Surrey Fire and Rescue Service Community Survey

Full Report -April 2023

Introduction

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) are preparing their Overarching Service Strategy, the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), which sets out the risk in Surrey as well as how they will go about meeting, mitigating, and/or resourcing this. A key aspect of this plan is to understand what residents know about the service, what really matters to residents and the risks that residents can identify in their area.   This plan will be informed through engagement both with our communities living, working and travelling through Surrey and our staff working within SFRS.

As a first stage of the community engagement SFRS launched a short community survey for residents of Surrey. The survey findings presented in this report along with other data and insights will be used to inform the CRMP.

Methods of engagement

The community survey was hosted on Surrey Says and remained open for a six-week period from the 4th of January 2023 to the 14th of February 2023. Through this survey, feedback was gathered on three key themes: the SFRS principles, the three areas of work that SFRS carry out (prevention, protection and response) and the five key community risks (Building fires, wild fires, floods, water rescue and road traffic incidents). To ensure that everyone in Surrey had the ability to comment easy read[1] versions of the survey were made available. Overall, 988 respondents completed this survey, including one response via Easy read.

Prior to the launch of the survey posters and leaflets were distributed across surrey by the local fire station staff and volunteers. These included a QR code that linked to the online survey. The survey was also shared via social media through a series of videos from employees within SFRS.

During the engagement period four social media polls targeted at younger people were hosted through Instagram. Response rates varied across the four polls with the most popular being completed by 391 people and the least popular receiving only 51 responses.

Methods of analysis

For the closed questions, descriptive statistics have been used. Where an 'other' category was included, the decision was made to only include topics that were raised by five or more respondents. All open-ended responses to the survey were thematically coded to provide quantitative summaries. Unattributed quotes have been used throughout this report to provide context and feedback in respondents' words.

Demographics

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[1] Easy read is a picture supported format which is designed for people with learning disabilities who may find using the traditional survey methods difficult

Surrey Says Survey

The majority of respondents do live in Surrey however, we also had responses from visitors, business owners, and other stakeholders (figure 1).
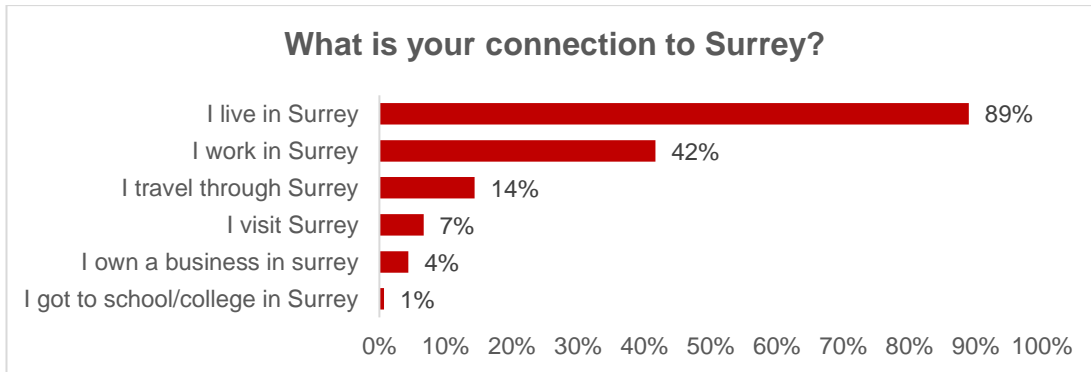

What is your connection to Surrey?

I live in Surrey	89%
I work in Surrey	42%
I travel through Surrey	14%
I visit Surrey	7%
I own a business in surrey	4%
I got to school/college in Surrey	1%

Figure 1

Respondents who lived in surrey came from across the county with clusters around key towns such as Guildford and Woking.
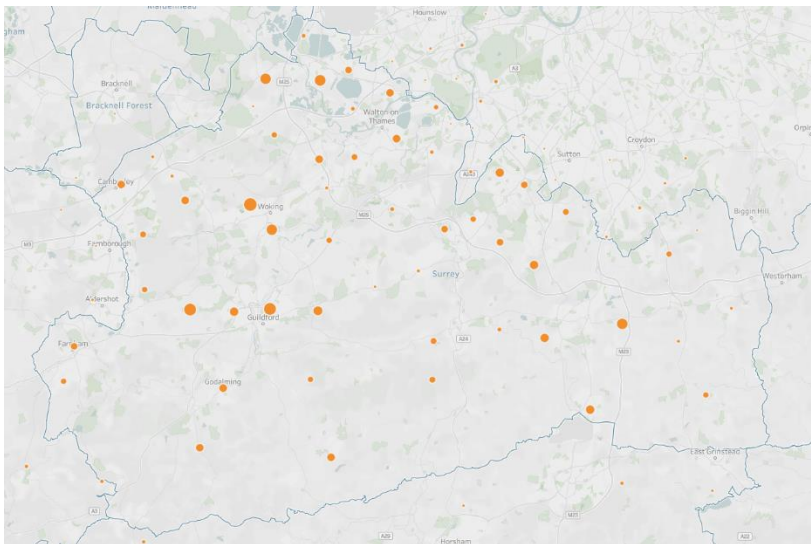

Figure 2

Figure 3 shows the age spread is somewhat representative compared to Surrey demographics with 69% of respondents were over 45 years of age. However, there is a noticeable drop off under 25s. An attempt has been made to mitigate this through social media polls.
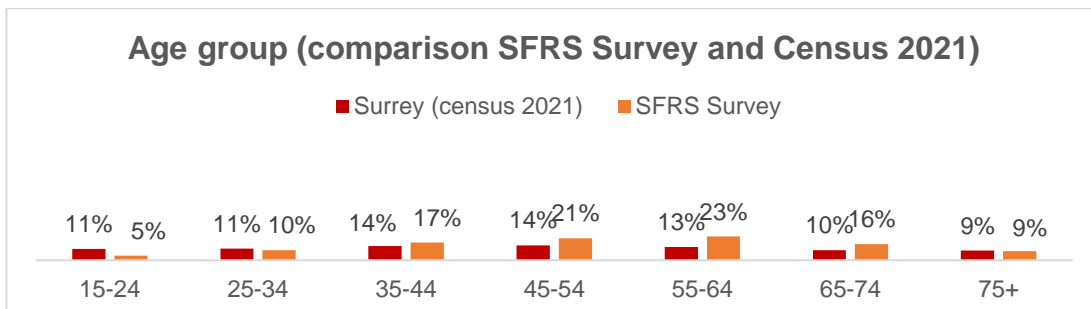

Age group (comparison SFRS Survey and Census 2021)

■ Surrey (census 2021)   ■ SFRS Survey

15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
11% 5%	11% 10%	14% 17%	14% 21%	13% 23%	10% 16%	9% 9%

Figure 3: Age group comparison Census 2021 (https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/census-2021/2021-census-first-results/#Age) and SFRS Survey (n=940)

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Respondents, where they chose to disclose, were more likely to be female (53%) rather than male (46%) (figure 4). There was a small percentage of respondents who identified outside the gender binary (1%).
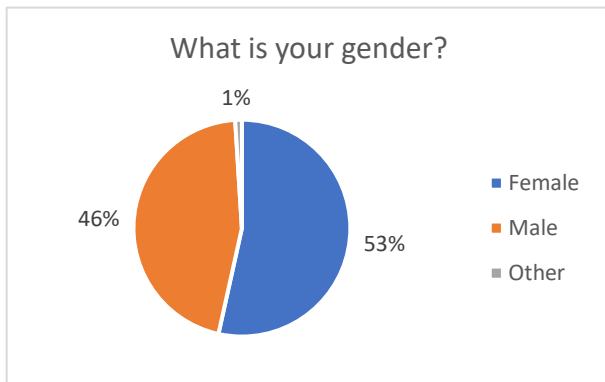

Figure 4: Gender (n=907)

There was a good response rate from people with disabilities (figure 5). 29% of respondents identified that their day-to-day activities are limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months, compared to the 14% of Surrey who identified as disabled in the 2021 census.[2]

There was representation from a broad range of disabilities including:

- People with a physical disability or limited mobility;

- Deaf or hard of hearing;

- People with one or more mental health conditions;

- People with neurological conditions;

- People who are blind or have a vision impairment;

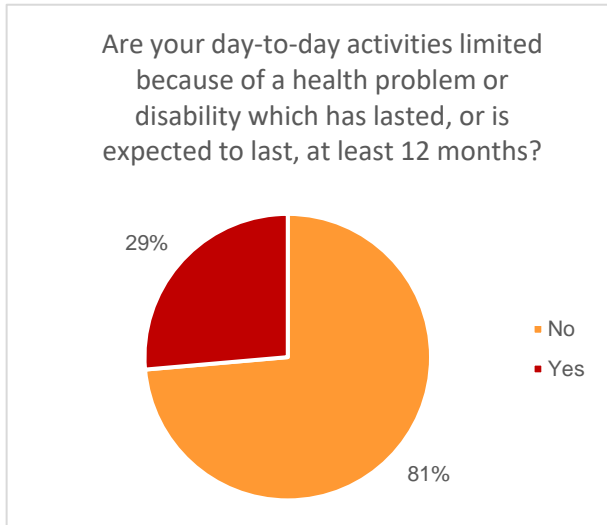- People with a learning disability or autism

Figure 5: Disability status (n=902)

The vast majority, 89%, of respondents were white British (figure 6). This reflects Surrey demographics which sees a similar ethnic breakdown[3]. However, it is important to recognise that as such this analysis inadequately explores the views of ethnic minority residents.

Figure 6: Ethnic group (n=987)

The majority of respondents live in a house of one kind or another (74%). However, 67 respondents lived in a non-fixed abode; converted commercial or other buildings; houses of multiple occupancy or other situations entirely (figure 7).

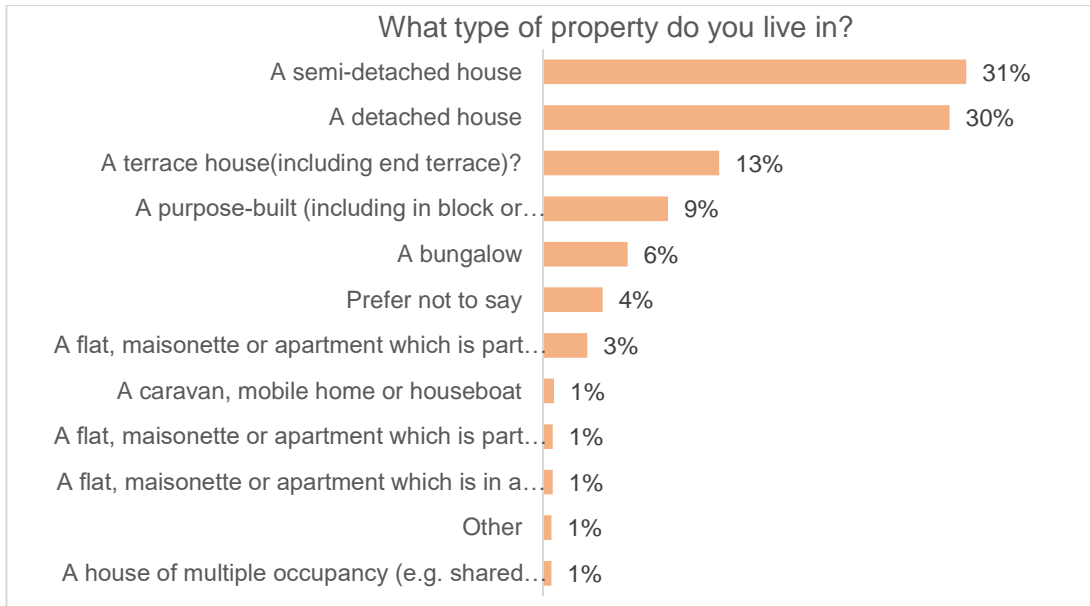[3] https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/census-2021/ethnic-group/

Figure 7: property type (n=987)

Figure 8 shows that around three quarters of respondents owned their housing either with a mortgage or outright. 13% were renting through either the private or social sectors. This is compatible with the age of respondents tending to those that are older and therefore have had the opportunity to have finished paying off their mortgage or be in the process of owning their homes though a mortgage. Furthermore, this suggests that those responding to the survey are from more affluent backgrounds.[4]

It is also key that we recognise how informed about SFRS services the respondents are. Only 10% of respondents either work for SFRS or are related to someone who worked for SFRS (figure 9). This suggests that overall, the findings will be reflective of Surrey residents not overly biased by those who may have a greater knowledge of SFRS. Furthermore, around two thirds of respondents had not encountered SFRS in the last 12 months (figure 10). This suggests that many respondents are coming to this survey with little to no knowledge of how SFRS works.
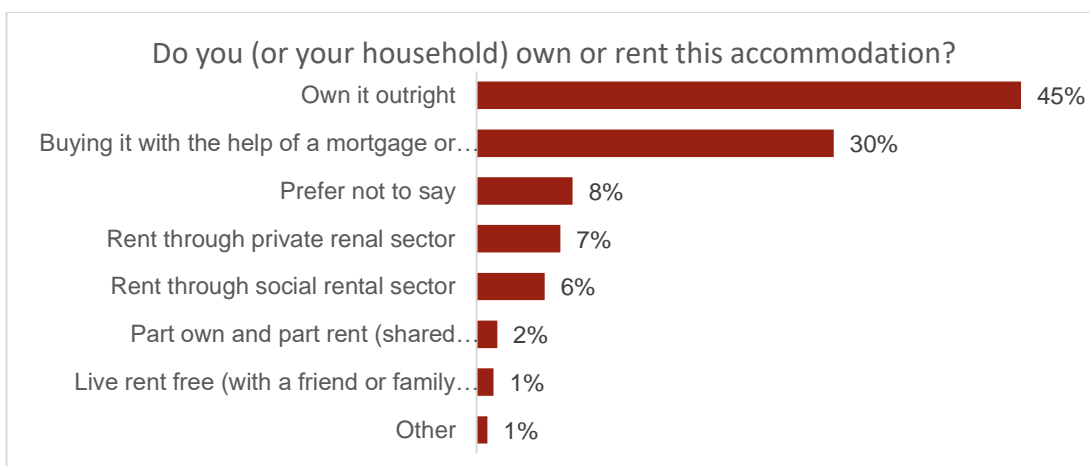
Figure 8: home ownership status (n=987)
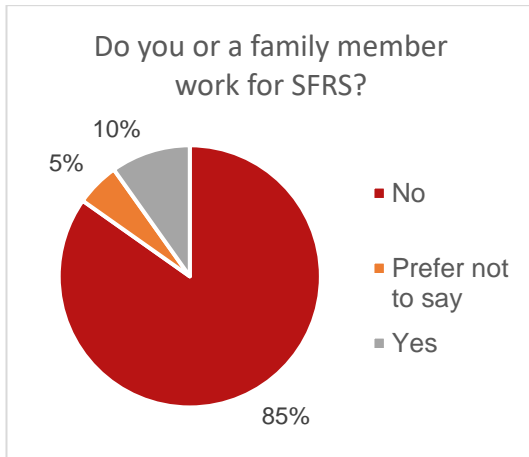
Figure 9: SFRS employees of family members (n=987)

Figure 10: contact with SFRS (n=987)

Findings

Principles

Respondents to the community survey were asked to indicate their sentiment towards a series of statements related to SFRS's principles (figure 11).

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree or disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

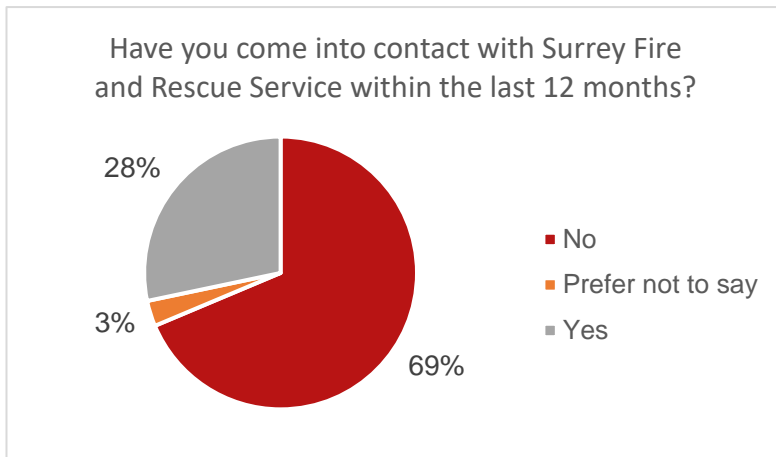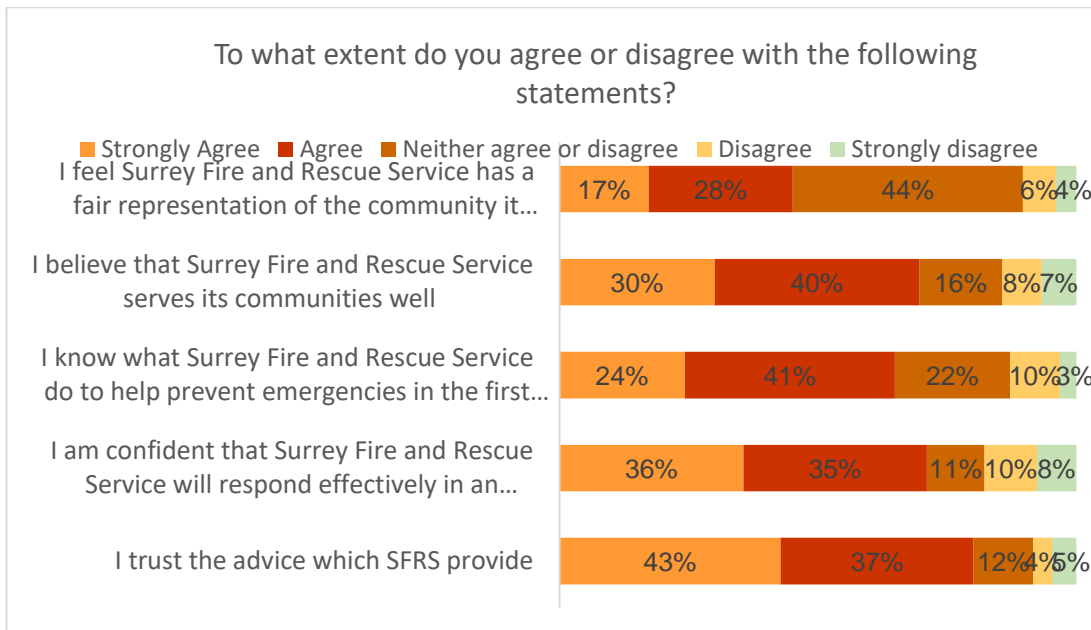| Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel Surrey Fire and Rescue Service has a fair representation of the community it...	17%	28%	44%	6%	4%
I believe that Surrey Fire and Rescue Service serves its communities well	30%	40%	16%	8%	7%
I know what Surrey Fire and Rescue Service do to help prevent emergencies in the first...	24%	41%	22%	10%	3%
I am confident that Surrey Fire and Rescue Service will respond effectively in an...	36%	35%	11%	10%	8%
I trust the advice which SFRS provide	43%	37%	12%	4%	5%

Figure 11: sentiment towards statements (n=987)

Overall sentiment towards the statements was positive. The majority (80%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would trust the advice provided by SFRS. Less than half of respondents (45%) agreed or strongly agreed that SFRS fairly represents the community, however, nearly the same proportion of respondents (44%) also indicated that they did not feel strongly either way. This could suggest that this is an area that respondents do not have enough information about to feel confident in making a judgement.

In spite of being the statement that was most likely to be disagreed with, 'I am confident SFRS would respond effectively in an emergency', was still agreed with by the majority of respondents (71%). This was supported by the social media poll which asked, 'are you confident SFRS would be there for you in an emergency?' in which 65% of respondents said yes (figure 12).

Are you confident SFRS would be there for you in an emergency?

- Yes
- No

35%

65%
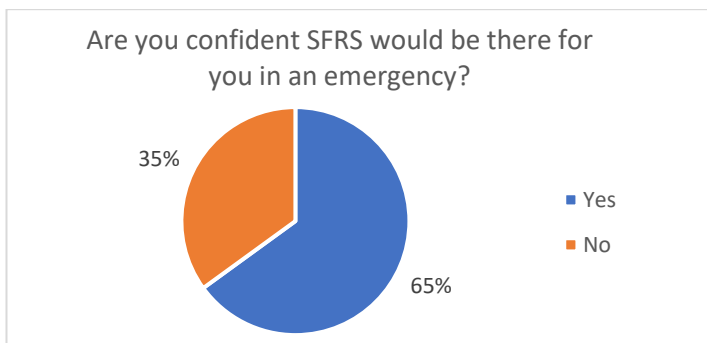
Figure 12: social media poll 1 - confidence in emergency (n=51)

Areas of work

When asked about their confidence levels when it came to each of SFRS areas of work the respondents were more likely to be confident than not confident across each of the three work areas which are Prevention, Protection and Response. Respondents who indicated they were not confident were asked why they felt this way. Across all three areas of work, in the comments that followed, five overarching themes were

identified: resources (e.g., staffing levels, fire station and appliance availability, and the influence of budget constraints upon these); community knowledge (e.g., levels of awareness of SFRS roles and responsibilities, visibility of SFRS communications, media coverage and first-hand shared experience); organisational and staff (specifically human factors, e.g., staff turnover and retention, training and experience, organisational restructuring and values); environmental and contextual (conditions distinct to Surrey, e.g., local geography and demographics, urbanization and road networks, and unique climate change factors such as heathland fires); and safety (e.g., feelings of safety and worry about effects of fire station closure, the need for depending on neighbouring fire authorities, etc.).

As can be observed patterns of responses and content (figure 13), there is a noticeable similarity across the prevention and protection spheres, with Respondents' perceptions of "SFRS Resources" is the leading cause of low confidence in both of these key purposes. However, "Community Knowledge", or absence thereof, is a significant cause for low confidence when compared with the SFRS third key purpose "Response". That said, across the three areas of work, SFRS Organisational and Staff is raised more when compared with Community Knowledge. Furthermore, "Response", which elicited the most responses, saw SFRS Resources and Organisational Factors being seen as the leading causes of low confidence amongst respondents. These themes are explored in more depth below.

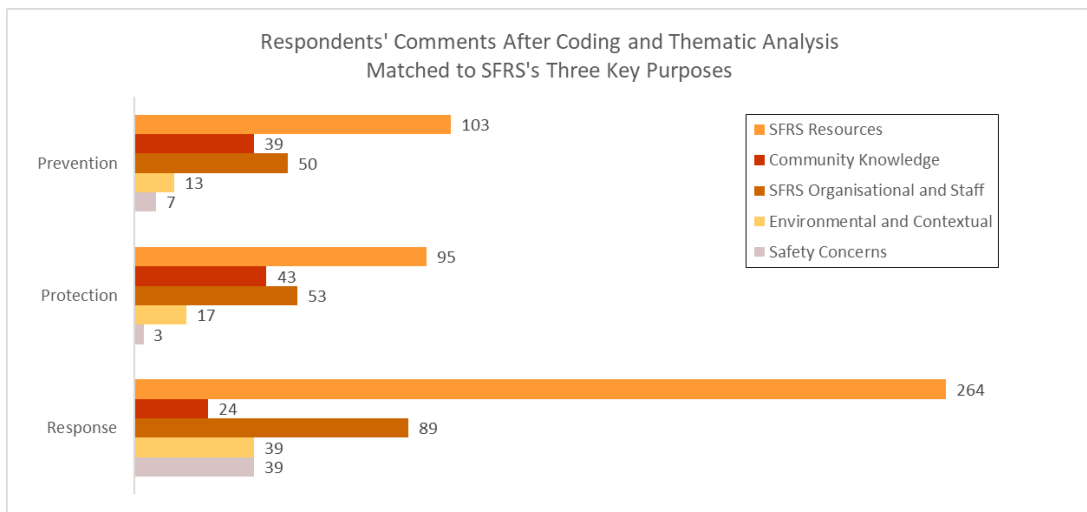*Figure 13: themes matched against SFRS's thee key purposes*

Prevention

Under half of respondents (46%) indicated that they were confident or very confident with SFRS ability to deliver prevention work (figure 14). Confidence in SFRS's prevention was further supported by the social media polls in which 67% of respondents indicated that they were confident in preventing emergencies (figure 15).
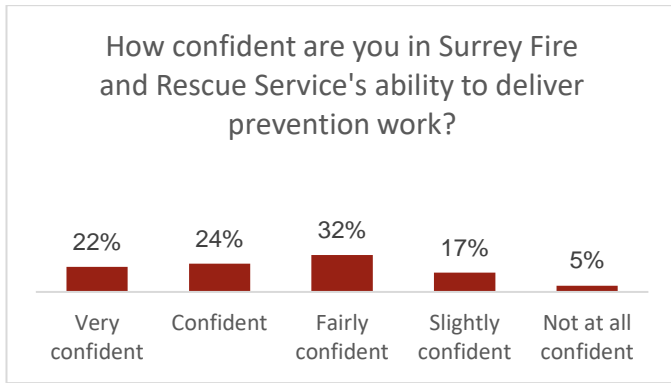
Figure 14: confidence in prevention (n=987)

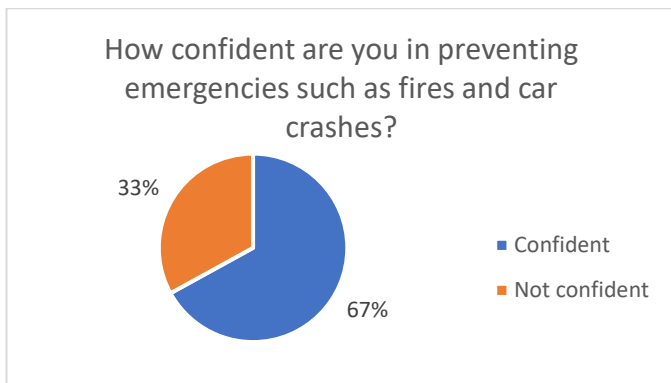*Figure 15: social media poll 2: confident in preventing emergencies*

For those respondents indicating that they were either 'Not at all confident', or 'Slightly confident', in SFRS's ability to deliver prevention work (22%), an invitation was provided to comment on why they felt this way (figure 16).

The top two themes identified were:
- staff cuts and shortages;
- low visibility of communication and information
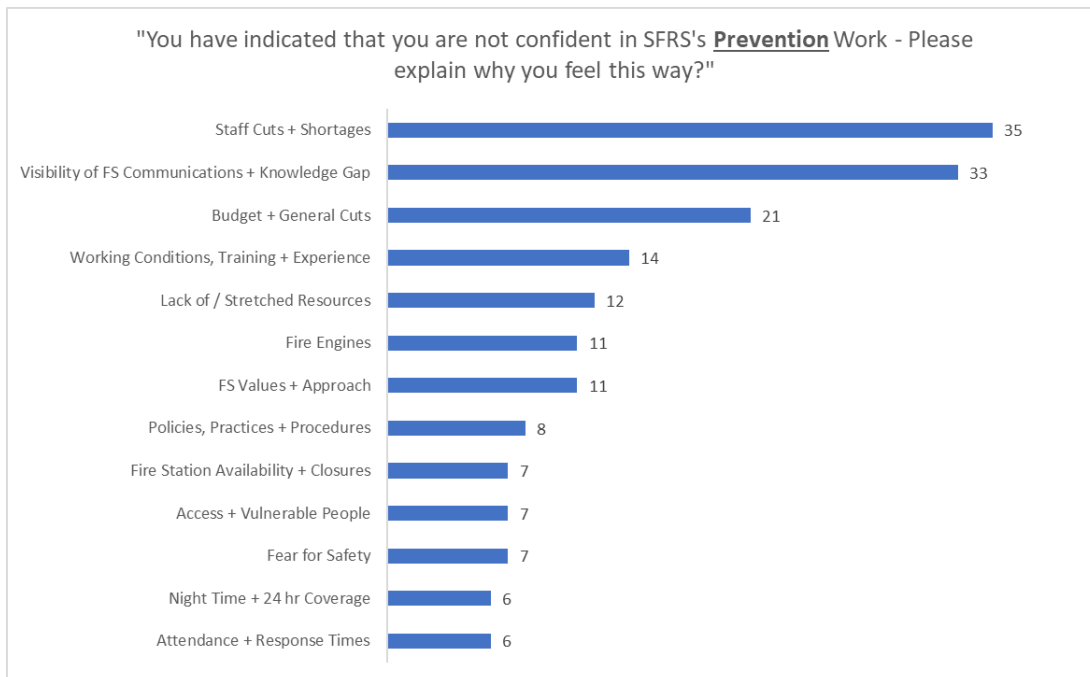
Figure 16: top coded reasons emergent across repondents' feelings explaining their pool confidemt in SFRS's Prevention Work (n=166)

Respondents' perception that staff cuts and shortages was the leading factor for feelings of low confidence in SFRS's prevention work.

"As a retired SFB member, I believe that the cuts to staff and closure of Fire Stations over many years has severely reduced the effectiveness of what was once a great Public service, all just to save money not lives, it's now not safe, we must have more professional staff and Fire engines."

The second leading reason for low confidence in SFRS's ability to deliver prevention work was a perceived low visibility of communication and information that led to respondents not knowing about this area of work.

"I have never received any information or advice from SFRS regarding safety in my home…"

"Mainly because I know nothing about this and feel that this could be something they could have an assembly on in all Surreys Secondary Schools, both council run and academy."

Protection

When asked about SFRS's second key purpose 'protection', 47% of respondents indicated that they were confident or very confident with protection (figure 17).

How confident are you in Surrey Fire and Rescue Service's ability to deliver protection work?

Very confident	Confident	Fairly confident	Slightly confident	Not at all confident
22%	25%	32%	15%	6%

Figure 17: confidence in protection (n=987)

As with the survey's previous question, respondents were invited to provide reasons for why they felt either "Not at all confident" or "slightly confident" in SFRS's ability to provide protection from fire (21%). From the 122 comments provided the top two themes identified the leading reasons for low confidence in this area of work, were as with prevention, staff cuts and shortages alongside a low visibility of SFRS communications – and subsequent levels of community awareness (figure 18).

"You have indicated that you are not confident in SFRS's **Protection** Work - Please explain why you feel this way?"

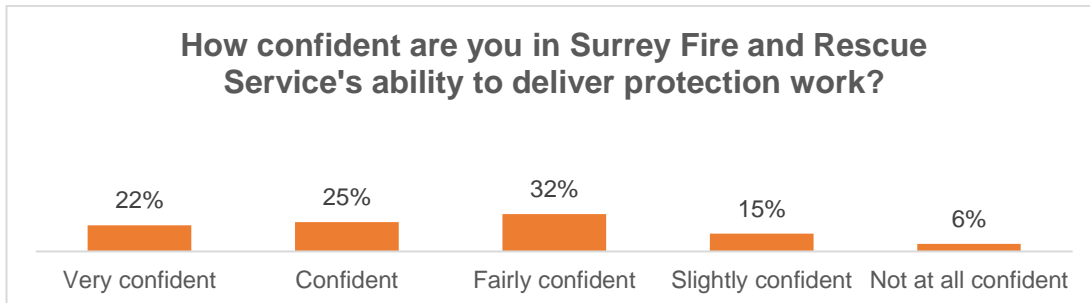|	
Staff Cuts + Shortages	36
Visibility of FS Communications + Knowledge Gap	34
Working Conditions, Training + Staff Experience	21
Budget + General Cuts	17
Fire Engines	9
Reliability + Trust	9
FS Values + Approach	9
Policies, Practices + Procedures	9
Lack of / Stretched Resources	9
Fire Station Availability + Closures	8
Access + Vulnerable People	7
Night Time + 24 hr Coverage	6
Attendance + Response Times	5
Positive Reputation	5

Figure 18: top coded reasons emergent across repondents' feelings explaining their poor confidence in SFRS's protection work (n=122)

Unique for this question however was a series of emergent reasons that were grouped around SFRS Organisational factors, these were most commonly received from people who currently or previously worked in SFRS or were related to an employee of SFRS. The reasons under this overarching theme included working conditions, staff turnover, policies practices and procedures, and inexperienced fire crews and a pattern of more experienced fire service professionals leaving SFRS to work in other services (most notably London).

"No staff retention leading to Loss of experience…"

"The workload for the operational crews is getting huge and the first thing to cut is the operational training for those probationers. They are struggling to complete folders and get their operational experience. If things do not change then someone may get seriously hurt."

"Lack of funding had led to staff shortages and the change in the legislation has led to not enough preventive inspections."

Response

The final survey question related to SFRS's three key purposes revealed that 52% of those surveyed indicated that they were confident or very confident with the response work (figure 19).

How confident are you in Surrey Fire and Rescue Service's ability to deliver response work?

Very confident	Confident	Fairly confident	Slightly confident	Not at all confident
34%	18%	24%	13%	12%

Figure 19: confidence in response (n=987)

Respondents provided feedback on why they felt either 'Not at all confident', or only 'Slightly confident', with SFRS's ability in this area (25%). This yielded the most comments of the three opportunities to comment on SFRS's key purposes (176 individual statements provided). Not only were the responses to this question most numerous, the pattern of coded responses also significantly departed from the previous two questions related to SFRS key purposes (figure 20).

Figure 20: top coded reasons emergent across repondents' feelings explaining their poo confidence in SFRS response work

The perception of staff cuts and shortages were again seen as the leading reasons for why respondents felt low confidence in SFRS's ability to provide a response to fire and other emergencies, with SFRS staff working conditions also appearing as a top five reason. However, availability of fire engines, the rate of fire station closure – and reduced 24-hour availability and the county's unique geography (its large size, diverse and complex road infrastructure e.g. a mix of motorways and country lanes, climate crisis related emergencies; e.g. summertime heathland fires, flooding), which were perceived as being related to an over-reliance on emergency responses from neighbouring fire authorities, with an associated increase in response times in general.

"Budgets have been cut, lots of local fire stations are not open 24 seven, there's been a number of times when local fire stations have been closed where then there is a fire there coming from further away."

Whilst the previous quote from respondents illustrates the interconnectedness of these different factors – which in turn are connected to low confidence levels for work related to preservation and protection – the responses for 'response' had further unique patterns. Concerns related to perceived response times, numbers of firefighters in different locations, within the specific context of the climate crisis was raised.

"With only 4 firefighters on a fire engine and closing Painshill, Egham, Banstead at night and removing the second pumps from the 2 pump stations means a much slower response and with climate change and experts saying that we will have hotter summers I am very concerned."

Another unique aspect for patterns of comments related to SFRS's work in response was the degree of worry and anxiety expressed by respondents. As the following comments illustrate:

"Due to the lack of fire engines from the last PSP I do not feel safe at night. I have been reassured by my local Fire Station, however, how can you take away cover to make Surrey safe it doesn't make sense to me. Surely attendance times at night are greater. It's not just me it's my whole street!"

"[it is...] Concerning that the service doesn't have enough fire appliance availability across the service. Concerning at night-time."

Service improvements

Respondents shared their suggestions on how Surrey Fire and Rescue Service could improve the service it provides. Figure 21 below highlights the key themes as a percentage of all survey respondents who provided a response to this question (523). Themes reflected the concerns raised above and include public engagement (36%), staffing and organisational culture (33%), additional funding/investment (13%), more resources and equipment (13%) and increased cover at fire stations (9%).
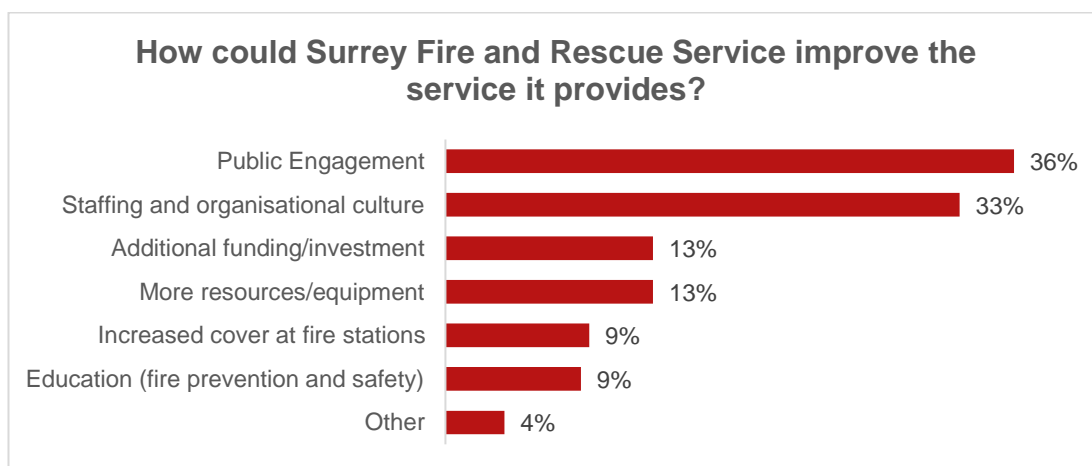
How could Surrey Fire and Rescue Service improve the service it provides?

Public Engagement	36%
Staffing and organisational culture	33%
Additional funding/investment	13%
More resources/equipment	13%
Increased cover at fire stations	9%
Education (fire prevention and safety)	9%
Other	4%

Figure 21: suggestions for service improvement (n=523)

Public engagement

Over 1 in 3 respondents felt SFRS could improve their engagement with Surrey residents and the community (figure 22).

Public Engagement

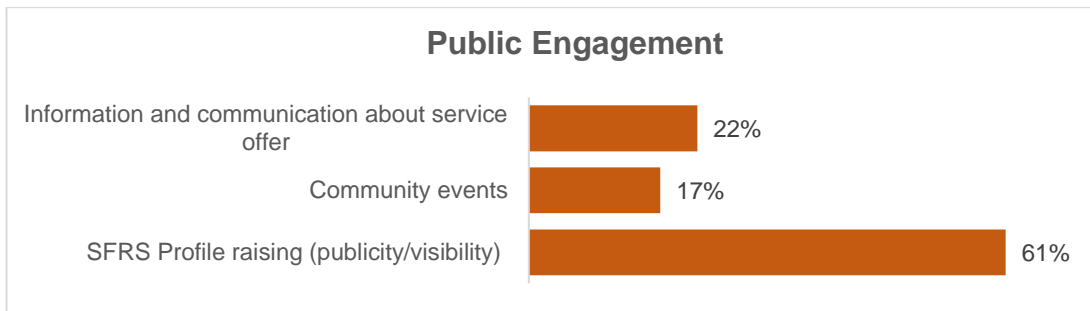|	
Information and communication about service offer	22%
Community events	17%
SFRS Profile raising (publicity/visibility)	61%

Figure 22: public engagement thematic breakdown (n=189)

Out of these respondents, just over 60% felt that SFRS could raise their profile and visibility. Common suggestions included engagement via newsletters, leaflets, and boosting SFRS' social media presence.

> *"Give the wider community a better understanding of the work that the service undertakes on a day-to-day basis."*

A further 22% of respondents felt SFRS could improve the quantity and type of information shared with residents about their service offer. The general sentiment from respondents was the desire for improved exposure about what the service offers, include the sharing of success stories, annual updates, and so on.

> *"I would love to see more information about what has been happening and what the plans are, good and bad."*

A total of 17% of respondents suggested that SFRS could be more present in the community with suggestions included stalls at community events, local workshops and visits to local businesses or centres e.g., residential homes or community hubs. One respondent reflected that *"community engagement seems to have lessened a little in recent time"*, with another noting that *"more visibility at local community events, local schools etc to engage with residents who may not normally interact with the SFRS would be useful"*.

Staffing and organisational culture

Over half of respondents (56%) who suggested improvements under the theme of 'staffing and organisational culture' felt that SFRS could improve by increasing staffing levels (Figure 23). There was significant reference to increase the number of personnel at local fire stations and suggestions for SFRS to focus on employment.

> *"Making sure it's staffing levels and training are sufficient for the numbers of people it is now serving considering the influx and amount of new residents moved/moving into the area."*
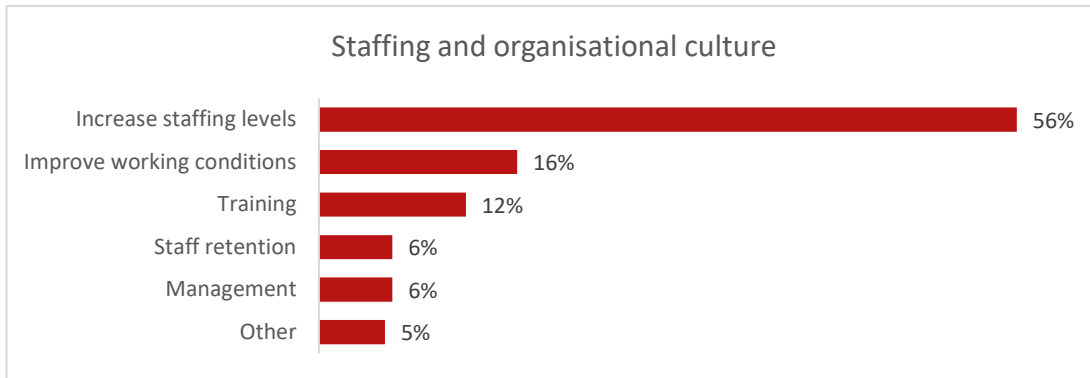
Staffing and organisational culture

Increase staffing levels	56%
Improve working conditions	16%
Training	12%
Staff retention	6%
Management	6%
Other	5%

Figure 23: staffting and organisational culture thematic breakdown (base size: 171)

thinking about staff, some respondents (17%) highlighted the need for improvement working conditions, including increase pay or a 'fair wage', increasing staff respect and value, and improvements to shift work and rotas.

Staff training was a further theme mentioned by 12% of respondents, with some feeling that the provision of training and focus on the upskilling of staff is a way for SFRS to improve its service.

"More trained personnel in the right skill sets. Pay the staff better so as to not lose good people to better paid jobs. Look after and treat your staff well so they feel valued."

Out of the 6% suggesting improvements in relation to management, responses included conducting a review of the current management structure, reducing senior roles, and review roles and responsibilities of management.

Additional funding and more resources

Securing additional funding and additional resources were key themes mentioned by a combined total of 26% of all respondents. In terms of resourcing and equipment, suggestions varied between both generic and specific e.g., more pumps, additional fire engines, specialist equipment, drones, and so on. Many were keen for funding and investment in the service in general, as well as investment in resources.

Below are quotes from respondents who would like an increase in funding and/or resources to enable SFRS to improve service provision.

"The staff working for SFRS are excellent, the lack of funding and cuts are the concern. You cannot protect the public if you don't invest in the service and personnel."

"I believe that the service provided is already excellent. However, with more funding for full time staff the service could be maintained at this level."

"More funding to enable the fire & rescue service to confidently respond to major incidents without compromising safety to the public and themselves."

"Increase in budget allowing more provisions for fire engines and resources, including training resources."

Increased cover at fire stations

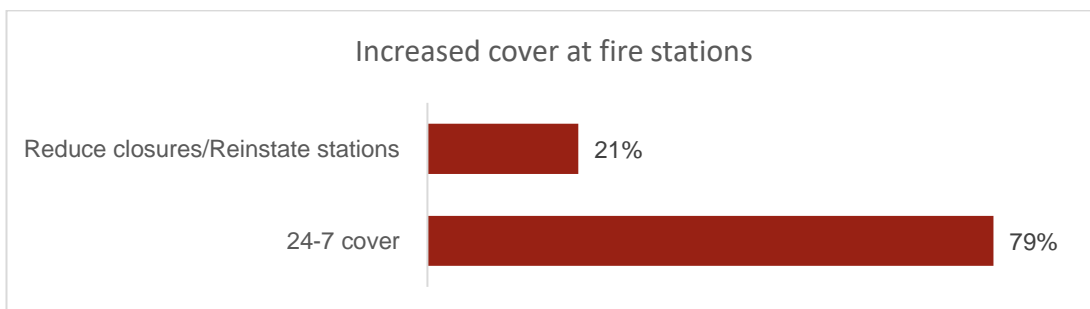Around 1 in 10 respondents felt that increasing cover at fire stations would improve the service (figure 24).

Increased cover at fire stations

Reduce closures/Reinstate stations	21%
24-7 cover	79%

Figure 24: increased cover at fire station thematic breakdown (n=57)

The majority of these respondents (79%) stated that they would like to see fire stations open and operational during the night and providing 24-7.

"Opening stations at night and providing the fire cover that communities require and pay for."

"Reinstate fire engines at night to ensure all communities are kept safe with the quickest response time available."

"Reinstate night cover and also on call cover 24/7 not just nights and weekends."

Others noted closures to their local fire stations and would like these reinstated with a future reduction in closures.

Education (fire prevention and safety)

Just under 1 in 10 respondents noted that education, including both information on fire prevention and advice on fire safety, are an important way for SFRS to improve (figure 25).
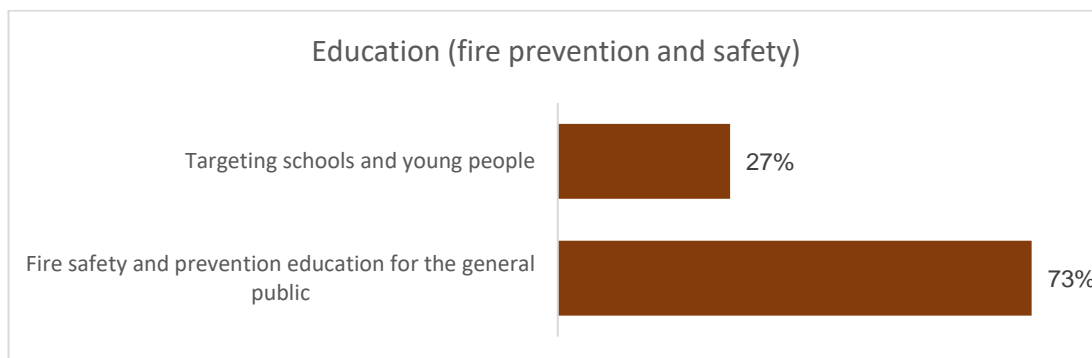

Education (fire prevention and safety)

Targeting schools and young people	27%
Fire safety and prevention education for the general public	73%

Figure 25: education (fire prevention and safety) thematic breakdown (n=45)

Out of these respondents, 73% would like to see more general awareness raising of risks and prevention e.g., house fires, microwaves, BBQs. A further 27% mentioned visits to schools or education of young people.

"I remember a demonstration of the risks of kitchen fires that was held in [location redacted] some years ago, it made a big impact on me and my family."

One mother shared a positive experience of a SFRS-led fire safety session at a local nursery: *"My little boy is 2 and the fire service came to his nursery, and we went to the open day at [location redacted]. My son knows all about the smoke alarm and fire extinguishers and I think that is amazing! So not a suggestion of improvement but just a plea to say please keep up the community work, as it is so important that kids learn about fire safety from a young age. It also gives us adults a nudge to remember to test alarms etc at home!"*

Risks

Respondents were asked to identify the risk that they were most concerned about from the five key risks identified in the research.

Which of the five local fire and rescue- related risks identified are you most concerned about?

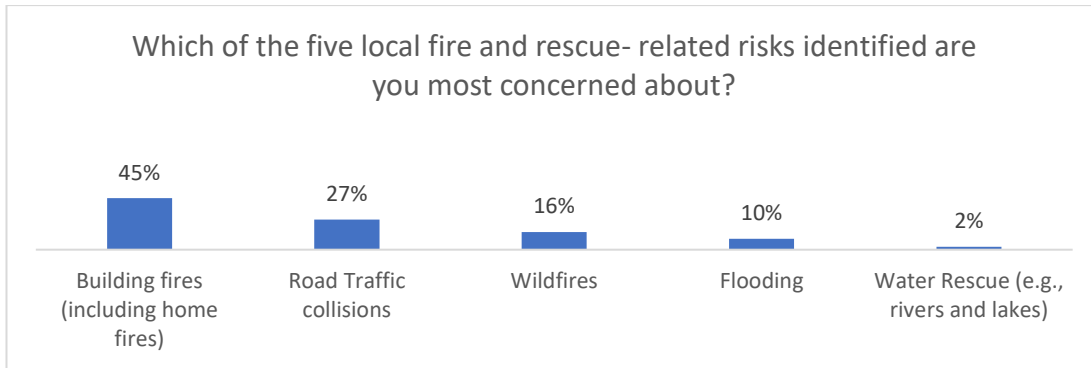|				
45%	27%	16%	10%	2%
Building fires (including home fires)	Road Traffic collisions	Wildfires	Flooding	Water Rescue (e.g., rivers and lakes)

Figure 26: risk most concerned about (n=987)

Figure 26 shows that just under half of respondents felt that the risk they were most concerned about was building fires (45%). Some respondents further clarified that they were concerned *"in relation to High Rise residential buildings such as those recently built in Woking".*

The second most prevalent was road traffic incidents, with some respondents focusing in particular on motorbike incidents (figure 26). This was contrasted by the response to the social media poll shown in figure 27, in which respondents indicated they were more concerned about car crashes (69%) than building fires (31%).

Flooding and water rescues were the least likely to be seen as the most important of the risks (figure 26). This was supported in the final social media poll where wildfires were seen as more concerning than flooding and water rescue (figure 28).

There were a further five perceived risks that had not been identified in the top five these were: aviation accidents, getting to emergencies, assisting the ambulance service, animal rescue and chemical incidents.
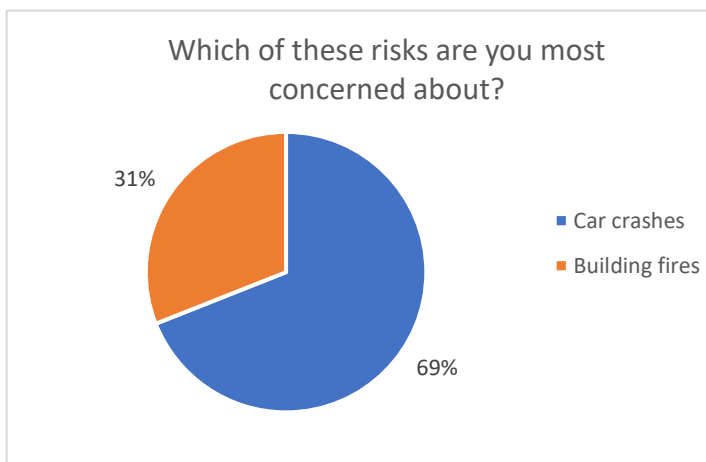

Which of these risks are you most concerned about?

- Car crashes
- Building fires

31%

69%

Figure 27: social media poll 3: Concern: car crash or building fires (n=174)

Aviation incidents

Those who live near Heathrow raised a concern about *"aircraft crashing given proximity to local airports"*.

Getting to emergencies

Respondents felt that poor parking or road layouts were a risk in that fire engines may not be able to make it to the emergency.
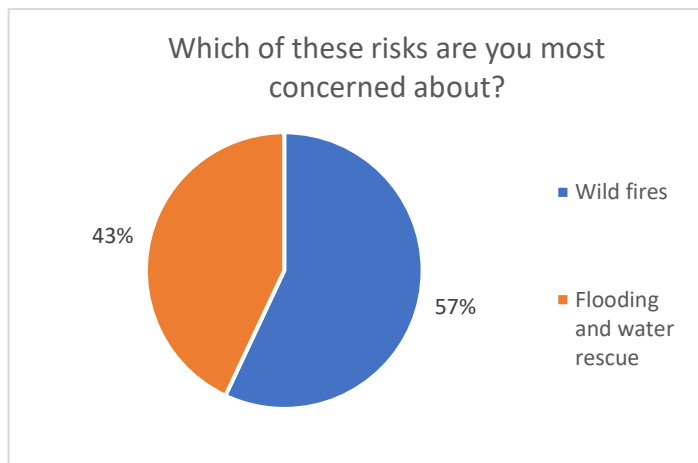

Figure 28: social media poll 3: Concern: wildfires or flooding (n=391)

> *"Access to properties in my area where there are unadopted roads where parking is often very bad and no signage to remind drivers about leaving enough room for emergency services to access."*

Assisting ambulance service

The risk in terms of assisting the ambulance service came from two directions. Firstly, there were those who were concerned that decrease in funding or resources would prevent SFRS from doing so.

> *"The defibrillator service (and other medical emergencies) is fantastic and the provision of this to back up our stretched ambulance service is essential in our rural areas especially."*

In contrast there were also those who were concerned that by supporting the ambulance service SFRS would be too busy to respond in an emergency.

> "*It concerns me that fire crews are being used to provide ambulance support which means that fire engines are effectively off the run and unavailable.*"

Animal rescue

Some respondents also bought up concern about animal rescue, specifically livestock.

Chemical spills or incidents

This was raised by several respondents as a risk within Surrey, such as *"fuel lines running across Staines moor and chemical fly tipping incidents"* or *"Chemical and petroleum leaks and spills"*.

Appendices

Question	Parent Code	Child Code	Description
How could Surrey Fire and Rescue Service improve the service it provides?	1. More resources/equipment		Any reference to 'more resources' or 'more equipment' (non-staff related). Suggestions were both generic and specific e.g., pumps, fire engines, specialist equipment, drones etc.
	2. Public engagement	**a.** SFRS Profile raising (publicity/visibility)	Responses referring to SFRS making the public more aware of the service and what they do. Suggestions included newsletters, leaflets, social media presence etc.
		b. Community events	Responses referring to SFRS making the public more aware of the service and what they do via community events e.g., local stands, workshops, visits etc.
		c. Information and communication about service offer	Improved exposure about what the service offers, sharing of success stories, annual updates etc.
	3. Education (fire prevention and safety)	**a.** General fire safety and prevention education	Awareness raising of risks and prevention e.g., house fires, microwaves, bbqs.
		b. Targeting schools/ young people	Specific references to visits to schools or education of young people.
	4. Increased cover at fire stations	**a.** 24-7 cover	Including all references to either 24hr cover, 24-7 cover, more cover in general and night-time cover (both staff availability and local stations being open at night).

		b. Reduce closures/Reinstate stations	Responses include mention of re-opening local fire stations, references to 'more fire stations' being opened in general, reinstating local stations.
	5. Staffing and organisational culture	a. Increase staffing levels	Increase personnel/manpower, employment.
		b. Improve working conditions	Typical responses reference increase pay, fair pay or conditions in general (valuing staff).
		c. Management	Responses included review of senior roles, review of structure, reduction of senior roles.
		d. Training	Any reference to staff training and upskilling.
		e. Staff retention	Any reference to high staff turn over or loss of staffing.
		f. Other	Responses include reference to increasing diversity in the workforce, staff respect etc.
	6. Additional funding/ investment		Typical response references the requirement for additional funding for Surrey Fire and Rescue Service.
	7. Improved response time		Any reference to reducing or improving response time .
	8. Joint working		Responses include reference to working alongside other FRSs, emergency services or other organisations such as the environment agency.
	9. Other (e.g., Road access for fire engines.)		Responses suggested by minimal respondents (>3). Some offer specific suggestions relevant to their personal situation.
	10. Not Applicable	a. Blank	Including all blank rows, N/A, 'don't know', 'not sure', 'no idea' or responses of a similar sentiment.
		b. Other	Including some positive feedback (with no need for improvement), and offensive and/or inappropriate responses.