

Combined Fire Authority Consultation

Findings Report Part one – key findings summary

November 2018



HAVE YOUR
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Further detail on the consultation findings can be viewed in Part Two of this report.

Imagery has been used throughout the report to illustrate findings; all icons are made by Freepik, available from www.flaticon.com.

Project overview

Having worked successfully in partnership for three years, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority (HFRA), which is responsible for Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS), and Isle of Wight Council (IWC), which is responsible for the Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service (IWFRS), agreed to consult on whether or not to submit a proposal to central Government for the creation of a new Combined Fire Authority, which would cover Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton.

Residents' and stakeholders' views were sought via an 'open' consultation, held from midday on Monday 6 August until midnight on Friday 26 October 2018.

Responses could be submitted through an online Response Form, by paper version or as 'unstructured' letters and emails. Consultation Information Packs were placed in libraries and council offices across the four areas and could be requested in a range of alternative formats by email or telephone.

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority (HFRA) and Isle of Wight Council (IWC) aimed to ensure that everyone who wished to have a say on the proposal could do so. The consultation was promoted via a wide range of means (see Appendix), including regular internal updates and Union meetings for employees, regular news articles in online and traditional media, advertisements on Facebook, Twitter and in local newspapers, and face to face meetings with Town and Parish Councils.

In total, **311** people took the opportunity to respond via the consultation response form from an approximate population of 1,978,789 across the four areas. These respondents comprised **300** individuals and **11** organisations, groups or businesses. **46** individuals were employees of either Hampshire or Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Services.

25 unstructured responses were also submitted in the form of letters and emails, comprising **seven** from members of the public, **one** from a councillor, **one** from a member of parliament and **11** from county, borough, city, town and parish councils. Five unstructured responses were received from within the emergency services, with the Police and Crime Commissioner, Hampshire Constabulary, the Fire Brigade Union, South Central Ambulance NHS Foundation Trust (SCAS) and Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service all represented within this group.

In addition to the written responses, five focus groups were conducted, in order to enable a more in-depth discussion with members of the public. These were held in September and October 2018 in Ryde, Portsmouth, Southampton, Newport and Basingstoke, with participants invited from across the local areas. In total, **44** people took part in the groups.

This report provides an overview of the main findings from all aspects of the consultation. Part One offers a summary of key findings, whilst Part Two provides additional detail.

Executive summary of key findings

The consultation provides a clear mandate for putting a case to central Government for the creation of a new Combined Fire Authority which covers the local authority areas of Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton.

The majority (53%) of those who responded were in favour of the proposal, with strong support from across Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton, and from professionals across the emergency services sector. Most of the **responding staff** from within the affected Fire and Rescue Services also offered their approval.

Respondents who agreed with the proposal felt it would help to streamline governance arrangements, leading to more efficient decision making, economies of scale and pooling of knowledge and resources that could both protect and improve frontline services.

Respondents also recognised that a Combined Fire Authority presented an opportunity to safeguard the Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service against budget reductions, as well as providing investment to upgrade existing fire stations.

Most respondents felt that a Combined Fire Authority presented the best option for the Fire and Rescue Services, with **less than a third of respondents offering alternative options**, and almost half who did so simply preferring that the current arrangements be maintained.

However, should the proposal be submitted to central Government, **there remains a need to offer reassurance** to those respondents (41%) who were not in favour of the proposed merger – and in particular to residents of the Isle of Wight.

In contrast to the view from the mainland, three quarters of Island-based respondents and two thirds of Island-based town and parish councils raised concerns about combining the two Fire Authorities – with older residents in particular opposing the proposal.

Although sympathetic to the Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service's position, those who disagreed with the proposal raised concerns about local impacts. These included a perceived loss of local representation, accountability and focus on the Island's needs, as well as paying more tax to support services in other areas.

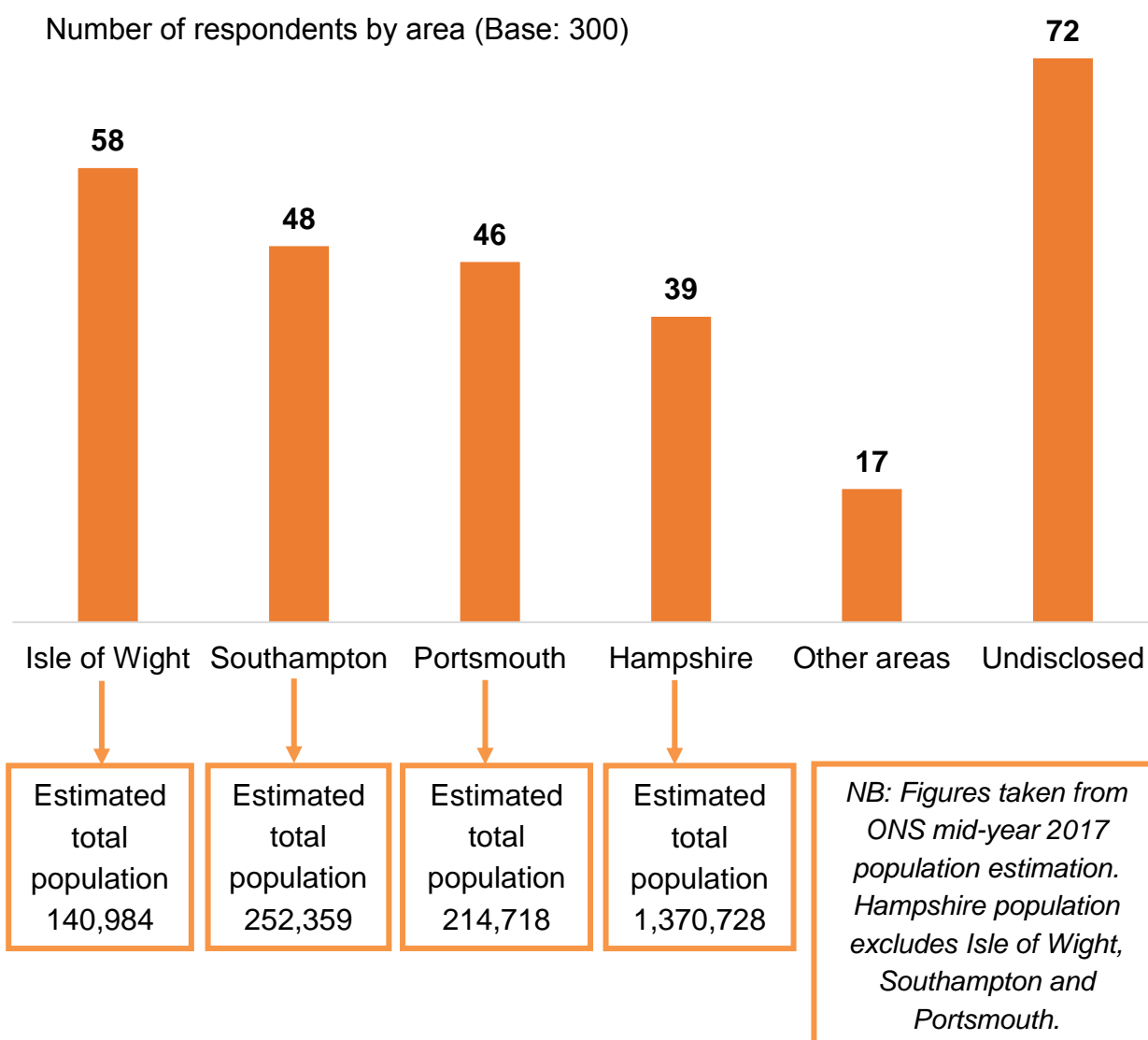
Despite reassurances to the contrary, it was also anticipated that combining Fire Authorities could lead to a reduction in frontline services for the Island. Respondents expressed fears for public safety - based on an assumption that the speed of response, number of stations, amount of personnel or level of equipment stationed on the Isle of Wight would decrease.

This was further based on a perception that operations would be directed from the mainland by people who had limited local knowledge and did not understand the specific Island context. When discussed in more depth with the focus group participants, many were surprised to hear that operations were already guided from Hampshire.

This suggests that **several key concerns underlying people’s lack of support for the proposal could be addressed through further education and awareness raising.**

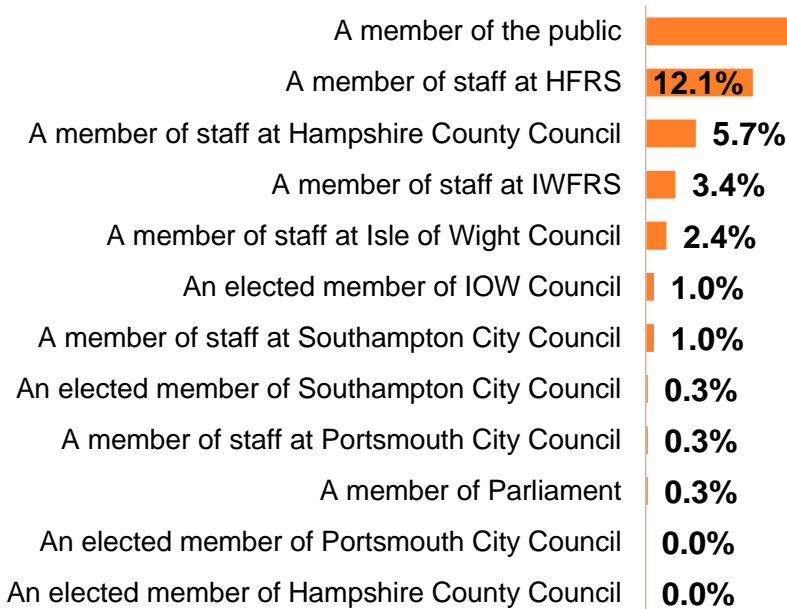
Demographic profile of respondents

Responses to the consultation were received from across all four areas affected by the proposals and beyond.

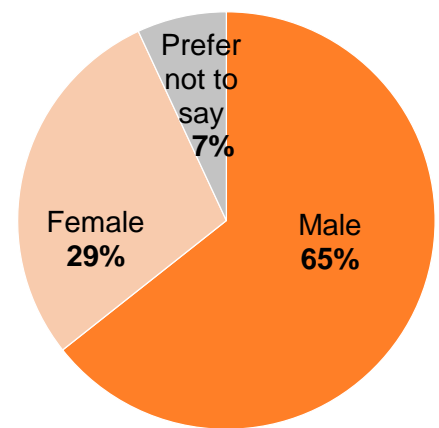


Nearly three quarters of all responses came from members of the public. Most respondents were aged between 35 and 74. There was an over representation of males compared to females. The majority identified as white and a large proportion did not wish to disclose their ethnicity. Nearly three quarters of respondents were not affected by a disability.

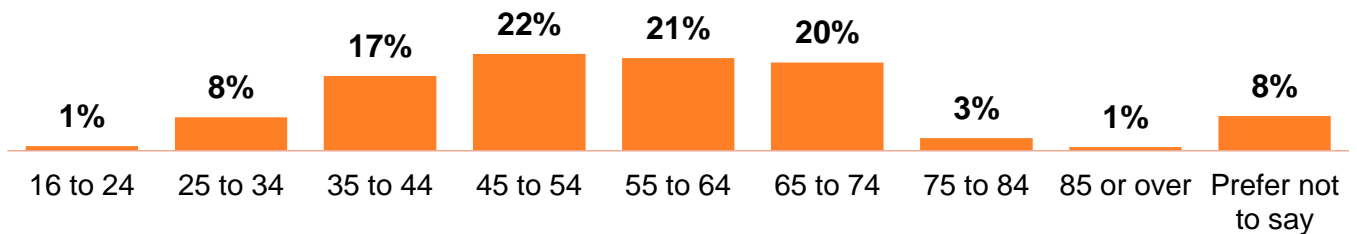
Respondent type (Base: 297)



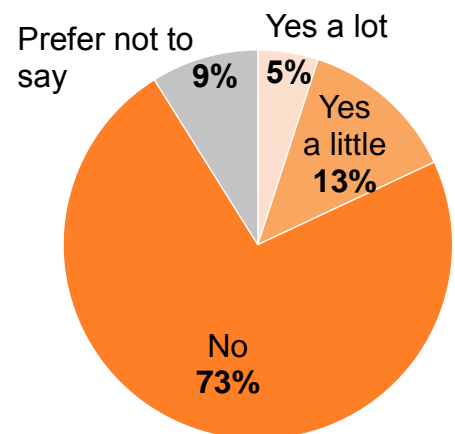
Respondent gender (Base: 293)



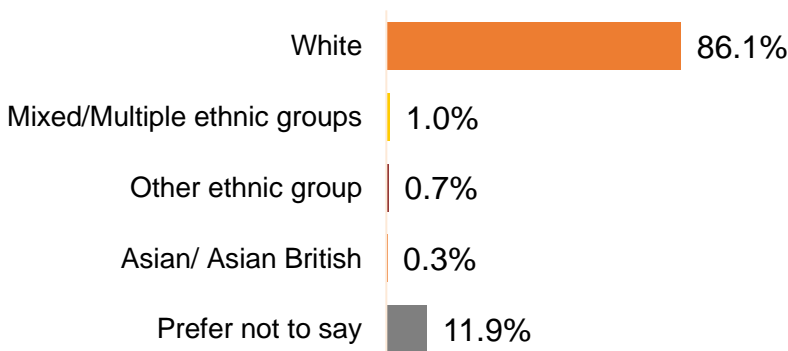
Respondent age (Base: 293)



Long term illness or disability (Base: 292)



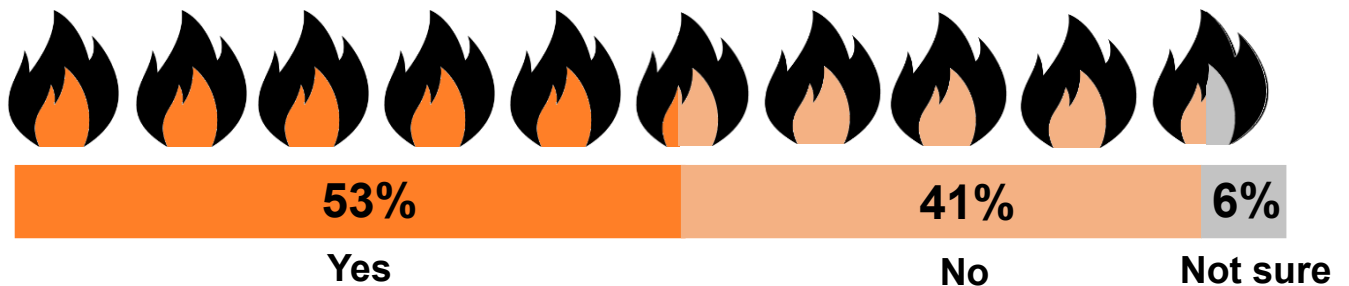
Respondent ethnicity (Base: 294)



Key findings summary

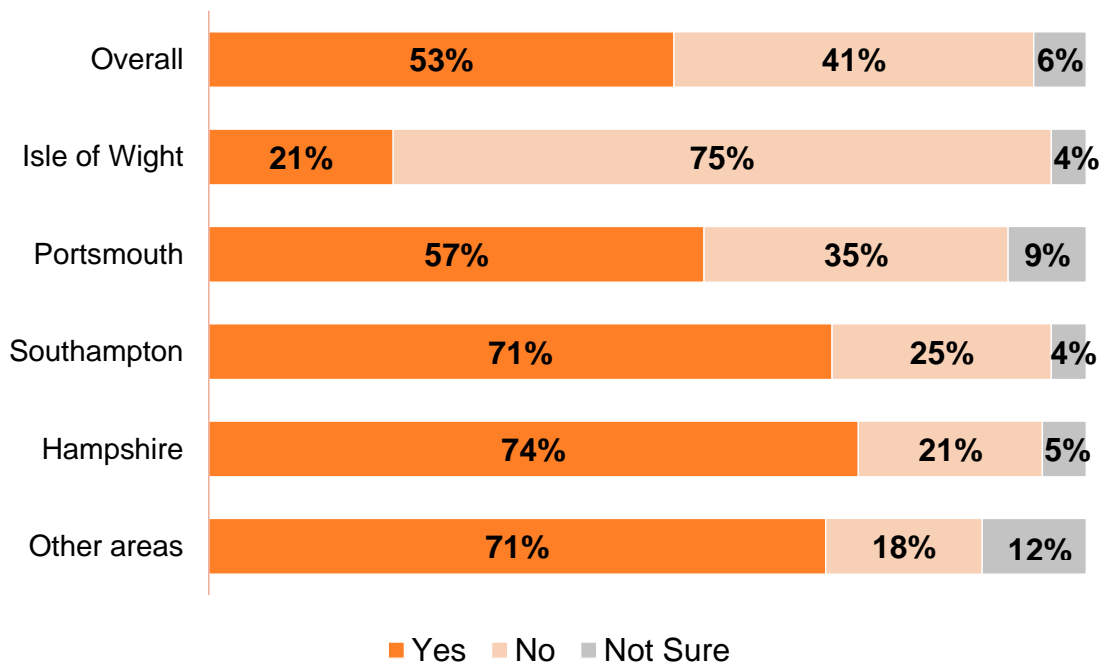
The majority of respondents were in agreement with the proposal to create a Combined Fire Authority. 12% more respondents agreed than disagreed with the proposal. Only a small proportion of the responses received were impartial.

Agreement with the proposal that a new Combined Fire Authority should be submitted to the Government (Base: 308)



Respondents who provided a mainland postcode (Portsmouth, Southampton, Hampshire and other areas) were more likely to agree with the proposal to create a Combined Fire Authority than those who reside on the Isle of Wight.

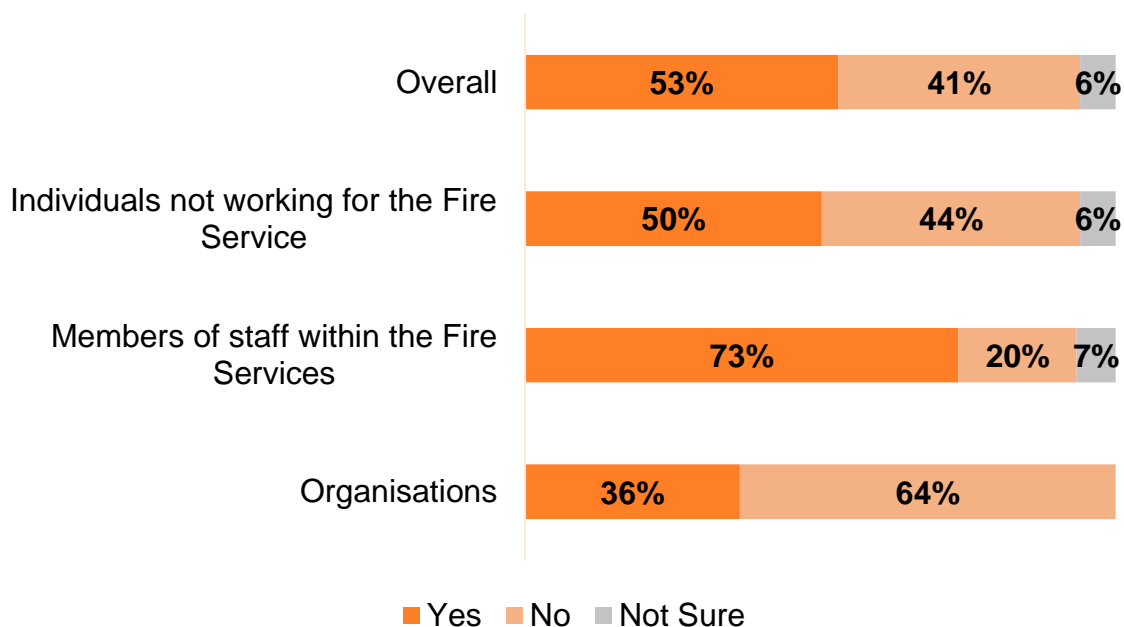
Agreement with the proposal for a Combined Fire Authority by respondent residence (Base: 308, 57, 46, 48, 38, 17)



Support for the proposal was stronger amongst 'professional' respondents than members of the public.

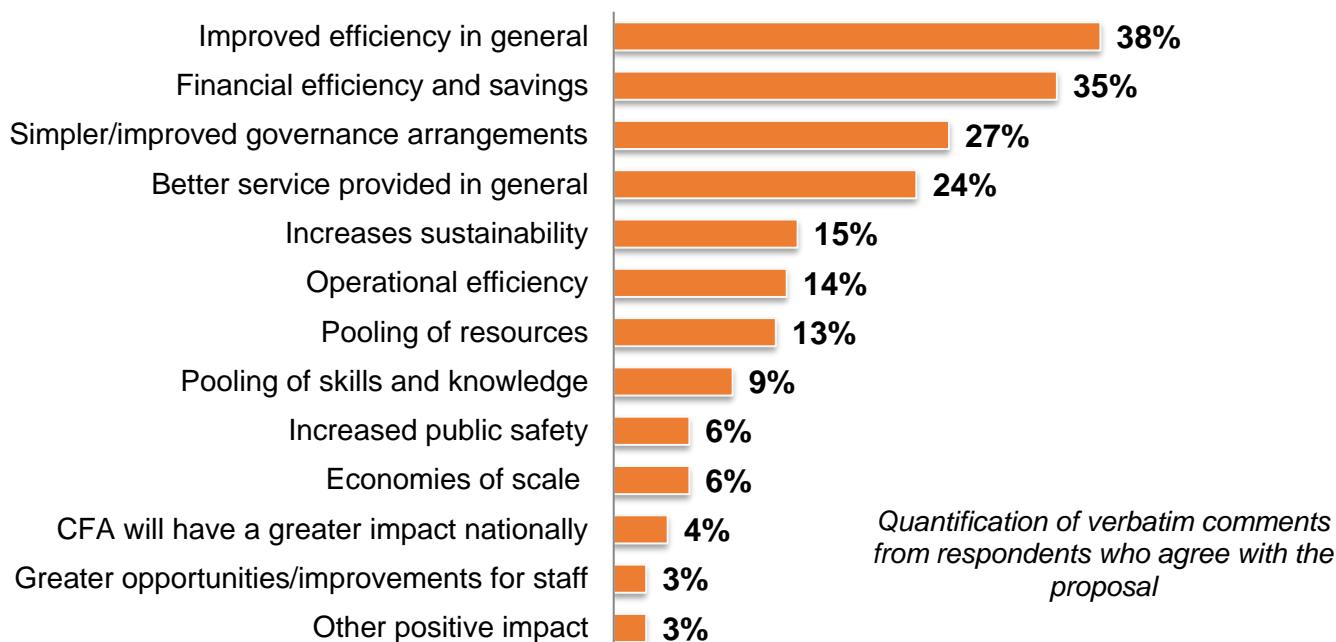
The majority of respondents who worked within the Fire and Rescue Services were in agreement with the proposal to combine and create a joint authority, suggesting a high likelihood of support from within the Service.

Agreement by respondent type (Base: 308, 249, 45, 11)



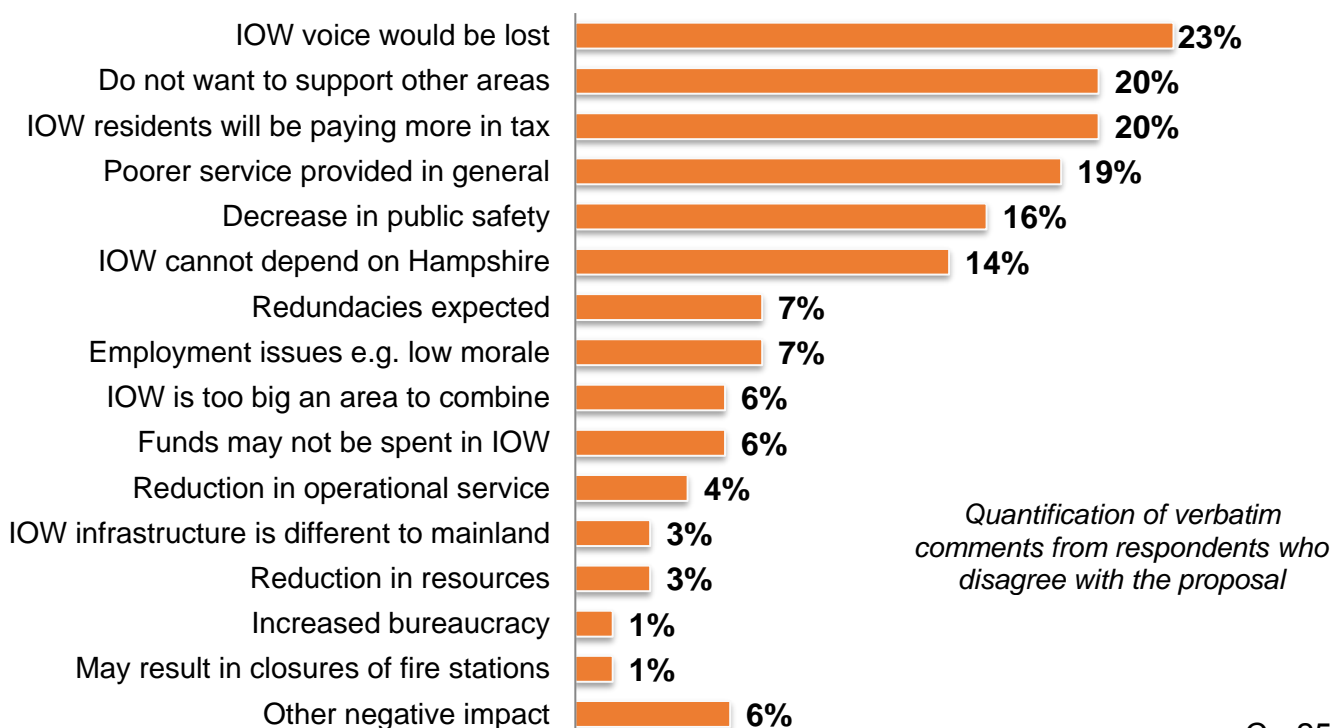
Respondents who agreed with the proposal hoped that it would result in improved efficiencies - with many mentioning financial efficiencies. In particular, they hoped that the combination will improve the current governance arrangements and lead to a better service.

Key themes as to why respondents agreed with the proposal (Base: 117)



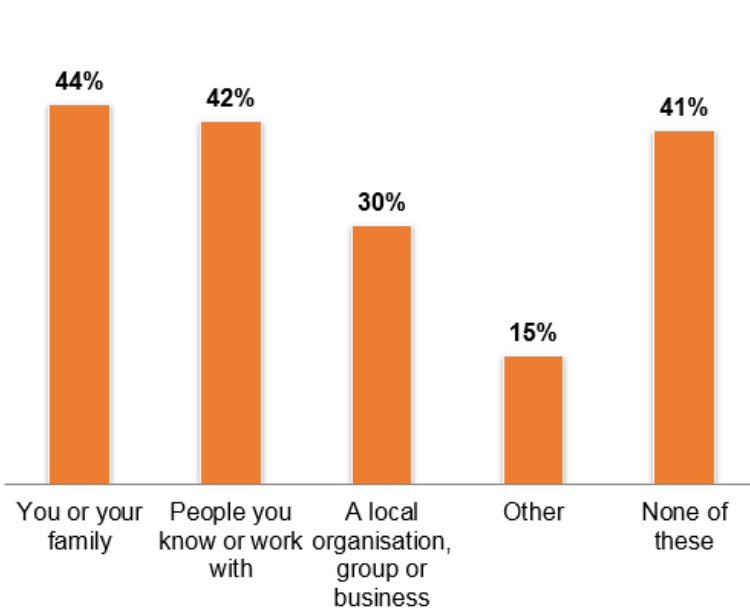
Those who disagreed with the proposal were concerned about the local impacts of the change – from the loss of local representation to the financial implications of supporting services in other areas. Some felt that a combination could lead to a poorer service as resource could be spread too thinly and important local knowledge could be lost.

Key themes as to why respondents disagreed with the proposal (Base: 69)

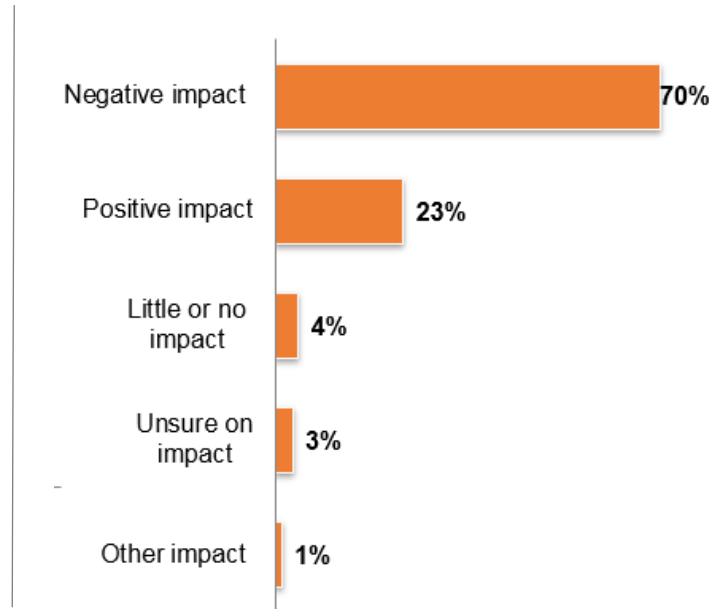


Six out of ten respondents felt that they would be impacted, should a new Combined Fire Authority be created. The majority of these believed that the proposal may have an adverse effect on themselves, their family or someone they know.

Who could be impacted? (Base: 303)

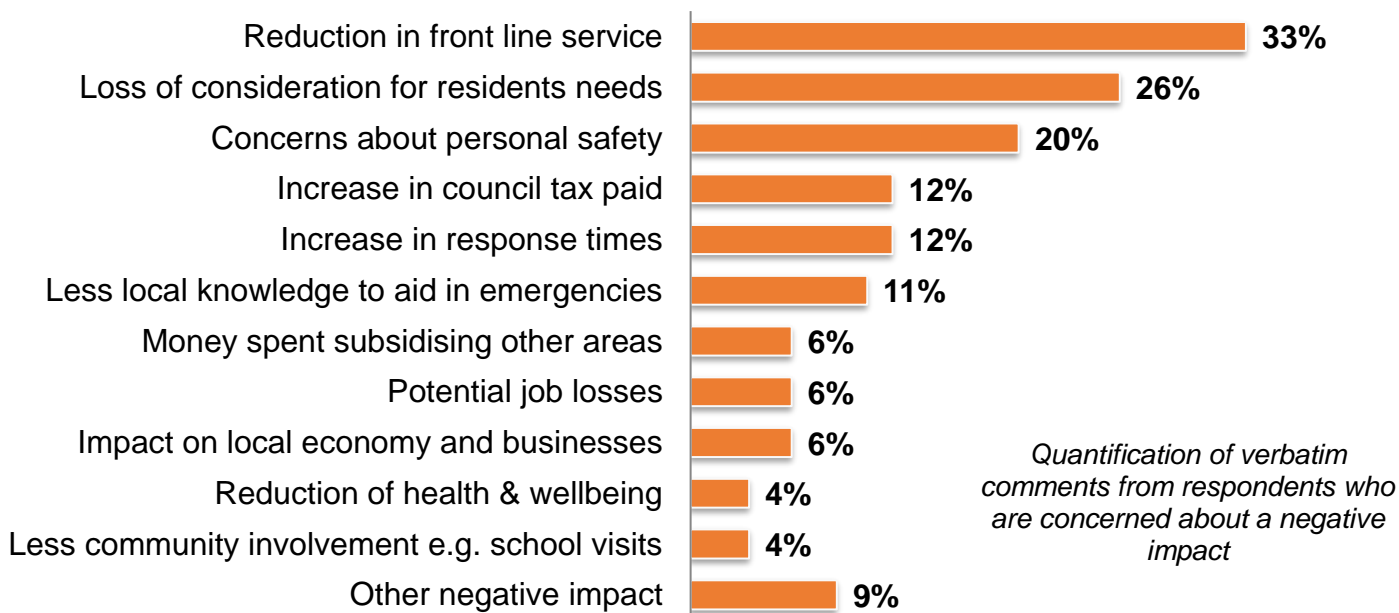


What could the impact be? (Base: 94)



Those who felt that the proposal would have a negative impact were primarily concerned about either an assumed reduction in frontline services (and the consequent impact on personal safety) or a loss of local autonomy / direction.

Perceived negative impacts of combining the two authorities (Base: 66)

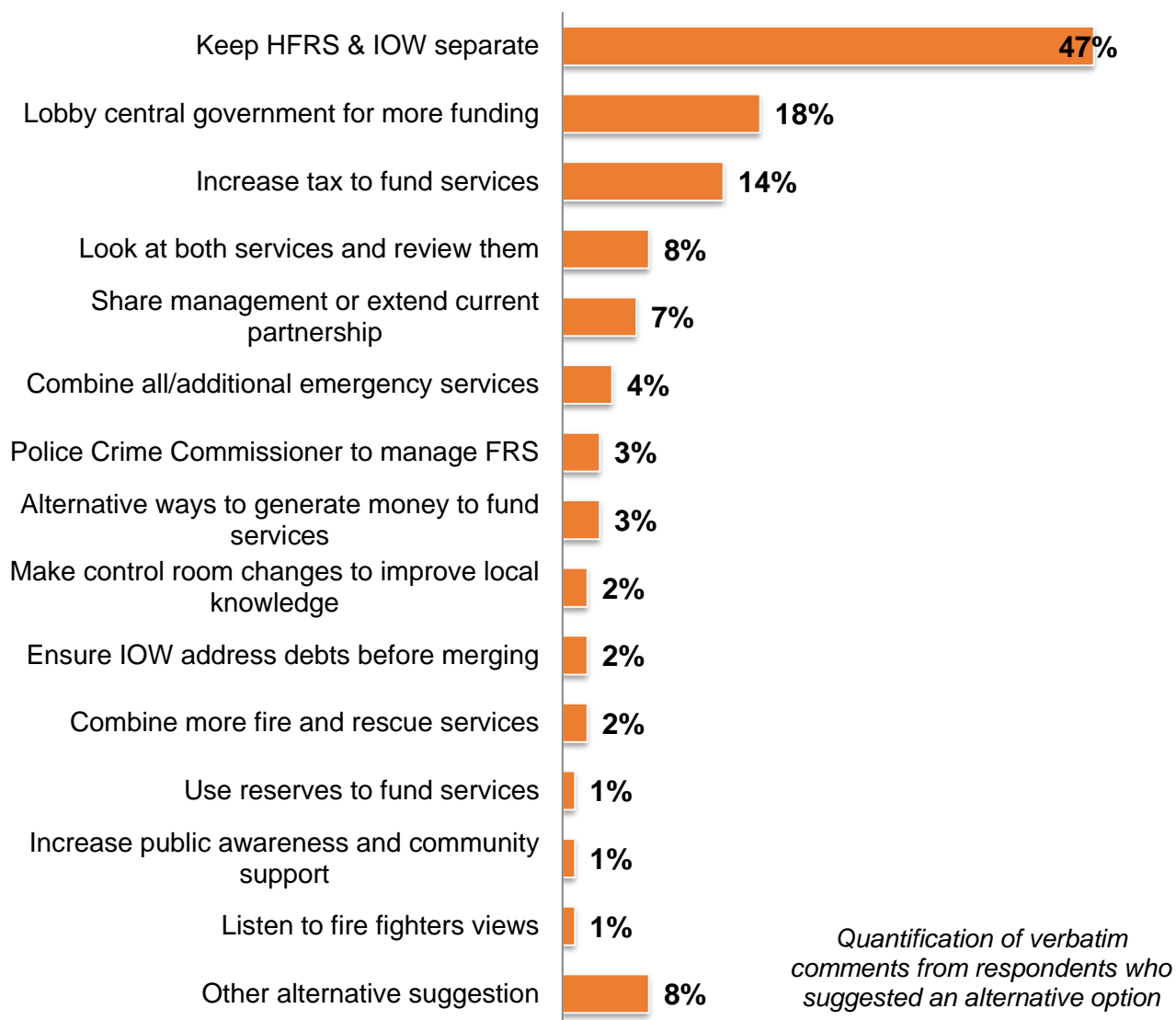


A small proportion of respondents (22) mentioned a positive impact arising from the proposal, suggesting it could improve governance and financial efficiencies and, as a result, benefit residents with an improved frontline service.

Less than a third of respondents (29%) put forward an alternative suggestion to the proposal.

Nearly half who did so would simply prefer that the two authorities remain separate.

**Alternative suggestions to the proposed creation of a new Combined Fire Authority
(Base: 91)**



Besides the option to maintain the status quo, respondents' alternatives primarily focussed on investigating alternative funding options - by lobbying central Government, raising council tax or income generation – or considering alternative organisational structures, such as an extension of the existing partnership arrangements or a combination across different emergency services instead of a combination across areas.