



**Kent Fire &
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To
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Dear Mr Lewis

KMFRA Response to Sir Ken Knight's Report "Facing the Future"

I refer to your correspondence of 6 August seeking ideas and views on Sir Ken's report which has now been the subject of a detailed presentation to Members of the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority.

In overall terms the report presents a good analysis of issues facing Fire and Rescue Authorities across the country. It is pleasing to be able to say that many of the initiatives and examples of best practice resonate with what is already being pursued by the Authority with some of the most significant being, the move of all retained fire fighters onto part-time contract arrangements, the closure of 11 fire stations and the more innovative use of equipment. These are all products of the Authority's reviews to ensure that the right people are in the right place with the right equipment at the right time, as well as importing ideas from other FRAs which have also recognised the need to change.

As well as being one of the lead authorities in the development of national standard operating procedures and commitment to JESIP, the Authority has also recognised the need to offer a more joined up response to people during all types of emergency and is now working with other blue-light services to provide joint emergency planning, enhanced medical care at RTCs and a joint control room with Kent Police. This in addition to the multi-agency working such as the Margate Task Force Project which you saw on your visit to Kent in January.

The question surrounding whether the service is efficient and what could be done to realise opportunities for further improvements is difficult to answer and I do not intend to go into aspects of detail contained in the report but instead focus on what seems to be the major challenge and this is the number and size of FRAs. Whilst all efforts should continue in the pursuit of efficiencies through better collaboration and federation across all areas of operation, as well as in support activities, Sir Ken's conclusion that "The potential savings

identified in this review are unlikely to be sufficient for some fire and rescue authorities to be able to live within their reducing budgets.” has been apparent for some time and the attempts at voluntary mergers may be evidence of this. Given that funding pressures are likely to continue for the duration of the next Spending Review in 2015, surely now should be the time to explore longer term solutions.

Sir Ken makes a number of suggestions on possible future operating models and to consider them in this response would not do justice to such a significant matter. However, it may be more appropriate that the Government’s response to the report should make reference to seeking a more structured approach to look at the best solution together with the degree of support and prescription required for implementation. In this respect the KMFRA would be willing to act as a sounding board or offer expertise and help in any way as has been the case with past reviews such as when the Audit Commission was producing its value for money study “In the Line of Fire”.

In conclusion, the Authority is fully aware of the need for change but recognises that for reasons of national resilience and interoperability it may be that a more strategic approach needs to inform local solutions.

Yours sincerely

Ann Millington
Chief Executive

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