This submission is the result of a Member debate which followed a number of briefings and individual Member reviews of Sir Ken Knight’s report ‘Facing the Future’. It lays out the key observations made by Members of the Humberside Fire Authority and represents their views of Sir Ken Knight’s report.

It is fair to say that there were no great surprises revealed within the report though it is felt that Sir Ken’s observations were coloured by the views of central government during a period of austerity. Would similar conclusions have been drawn during a period of national prosperity? Many of the issues raised have been highlighted in previous reports such as the Bain Review, ‘Rising to the Challenge’ and ‘Fire Futures’.

Bearing all of this in mind the Humberside Fire Authority have implemented change as a result of previous reviews and have in fact exceeded the savings thought possible by the Audit Commission in ‘Rising to the Challenge’ (see Appendix 2 ‘HFRS Efficiency Overview’). There is merit in many of the suggestions proposed by Sir Ken and the Authority will evaluate these and implement those which benefit the community we serve.

The following paragraphs outline HFA Member view by chapter.
This chapter works on the premise that a reduction in demand of 40% over 10 years has not been matched by a similar reduction in firefighters. Whilst the 11% reduction in whole time firefighters may have been accurate when the statistics were published, many Services, including Humberside, have seen much greater reductions in excess of 25% over that period. The report assumes that a reduction in demand merits a similar reduction in response capability. Unfortunately this cannot be the case as the risk, particularly in hazardous industries, still exists. Would the government be assured by a Fire and Rescue Service that could not deal with another Buncefield even though such incidents do not occur often? Humberside currently hosts 32 top-tier COMAH premises, some of which are orders of magnitude larger than Buncefield. In addition to this concentration of heavy industry, Humberside FRS has to be ready to deal with incidents at sea, within the Humber Estuary and in the busiest port complex in the UK. It would be unwise to surrender the resources needed to initially contain a large incident in this area.

It is forecast that by 2050 Yorkshire and the Humber will have the highest instance of river and surface water flooding and even now the Humber area has the largest population at risk from tidal inundation in the UK. Whilst having no statutory duty to manage flood risk, Humberside FRS commits significant resources to community resilience, flood planning and water rescue, a commitment that can only increase.

There is an odd paradox in the report which on the one hand questions why some authorities spend almost twice as much per person per year in some areas than others, but goes on to say that the fire funding formula is fair. This Authority agrees that the
formula is fair as it allocates resources according to need. The report also says that cost per person has no correlation to performance outcomes. In Humberside that relationship is clear. Humberside is the sixth most expensive Service per head of population in England. It also delivers the fifth quickest emergency response in England, which is commensurate with the high level of risk identified previously. Whilst recognised by the funding formula, this level of risk is largely driven by external factors such as geography, the local economy, deprivation, health inequalities and poor educational attainment. Until these matters are conquered it remains crucial to continue effective community safety activities and to deploy adequate response resources.

It is puzzling that Sir Ken chose to anonymise the various performance and spending data. This is all in the public domain and is not something to be hidden. In Humberside we understand the data and are dealing with it.

What is clear, however, is that one size does not fit all. Even agreeing with Sir Ken’s assertion that we live in a new era of demand and risk each Fire and Rescue Service has its own unique set of challenges hence the adoption of Integrated Risk Management Planning.

**Chapter Two**

In 2005 Humberside Fire and Rescue Service began the transformation from a predominantly response Service to a Service that put prevention first. That transformation has seen a Service working effectively in partnership to reduce risk and consequently being able to reduce response resources. In 2007 we were established for
709 whole time firefighters a number that had reduced to 526 by 2013. This Authority agreed a challenging set of risk-based response standards (including a second appliance standard) and all operational resources are deployed according to these standards. The current operational efficiency programme will remove any remaining excess capacity whilst still allowing standards to be met.

That programme proposes converting some whole time appliances to retained appliances but this can only happen where response standards permit. Sir Ken appears to underestimate the difficulty in recruiting and retaining RDS firefighters in rural areas and particularly in ensuring that they are properly trained. With the best will in the world, retained firefighters do not spend sufficient time at work to be competent in such functions as technical rescue, marine firefighting and hazardous materials handling.

Innovative staffing models are, in reality, less efficient and less resilient than they were first thought to be, case law relating to pensions particularly having reduced financial savings. Models such as Day Crew Plus and LLAR do not appear to be sustainable in the light of the Working Time Directive and have very high start-up costs.

Comments about Elected Members avoiding station closures and redundancies do not reflect an understanding of the wider responsibilities of local authority politicians, nor do they acknowledge the consideration that Elected Members give to the views of the communities that they represent. As well as having a role on a Fire Authority, they have a role within their parent Authorities and must consider the impact of any job losses on the local economy. Elected Members are the representatives of the communities they serve and as such speak on behalf of their constituents but, regarding station closures, they do
so with full knowledge of the results of the extensive stakeholder consultation which takes place around options for consideration. Fire stations provide great confidence to communities and no local politician wants to see fire stations closed with skilled workers, including firefighters, made redundant so that their skills are lost to the community. Within this context Chief Fire Officers are expected to forge links beyond the fire and rescue service and work with local authority Members and officers to support local communities and the local economy. They must therefore balance the wider impact of station closures and redundancies against the potential savings made within a single Service. This Authority does however agree with Sir Ken that sharing premises with other blue light services makes a great deal of sense and can deliver worthwhile savings in some locations.

Rather than increase the number of retained firefighters at the expense of capability, Humberside FRS intends to increase the range of services provided by firefighters to include supporting the local ambulance services and being proactive in flood prevention and recovery. This local approach will minimise the latent capacity referred to, but it should be borne in mind that National Resilience is also entirely reliant on local fire and rescue services in a large scale emergency. Government could support this approach by reviewing the Grey Book to ensure that it facilitates a flexible and professional workforce.

Chapter Three

This Authority fully supports blue light interoperability and is actively seeking to support local ambulance services. It has good relationships with Humberside Police and is
pursuing collaboration in premises. Such collaboration should only take place where true efficiencies are evident, for example, it would not be wise to leave a building derelict simply to co-locate with another Service.

Humberside Fire Authority has considered the benefits of sharing Chief Fire Officers, Corporate Management Teams and a full merger. In all cases the savings to be made were small compared to the obstacles to be overcome. It should be noted that the only English merged Fire and Rescue Service has raised its precept in both of the past two years, which calls into question the true efficiency of such arrangements.

Whilst collaboration with the Ambulance Service and the Police is desirable, authorities should not confine themselves to these two services. Opportunities to collaborate with other Fire and Rescue Services, local authorities and in some cases the private sector can have equally great potential for improvement in savings.

The report returns again to the benefits and potential savings to be achieved by joint procurement. Why, after the failure of Firebuy, is this seen as a critical efficiency initiative? Over 80% of the Fire Authority budget is spent on staff costs, therefore the savings to be made by joint procurement are relatively small. The fire industry is diverse and vibrant and any move to joint procurement is likely to stifle this sector and reduce choice with very limited savings, however, where joint procurement is beneficial it is already carried out in any case through various framework agreements.
Chapter Four

In general this chapter appears to lack insight into the reality of local authority life. Combined Fire Authorities cannot set a budget in deficit and neither can they go to a parent authority should they run short of funds. They must therefore maintain a prudent level of reserves. Most CFAs have been building reserves in anticipation of difficult times to come. Unless government changes legislation to allow firefighters early access to their pensions it will be impossible to reduce staffing by voluntary redundancy sufficiently quickly to balance the books. This situation could exhaust HFA reserves by 2017.

HFA Members are well supported in terms of knowledge and understanding but short periods of tenure on the Authority can lead to excessive resources being allocated to Member development. A longer tenure, perhaps of four years, would provide ownership and leadership by Authority Members.

Humberside Fire Authority has now adopted a Board Structure so it has become the single decision making body in terms of fire and rescue. Robust scrutiny is provided by the Governance, Audit and Scrutiny Committee, which consists entirely of independent members. It is therefore possible to provide strong local leadership and effective scrutiny within the CFA model. It is disappointing that this was not used as a case study in Sir Ken’s report.

Sir Ken states that whilst a number of Services have set up trading arms, he questions whether Fire and Rescue Authorities have “the right skill sets to trade efficiently”. This
does not do justice to Humberside Fire Authority whose trading arm has competed successfully with private sector organisations to win a number of high value contracts. Fire and Rescue Authorities can trade effectively by using the broad experience of Elected Members, many of whom have had successful careers in business. He fails to recognise however that trading will only ever provide a small proportion of the revenue needed to run a Fire and Rescue Service and that the surplus generated must be balanced against the risk to the Authority.

**Chapter Five**

Sir Ken’s report clearly states that the potential savings identified are unlikely to be achieved by some Services and that the scale of change needed to transform the Fire and Rescue Service is unlikely to be achieved by local action alone. This clearly indicates the need for some action by central government.

He also provides examples of some alternative forms of governance that could promote the transformation to which he alludes.

Privatisation has already been ruled out by the Secretary of State, and this Authority supports that position, and the current research into a staff owned mutual appears to be making little progress. Moving towards a more national model appears to fly in the face of localism, whilst moving to a county structure would split Humberside into four unsustainably small units. Merger with another Fire and Rescue Service offers few efficiencies and merger with the Police or Ambulance Service fails to recognise the differences in purpose of these functions.
Police and Crime Commissioners taking responsibility for Fire and Rescue Services seems to be gaining traction, though it could be argued that this arrangement has not yet been proven and will not be until at least the end of the first term of office. Humberside Fire Authority believes that a public body of 22 Elected Members, from four Local Authorities and three political parties is highly representative of the communities it serves. This Authority is democratically accountable to those communities and is trusted by them to deliver an efficient and effective fire and rescue service. We cannot agree that a Police and Crime Commissioner with responsibility for fire and rescue would be more effective.

**What is the way forward?**

We must not lose sight of the fact that the Fire and Rescue Service in England is not a failing service. On the contrary it has, with others, driven down demand by 40% in 10 years, delivers a great emergency response and is seen as a partner of choice by many other agencies. Even though it labours under four different governance structures, it is universally trusted and respected by the community it serves. This does not happen by accident, it happens because it is well led, well managed and employs great people who are well trained and highly motivated. It is not however perfect as Sir Ken rightfully observes.

The Service needs government leadership. That does not mean that it needs to be micromanaged. The government should develop a Vision for the English Fire and Rescue Service (for example see Appendix 3 ‘HFRS Vision 2020’) and it should fund the Service accordingly. It should value fire and rescue staff and capitalise on their ability to get a job done. It needs to change legislation to remove the current restrictive employment
practices seen in many Services and it should revise industrial relations now to ensure that community safety cannot be compromised by industrial action.

The Humberside Fire Authority has managed the grant reductions set out in CSR 20210 and has frozen the Council Tax precept for the past three years. Staff work more flexibly and are delivering a more diverse Service than ever before. This cannot however go on indefinitely. Continued grant reductions will firstly cause the Service to miss the challenging performance targets it has set and will ultimately put communities and staff at risk. We therefore urge you to recognise the vital work of the Fire and Rescue Service and to accept that a well-motivated, highly trained and professional emergency service is a national asset that must not be allowed to fail for lack of funding.

The Fire and Rescue Service must be efficient but first and foremost it must be effective. It should meet the needs of local communities, national resilience and government expectations.

Submitted on behalf of Humberside Fire Authority by

Councillor John Briggs

Humberside Fire Authority Chairman
1. In the past decade demand on Humberside Fire and Rescue Service has reduced by 45%.

2. Since 2007 Humberside Fire and Rescue Service has reduced whole time duty system posts by 26% and reduced the revenue budget by £6.5m (13%).

3. The Humberside Area hosts 32 top tier COMAH sites, the busiest port complex in the UK and experiences high levels of deprivation.

4. Costs are understood and resources are deployed according to risk.

5. Further significant savings are planned in the years 2014-16.

6. The community receives a greater breadth of service than ever before including preparation for and recovery from emergencies.

7. Collaboration with the Police and Ambulance Service is underway and this includes firefighters providing a medical response in support of the Ambulance Service.

8. The Humberside Fire Authority effectively represents the community it serves and it is underpinned by sound governance, audit and scrutiny.

9. The Humberside Fire Authority does not support the idea that the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner should be extended to cover other blue light services.
10. The Humberside Fire Authority urges government to provide leadership by setting a vision for the English Fire and Rescue Service allowing properly funded Fire Authorities the freedom to deliver that vision.