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National Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA)

Response to the Ken Knight Report

**For the consideration and at the request of the
Minster of Fire, Brandon Lewis MP.**

February 2014

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1. Introduction

This report provides a response on behalf of the members of the Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) to the Sir Ken Knight report ‘Facing The Future: Findings From The Review Of Efficiencies And Operations In Fire And Rescue Authorities In England’. The report particularly focuses on the implications of the report from an equality, diversity and inclusion perspective considering the needs of the diverse communities residing in England that the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) sector serve and also the concerns of the diverse employees from within the FRS sector.

AFSA hopes that the Minister Brandon Lewis and other Communities and Local Government officials will consider the depth of the concern and also the considered views of the AFSA membership within this report.

Particularly with regard to decisions that will influence the future of the Fire and Rescue Sector in England and the Services it provides to its diverse communities.

2. Background

During a meeting of the AFSA Executive members with the Fire Minister, Brandon Lewis, in October 2013; the Minister encouraged the submission of

views of AFSA on the Sir Ken Knight report so that these can be considered in future policy decisions.

The AFSA Executive have since the meeting consulted with its members through the AFSA national conference that took place in Manchester in October 2013 and more formally through the Executive meeting that was undertaken on 13 December 2013. A further open consultation exercise with members was undertaken between 13 December and 31 January 2014. This report now explores the key areas of the 'Facing the Future' report and provides the collective views of the feedback received by members of AFSA.

3. Strategic Context

The Asian fire Service Association (AFSA) welcomes the opportunity to engage in any debate regarding how the Fire and Rescue Service is currently run in England. We welcome the opportunity to engage in influencing the future of the Fire and Rescue Service, and we are pleased to see that by commissioning the review the government recognises the importance of the services the Sector provides to its diverse communities.

We wish to note that we offered our involvement, consultation and advice to the officers that carried out this review but for whatever reason we were not called to attend any focus groups or asked for a written submission. In our view this was a lost opportunity to explore the debate from an informed perspective and to form a considered view.

4. The changing role of the Fire and Rescue Sector

The role of the Fire and Rescue Service has evolved and changed over the years. Fire Services are now seen as a key contributor in making local communities feel safe and well. We are valued by our diverse communities, other public sector partners, businesses and the third sector. The portfolio of services of the Fire and Rescue sector range from not just fire to now also include: road safety; water safety; arson reduction; international rescue; crime reduction and national resilience. Alongside this, the prevention and protection agenda which through the Marmot report provides the official recognition of the contributions of the Fire Service to the health and well being agenda; community cohesion, education and socio economic empowerment.

We challenge Sir Ken Knight's comment regarding "*the public's seemingly unconditional attachment to the fire and rescue service*" acting as a *constraint* to efficiency and being outdated. Our experience has been more positive where the Fire and Rescue Service has been able to use that attachment to access some of the most hard to reach communities and drive a change in culture and behaviours on safety whilst delivering year on year improvements on fire deaths and casualties so that we now have the lowest figures for decades. The FRS sector provides access to communities, to other public services and adds values across a range other public services, including the Police, NHS and Ambulance service.

For instance, this has been achieved through equality and diversity and inclusion initiatives such as Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) joining forces with Wigan Council and the NHS to help keep the older community safe as winter sets in. In addition to the wealth of work FRS undertake in partnership with the Princes Trust. We note that these types of good practice were not highlighted by Sir Ken Knight in his report, but we are pleased that others such as Marmot in his reviews acknowledged the great work of the FRS. West Midlands Fire Service has been officially acknowledged for their contribution to the health and well being of the communities within West Midlands by the Marmot Team; alongside their other prevention and education initiatives including Safeside, an interactive scenario based facility which provides health and safety advice to over thousands of young people and new migrant communities each year. We would welcome the DCLG to focus on the effectiveness, outcomes and impact of these services to local communities rather than to view it as constraint to efficiency.

The recognition of the importance of prevention and protection is welcome and we agree that staff engaged in such work should, and are, recognised as front line. Equally, we challenge the view that this can replace existing operational staff, which in the main is responsible for the bulk of delivery of such work. If we had to utilise retained crews for this purpose it would increase their costs as they would be required to do more hours for prevention work and not just provide operational cover, and the re-negotiation of non-uniformed contracts to undertake weekend and evening

working could also inflate salaries. We discuss this further in point 11 below.

Overall we welcome the conclusion of the Sir Ken Knight Report that FRSs have been very successful amongst public services in delivering improved outcomes year on year. Halving deaths and injuries from fires over a decade is a record for FRSs to be proud. It is against this backdrop of achievement that the Service should be judged as a 'can do Service' and one that is focused on achieving excellence.

5. Fire Fighter Health & Safety

The Review states that "firefighters themselves are much safer today". Whilst that may be true in some areas the fact that we are seeing an increase in firefighter deaths in the workplace and on the incident ground in the last decade compared to the previous is anything but a good news story. We would encourage CFOA and the Representative bodies to look into this stark fact in more detail.

6. Equality, Diversity and inclusion

We are disappointed to note the absence of equality, diversity and inclusion being embedded within this review, because of the lack of focus of this in the report we believe that there is a risk that the FRS and its future direction will not have 'due regard to equality and inclusion' in the development, local implementation of the key components of this review. We would wish to encourage CFOA and DCLG to ensure that any policy or strategy changes that come about as a result of this review are robustly challenged by giving due regard to equality as required by the Equality Act of 2010.

AFSA believe that equality analysis should be a key component when implementing efficiency measures to ensure that those who are marginalised and disadvantaged are not disproportionately impacted, whether that is within the sector as employees or within our communities.

7. Austerity & Sector Funding

AFSA recognises that we are all in the public service facing significant challenges. The Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) strive to sustain what can only be said to be exceptional performance in delivering prevention,

protection and emergency response services through what has been an extended period of austerity. Any value for money assessment would show the service has been delivering year on year efficiencies and saving, we currently have the lowest fire death and injuries in the history of the Service.

We note that the Report suggests there is *'little relationship between expenditure and outcomes'*, we disagree with this comment as we firmly believe that the FRS does deliver great value for money, however, we do accept that FRS can do more, particularly in relation prevention and partnership working with other public services and the third sector to involve communities in shaping Services and evaluation of outcomes to establish impact.

We also feel that the Report takes a very narrow view of efficiency. We feel that the report fails to acknowledge the value of the Fire and Rescue Services to wider society, the socio economic benefits, the wider health equalities and the education, empowering and building capability of communities. For example, West Midlands Fire Service through its prevention strategy, looking at the causes behind the causes and addressing behaviours and actions that enables communities to become stronger and thrive. This work is demonstrated in their forthcoming launch of work with Sir Michael Marmot and his team and through their commitment to their risk based response model that serves the communities of West Midlands.

The report suggests that the variance in expenditure across FRSs is *'inexplicable'*. We feel that this is worthy of more in depth analysis as we feel that FRSs in England are governed by too many financial and political governance models they cannot all be the best models for a modern FRS. FRS's need more autonomy to use their resources to best serve their own local communities with less red tape.

8. Risk Management

AFSA believes that the review should consider Risk Management within the context of the legally protected equality characteristics & equality duties in line with the Equality Act 2010, when looking at risk to the public & staff. AFSA would also recommend reference to socio economic issues. Therefore AFSA recommends the continued use of equality analysis in decisions that

are made by the DCLG, CFA and in particular local Services where assessments need to be similar to other areas of performance. Services need to demonstrate their performance around equality diversity and inclusion, delivery of Services to their communities based on risk and equality, diversity and inclusion with regard to their workforce.

9. Governance

AFSA is convinced that future governance models within the FRS should include a diversity and inclusion perspective as an explicit component with a commitment to reviewing these strategies annually.

In addition, AFSA believes that future FRS governance frameworks should also include a commitment to demonstrate how improvements have benefited minority communities and how organisations have benchmarked their achievements to ensure services are contributing to systematically closing the gap of inequalities, year on year. Derbyshire FRS is an excellent example of how local communities have been involved at the most senior level in shaping and to scrutinise outcomes for their local communities.

AFSA has serious concerns about possible plans for a single English fire and rescue service. This is based on issues around general accountability to local and diverse communities and meeting the inequalities challenge across the nation. Our knowledge and involvement with the Ambulance Trust, who has been reduced to ten and their struggle to meet local needs due to size and scale supports and reflects our concerns.

10. Collaboration between blue light services

AFSA welcomes the commitment to working with other blue light services. We would encourage collaboration in terms of more than just sharing of resources and facilities. The FRS has an excellent record of working with the NHS Ambulance service around providing support to the elderly and people with mental health issues which should be built upon in the future.

We support the recommendations that FRS should work more closely with Ambulance Trust in terms of joint training and exercising, shared use of fire stations, defibrillators placed on fire appliances.

We feel more work is needed and consideration with regard to co-responding by fire service personnel to 999 calls to ambulance services, particularly in rural communities and sharing of control rooms.

We believe that the culture of the two services is very different and that merging of the two services is not an option that could be delivered quickly or one that would deliver saving or major benefits to staff or society.

AFSA further believes that developing effective and enhanced partnerships and teamwork with other organisations, is crucial to delivering radical improvements for diverse communities. The NHS Nicholson challenge and the NHS 'Call to Action' both highlight the future funding crisis for the NHS where prevention and partnership working has been highlighted as crucial to sustain services. The FRS sector can play a proactive role within the health agenda and DCLG need to support ways of building synergies with the Department of Health, demonstrating the value of the Fire Rescue Sector to support savings in public spending and to sustain services to local communities.

11. Staffing

AFSA has long promoted the importance of not reducing the debate about staffing to crewing levels or in terms of costs. Our view is that this misses the point –we want the right staff, with the right skills, in the right place at the right time. There is no single ratio or formula that can calculate the answers to such complex questions. The right answer will differ across and within organisations in consideration of their local context, and reaching it requires the use of evidence, and evidence based tools, the exercise of professional judgment and a truly multi-professional approach. Above all, it requires openness and transparency within Fire and Rescue Services.

One of the major proposals in the Report is that FRS's should increase the numbers of Retained Duty System (On call Firefighters) personnel by 10%. Whilst we are unconvinced by the data provided to support the increase by 10%. We believe that the type of FF should be based on local risk mapping and should also reflect the community they serve.

There is also a common misconception that retained fire fighters are more likely to reflect the local diversity and ethnicity they serve. According to the

Fire and Rescue Services Operational statistics bulletin for 2011–12, there is no correlation between the amounts of Black, Ethnic, Minority or women on the retained duty system in comparison with whole time. In fact, the reverse is shown. This table represents the number of White and minority ethnic personnel currently recruited nationally, along with the ratio of White personnel to ethnic minority for both retained and whole time shift systems.

	Year	Whole time	Retained duty system
White	2012	25,235	12,278
Minority Ethnic		1,247	130
Ratio (White: ME)		20.24	94.45

The issue of future recruitment be, it on call or whole time provides the opportunity to FRS's to recruit a more diverse workforce. In addition, there are the issues of higher turnover, The statistics offered by *The Fire and Rescue Services Operational Statistics Bulletin for England 2011–2012* show that in England between the periods of 2011–2012 there was a total of 241 (0.8% of national work force) whole time fire fighters leaving due to reasons other than retirement, ill health etc. Retained crews had 1,461 (11% of national work force) personnel leave the Service.

Retention is also an issue; average retention expectancy of a retained fire fighter now is 4 years. According to discussion with other services, this is due to the following factors:

- Few people live and work in the same town/village, which equates to long travelling distances to work
- Some employers understand the needs of RDS fire fighters, but many do not and are unwilling to release staff due to the economies of their business
- People now travel during away time from work for leisure activities or to meet family and friends
- Many children's activities take place away from the home area and require parental support i.e. transport
- Being available for duty means not indulging in alcohol, this leads to longer periods of unavailability as it requires additional free time

- Restrictions on working hours, and imbalance of work and home life.
- Lack of pension rights
- Differing social expectations
- Increase in varying demands upon the service i.e. Community Fire Safety Work
- Drop in calls has resulted in less call outs, thereby limited earning potential

These challenges are being tackled differently by local services, for instance West Yorkshire has dedicated whole time crew commanders to recruit for local retained stations, supplement the appliance when not enough crew available, and to carry out the required prevention based activity, and operational risk gathering and inspecting. This approach required an investment from WYFRS of C. £1.6 million. They have had limited success with this approach and still struggle to recruit and retain due to the above issues. Also, since the comprehensive spending review, West Yorkshire has had to reduce these numbers of Crew Commanders by 50%, which means there has been a return to previous figures.

This data and research should have been reflected in the findings and more importantly needs to be reflected in future policy decision making.

12. Positive Action

Strategies around staffing should address the importance of the workforce diversity at all levels and renewed commitment to undertaking positive action to ensure people from under represented group in society are recruited, developed and welcomed into the FRS. FRS's need to consider creative and innovative approaches to support representation of minority communities at all levels of the sector through positive action.

Furthermore, AFSA believes that Leadership and management –must be reinforced and developed to create an environment where all staff feel supported, valued, listened to, empowered and involved. Also Education, learning and development for all staff must be a priority to ensure they have the appropriate skills, behaviors and knowledge to meet the professional standards expected of them.

Lastly the mainstreaming of diversity and inclusion Involving staff and the public in designing future services is essential if we are to successfully to meet the needs of our diverse society.

13. Sharing Notable Practice, Review and Assurance AFSA has a well-established communication mechanisms in place for the dissemination and sharing of notable practice which include; member conferences, development days across the country as well information sharing through the AFSA website and social media facilities. We would welcome the opportunity to support the FRS to share notable practices, debate and discuss new ideas and offer a view from a community and BME employee perspective.

AFSA would advocate integration of equality measures as part of the CFOA / LGA operational assessment toolkit and peer challenge in which all fire and rescue authorities are participating.

14. AFSA's Role

AFSA are determined to play a central coordinating role to bring together the fire and rescue services, the wider fire sector, and key stakeholders, to consider the opportunities and future challenges with a particular emphasis on equality, diversity, human rights and inclusion.

AFSA has demonstrated in recent years that we are able to lead and build capacity and capability in the professional skills and expertise across the fire and rescue sector to deliver robust, evidenced based and coherent products and policy recommendations that affect individual FRS and the Sector as a whole. Our annual conference held in October 2013 addressed issue such as partnership working, collaboration and leadership.

15. Conclusion

Sir Ken Knight has challenged the fire and rescue authorities to evolve and in doing so find new solutions. This response represents AFSA's contribution in terms solutions to help deliver a quality of service we can all be proud of. It is in this light this report should be viewed. We welcome the opportunity to offer our views at this late stage and confirm our openness to change. We hope that the report invokes further debate, discussion and curiosity. We hope that AFSA will be included in future consultation and engagement and

decisions making processes from the DCLG and hope that our members from across the FRS sector will use this document to engage in discussion with us.

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