Support Grant funding to Isle of Wight at odds with the DCLG's enthusiasm for a combined FRA solution.*
9. *Council Tax precept: major savings to IoW residents (approx £24.77) and slight increase to Hampshire residents (approx £2.16)*

Would this actually mean a reduction in Council Tax payments to IoW residents?

Increase in Council Tax to Hampshire residents would this represent Value For Money?

The IoW FBU believes that the three options being considered have been aimed to meet certain criteria:

Full merger – *IoW FRS to come under the umbrella of HFRS with a take-it-all approach and preferred option of the DCLG*

Collaboration – *IoW FRS collaboration aimed solely with HFRS rather than a wider perspective of collaboration with other FRS's and/or public and private companies*

Status Quo – *Additional option after criticism of this option not being considered. The IoW FBU believe that the IoW FRS should remain as a stand alone FRS under local democratic control, modernising and generating efficiency to progress and develop the service. The Status quo option is not a sole option it means moving the service forward with collaboration, modernisation and efficiency.*

The IoW FBU are concerned the three considered options have been prepared due to a short-term problem created by an incompetent CFO therefore the three considered options are short-term solutions. Improvements adopted since February 2005 illustrate the desire to move the service forward.

Consideration should be aimed at providing the current IoW FRS management the necessary time period to develop, progress, modernise and generate the improvements in assessment ratings.

7.9 Letter from The Falck Organisation:-

We think that we can offer you a viable and attractive extension to the choices set out in the Options Appraisal Document, a means by which we could offer the Island the possibility of maintaining a stand-alone fire and rescue service under the direct control of the Island's Council while expanding its capacity and clearly taking innovative and progressive steps to deal with all of the challenges of the national modernisation agenda.

So our proposal would be to help you maintain full democratic control of your fire and rescue service by contracting out the actual delivery to the private sector.

Such a suggestion might at one time have been considered unacceptably radical, but the pressures faced today and the benefits of transferring risk in delivering local authority services, together with the essential need to maximise value for money at the same time as increasing effectiveness, has changed thinking on the means by which a whole range of public sector services can be delivered. We believe that the Isle of Wight Council could innovate in this way to achieve its objectives.