



Kent Fire &
Rescue Service

Focus on Business

A strategy for helping businesses in
Kent and Medway to stay in business

2013-17

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Introduction

Whether you are at home, at work, out shopping or enjoying a night out, Kent Fire and Rescue's business and fire safety team is likely to have played a part in ensuring you, your customers and your staff are safe.

Put simply, our mission is to work with as many businesses as possible to help prevent fires and reduce risk

This strategy describes how your local fire and rescue service is here to work with you, and support you, in starting and maintaining a successful business in Kent or Medway. Our fire safety work in commercial buildings contributes to a prosperous economy in Kent and Medway. It outlines what we want to achieve over the next five years, and what that means to you and your business.

Our specialist staff use their knowledge of building design and use, laws, regulations, human behaviour and building management to assess the fire safety arrangements in commercial buildings. This helps prevent fires and to limit the risk from fire to your employees, customers and the public. The more we prevent, the more we can use our resources in other areas of our work.

You can always expect our staff to be courteous, professional and knowledgeable. We see the varied 'lives' of buildings from initial design, through commission, occupation, changes of use and sometimes ultimately demolition to make way for a new building. We can help you manage your fire safety responsibilities throughout this cycle as simply and effectively as possible, so that they become part of your normal day to day activities. This way fire safety becomes 'second nature' and almost looks after itself without being a burden on you or your business.

Having made an assessment of your organisation and building, our staff will work with you to maintain or upgrade standards in a proportionate way, generally in the form of simple advice. However as the enforcers of fire safety law in buildings we may sometimes have to escalate serious matters right up to full legal enforcement of prohibition notices if necessary.

Chapter one: Strategic objectives

The Authority has a strategic planning framework that sets out our 'vision for the future.' These are expressed in our aim, objectives and values, which are described in the document that overarches this strategy called the Corporate Plan¹. Our aim is to create safe environments for people to work, stay, shop, be entertained and conduct their day to day business. We will achieve this by putting people at the heart of our strategies and providing support at each stage of your business - from start up, development and also through the more challenging times.

By helping you understand what good fire safety management looks like you can prevent fires and reduce risk. You can also ensure that, if you do have a fire, your staff understand what to do and how to reduce the effects

We want businesses to feel they can approach us for advice and education on any fire safety issue without inviting full scale audits from our staff. If a site audit is necessary, we want to ensure that the timing is convenient to you and does not interrupt your work or productivity. When asked for advice, you can be certain that our response will be professional, impartial, realistic and 'reasonably practicable' in relation to the size of your business.

¹ Kent Fire and Rescue Service's Corporate Plan is available at http://www.kent.fire-uk.org/about_us/plans_policies_performance/corporate_plan-2013.aspx

Chapter two: What is changing and what is impacting us?

There are two primary drivers for Kent Fire and Rescue Service to undertake fire safety work:

- The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 which places a duty on local fire and rescue services to promote fire safety in their area.
- The Regulatory Reform Order (Fire Safety) 2005 which places a duty on fire and rescue services to enforce the requirements of the Order.

In addition there are other laws and guidance documents that outline the expectations and responsibilities of the Fire and Rescue Service. However we also understand economic, social, technical and environmental factors, and aim to be flexible enough to adapt and change to meet new challenges that emerge.

Transition from Fire Precautions Act to Regulatory Reform Order and emphasis on self-compliance: Many of you will remember the fire inspector checking your building against the content of a fire certificate. This all changed when the Regulatory Reform Order brought a significant shift from prescriptive enforcement by the authorities to a regime based on self compliance by businesses. The Government at the time anticipated that well-publicised enforcement and prosecutions would raise awareness amongst the businesses, organisations and people the Order applies to. Though we have enforcement powers, we believe we can achieve most through assistance and support for businesses to achieve satisfactory fire safety. We will enforce, but only when we have to, and only when compliance through advice and education is no longer possible.

Move towards supporting business: We want to achieve awareness and compliance in the business world through advice, education and a lighter touch when suitable. Effective partnerships with businesses can achieve our primary safety aims and bring added benefits to businesses that may not have been considered up to now, such as business continuity planning. By working with businesses we can all avoid expensive court costs which may never be recoverable, whilst reducing the likelihood, severity and business impact of a fire and increasing the chances of the long-term survival of businesses.

The need to work more closely with building owners/managers, other agencies and regulators: We need to act in collaboration and partnership with the owners and operators of buildings as well as partner agencies to promote safe businesses.

We have already worked with some large business premises in Kent and Medway to reduce the number of fires by helping to improve the way they manage their risks. In cases where a fire still occurs, the responses by on-site staff have improved in terms of the procedures they use and actual firefighting, using hand-held extinguishers or hoses when safe to do so.

These early interventions protect people, stop fires developing and ultimately result in smaller production losses, earlier returns to work and fewer fire service resources being needed to deal with the incident. We have also worked with partners in the public sector whose premises tend to contain large numbers of people, such as hospitals and shopping centres, to achieve greater safety by better prevention and management, with similar results.

That is why we think that good safety is good business - for everybody.

We think that managers of buildings can benefit from us increasing our joint working with other agencies and regulators that have an impact on businesses. By coordinating inspections we can reduce the number of working days that businesses have to give to proving compliance, creating more time for their core activities.

Challenging financial climate: With economists predicting austerity and a difficult financial environment beyond 2020, the need to help businesses survive whilst meeting their fire safety requirements has never been greater. Likewise, pressure on public finances means we will have to make even more effective use of our staff.

We intend to streamline the way our staff work, enabling them to be 'on the ground' more of the time. We will invest in ways to allow remote working without the need for repeated attendance at a base office. As increasing amounts of business are done in the evening and weekends we will develop flexible working arrangements to allow meaningful inspections, with other agencies if appropriate, of risk premises such as nightclubs during trading hours. By doing this we will be able to accommodate more types of business support in our work.

A large proportion of fire prevention and risk reduction is simple and inexpensive. The answers to basic issues such as housekeeping are often found in the culture of a workforce or the people that frequently use a building. In the future we want to work with businesses to educate people to make simple changes that reduce fire risk and bring other benefits – switching off electrical appliances, being tidy and organised are basics that can save money, enhance a workplace and stop fires.

Chapter three: Supporting business through education, advice and support

Business education team

Currently, education, advice and support for businesses are often provided 'ad hoc' when audits and other site visits are made by our staff. We currently hold seminars and events to talk to businesses and other bodies responsible for fire safety. These events often cover the general principles and do not provide enough time to deal with individual cases. Most recently, a series of events has been held both to consult with, and provide advice to, managers of commercial buildings about changes in how we respond to fire alarm systems, and the impact that these may have on their staff and buildings.

We have also organised schemes to educate various business types, such as owners and employees of care homes, industrial estates and vehicle repair businesses. We intend to use the data we gather to react flexibly and provide support to certain types of business, if we identify trends in the frequency or nature of fires that happen in them.

As we want your first dealings with us to be on an advisory basis, we will shortly launch a specialist business education unit that will be able to help you by offering simple advice on a practical level. If you need specialist advice, we will provide this too. If we cannot agree on a level of safety we will give you time to present alternative approaches that may suit you better and we will consider them.

There is a legal obligation on you to run a safe business and comply with the relevant laws. Your own fire risk assessment will always be the first step you take to get there. There is a wide range of information available on how you go about this and what you need to do, depending on the size and nature of your business. A fire risk assessment does not need to be a complex document and most of it is common sense. If you want to know more then look at our website first or contact us to discuss what this means for you.

There are specialist consultants that you can commission to undertake this work on your behalf, although ultimately the risk assessment is still yours in the eyes of the law and we are unable to recommend any individual fire risk assessors. Our work with you will centre on you producing a risk assessment that we agree is suitable and sufficient, and you acting in accordance with it.

Starting as you mean to go on – starting a safe business

If you are starting a new business, we want to help you by giving the correct information about what you will need to do to keep you and your employees as safe at work as you are at home. Starting a business is often hectic, involving a vast range of things to consider. We want to make access to the correct information as easy as possible for you. Improved

website information and links, and a single telephone number which can direct you to the right person you need to talk to in our business education unit, are examples of the changes we can make to help you with the challenges of starting a new enterprise.

Staying safe – running a safe business

We want established businesses to run safely by advising on changes you may wish to make, reviewing current policies or procedures, or performing general 'health checks'. We think that how we work with our partners is an important part of maintaining your business. We want to carry on expanding joint working with other agencies such as local authorities and other regulatory bodies so it is easier for you to see the whole picture of what your business is doing or planning. If you have a specific question or proposal it is far better for you to have all the bodies that may need to be involved attending your premises at the same time, or by video conference, to get agreement or comments and resolve any issues that arise.

We want to extend our business seminar programme to offer a range of education from general business advice to addressing specific industry issues.

There are clear benefits in us working with you to run a safe business; the benefit to you of not having a fire also reduces the physical resources we would need to send to deal with one. If you do experience a fire, good fire precautions and training will mean that people do not get hurt and can safely do the most they can to put it out. The building layout, management and fire-resisting features when properly used will limit the extent of any fire and protect your business as much as possible. Businesses need to be mindful of changing risk, as for example, the increased storage of flammable materials on premises may cause a problem and need fire risk assessments to be revisited.

If your business has a fire alarm system it is vital that staff react properly and, if necessary, influence others in the building, such as customers, to do the same. In April 2013 we fully implemented the policy that we introduced in 2012 on how we respond to calls from automatic fire alarms². As over 97% of such calls have not required any firefighting action by us, we will ask people responsible for premises to perform a reasonable amount of investigation into the cause of the alarm. We will send a response to any confirmed fire immediately. Local fire safety offices will also provide advice on this policy and what it means to your specific business.

² As of 2 April 2013, we no longer automatically attend a call from an automatic fire alarm. We will need the building owner to confirm if there is a fire before we will attend. This extends the scheme put in place in April 2012 for daytime hours. For more information on the background to this issue visit http://www.kent.fire-uk.org/your_business/latest_business_news/change_to_afa_policy.aspx

When it all goes wrong – business continuity

Very few buildings can be said to be entirely free from fire risk. In partnership with Kent County Council and Medway Council, we can help you with pre-planning for interim trading arrangements and full recovery should you suffer a fire at your business premises. We want to explain how important it is to plan for recovering from a fire, and what we can do to help you do that, as 60% of businesses that experience a major fire do not survive longer than eighteen months afterwards.³

Changing weather patterns and increased occurrences of flooding can have a similar impact on your business. A robust recovery plan is an essential starting point and will act as a road map during the stressful journey of reinstating a business during temporary loss of premises, for whatever reason.

Support for larger businesses – Primary Authority Schemes

Our business education team will provide guidance, advice and support for all businesses that request it but we anticipate that it will be small and medium sized enterprises that will benefit most from this service. This is because larger businesses are often part of national commercial organisations, chains or franchises. Nationally, concern has been expressed about the consistency of interpretation, application and enforcement of fire safety requirements across different fire and rescue services. The Government has established a 'Primary Authority Scheme' which allows for a large organisation to establish a working relationship with one (Primary) Authority whose requirements will then be consistently enforced across the country wherever branches of the business are located. This has been successfully used by local authorities for many years as part of their regulatory work.

We recognise the benefits that Primary Authority Schemes, and a similar scheme being proposed by the Chief Fire Officers' Association, could offer large businesses. Both schemes were piloted in the first part of 2013, and we expect the Government to announce that it intends to implement a statutory scheme. We expect this to be in place by April 2014, depending on the passage of the relevant legislation through Parliament. As part of the implementation of this strategy we will develop and implement a partnership with one large business which includes the Kent and Medway area as one of their operating bases.

Improved access to safety information for business

We will improve the access to the information which businesses need to start up and continue running safely. Our website will be updated to provide links to the relevant documents and guidance that will help you and your business comply with the relevant

³ <http://www.insight-security.com/fireprot.htm>

legislation. We will look at using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as tools to help you get the information you need more easily.

As part of the formation of the business education unit, we will consider establishing a single telephone number to call for all business fire safety enquiries, where our staff can answer basic questions straightaway or refer you to your local office for more specialist advice.

Chapter four: Understanding the business community

What we know about the number and type of businesses in Kent and Medway

We hold a large amount of information about commercial buildings in Kent and Medway and are about to introduce a new Premises Risk Management⁴ system. This information is constantly changing though, so we rely on local authorities to inform us where new buildings have been built and where existing ones have a change of occupier, use or configuration. Therefore, we are always 'catching up' to reality. If you are moving into a new business premises or changing your existing one, it is always best to tell us as soon as possible. In general terms the risk in larger buildings with high numbers of people is low and has been controlled well over the years. Smaller premises where occupancy and ownership changes more often are more difficult to manage and represent proportionately higher levels of risk.

Engaging with the business community and 'hard to reach' groups

By working with trade associations we want to get our messages to a wide number of businesses. For instance, by addressing a local meeting of a private landlords' association we can reach people responsible for houses in multiple occupation⁵. We have trialled some events like this and had good feedback from businesses. By broadening the field of business sectors we work with, we will be able to target groups that in the past have been difficult to reach to offer education, advice and support.

Recognising pressures which businesses face

We are well aware of the difficulties facing businesses at the present time. Difficult trading conditions can be made worse by the need to comply with different sets of regulations and satisfying various forms of inspections by a range of agencies possibly making multiple visits in isolation. We want to ease the burden by working closely with other agencies to minimise this. How we intend to do this is explained later in this document.

Understanding your expectations: being clear about what we can and can't do

We will use the seminars, visits, social media and as many other communication channels as we can to get a better understanding of what it is that you want and expect from us in terms of a service. At the same time we will be clear about the areas where we can assist and those where we cannot, so our relationship with you is properly defined and clearly understood.

⁴ The Premises Risk Management system will hold all the information we know about buildings, their locations and their use, and any issues which firefighters will need to be aware of should we have to go there in an emergency. It will be provided in the cabs of fire engines, so it is important that the information is as current as possible.

⁵ Houses in multiple occupation refers to houses which have been converted to a number of self-contained flats, and are often found in the private rented sector.

Chapter five: Developing ‘Safer buildings’ - research and development

New building methods, materials and techniques

We know that new building designs, materials and methods are constantly evolving. Timber framed construction, sustainable designs, ventilation, and the use of wide expanses of glass all contribute to different ‘fire behaviours’ and pose different risks to manage. Our specialist engineers work with architects, technical bodies and scientific research centres such as the Building Research Establishment to keep in touch with the latest developments and to ensure such developments are used to the correct safety standards. We will then interpret the complexities of this work into practical guidance that you can easily understand. We will communicate the issues that arise from new materials and techniques to our firefighters so that they are fully prepared to understand and fight fires that occur in newer buildings.

Influencing British Standards

The benchmark for many safe buildings is the standards which underpin their design, construction and management. We understand the importance of making sure we remain up to date with new and changed standards; this allows us to advise you of the appropriate standards to use for your building and ensure the technical knowledge of our staff is current and relevant. We will carry on using our professional experience and expertise to influence design guides and documents published by bodies such as the British Standards Institute.

New safety systems and engineered solutions

Recent years have seen a great increase in the adoption of new fire safety systems and specialist ‘fire engineering solutions’ in buildings. We recognise the need to apply these systems in the design and management of new buildings as they often allow for flexible and economic development, and innovative building design. We will continue to use our technical skills to validate innovative engineered solutions in complicated structures. This will allow us to advise on their suitability in specific applications and challenge their use if we feel they are inappropriate or do not meet the safety requirements of your building.

Chapter six: Partnership working

Working with regulatory partners

If we recognise an issue as one on which we should work with a partner agency, we will discuss and arrange for convenient joint inspections to be made. We think we can help businesses by making more use of good local working relationships with our partners to provide joint assistance.

Joining up internally

We know we can improve how we work with other departments within Kent Fire and Rescue Service, so that we are more effective and efficient. For example in houses in multiple occupation, our technical fire safety team is responsible for common areas such as staircases and hallways, but the living and sleeping space behind each individual front door has to be dealt with by our community safety staff because of the way the Regulations are laid down. We will explore the potential for staff to train in a 'cross-disciplined' way so that one member of our staff can inspect an entire building to ensure the shared parts of the building meets regulations, but also provide safety advice to anyone living in the building.

Chapter seven: Safer buildings

Safe buildings – about the building

We recognise that one of the most important elements to having a safe business is to have a safe building. There are a number of times throughout the life of a building when we can have an influence on this.

Design and planning: The fire and rescue service is only formally consulted about a planning application when there is a need to check that fire engines are able to get close enough to a new building or housing estate to deal with a fire. However, we have for some time recognised that monitoring development proposals and associated planning applications gives us an opportunity to understand when and how buildings in our area are going to change and the impact this would have on the risk profile of the county.

The planning process also gives us an opportunity to engage with those planning new buildings and to look at opportunities for improving the safety, and often the flexibility, of the building or development whilst the plans are still being developed, and long before any formal application for approval is made. We will continue to seek opportunities to work with you at this stage as we believe there is benefit for both sides and that a cost-effective and safer building will result.

We have developed an advice guide ‘Safer Buildings’ which covers a number of areas in the design, development and construction stages of a building where innovative techniques can be used to create a safer building. We have already spent time talking to building developers and local authority planning departments about this and will continue to promote the document to interested parties and those who we think can have an influence on the built environment.

The planning stage can also provide the appropriate time for us to give advice on a range of assisted technologies depending on the use of the building. We feel that more can be done to prevent fires in buildings by the use of design concepts to assist users who may suffer from life changing conditions such as dementia. This issue is discussed more in the Focus on Your Safety strategy, also available on our website.

Building regulations consultation: Local authority building control departments and specialist ‘Approved Building Inspectors’ consult with us to make sure that new buildings and changes to existing buildings have important fire safety facilities incorporated into them. This is a further opportunity for us to influence the safety of a building before it is constructed, and also to work with designers and developers to explore how improvements can be made to the building’s design which offer additional flexibility to the developer, reduce cost and ensure the building is safe to use and suitable for the particular people who will be using it.

Other consultation: There are also occasions when other organisations will consult us about the fire safety arrangements in a building. This includes alcohol and entertainment licensing and more specialist licensing, for example when a shop is storing or selling fireworks. When requested we will provide information to the relevant licensing authority. This may mean that we will come and inspect the building to make sure our information is up to date before we can make our report.

Safe buildings – about building management: Whilst we want to work with and support businesses as one of the main routes to ensuring that buildings have suitable fire safety arrangements and are managed in a safe manner, there are also some occasions when we will need to come and inspect a building. These are described below.

Workplace audit: We have a programme of workplace fire safety audits that we undertake. These are intended as a general building health check that should include all the fire safety arrangements in the building, and your plans for managing the building to make sure it stays safe. We determine which buildings we will visit using our 'risk-based inspection plan'. This means we have made an assessment of those buildings or areas where we think there is a greater risk of a fire or people being injured in a fire.

We will normally book an appointment with you up to six weeks before we plan to visit. When we make this appointment we will explain why the visit is taking place and make sure you know what information we will need you to show us when we arrive. We will also remind you about the appointment two weeks before the visit as we know people running businesses are often very busy and have a lot of competing priorities to deal with.

When we audit your building we will explain what we are doing and discuss our findings with you. The outcome from an audit can vary. If your building has a good standard of fire safety or there are just some minor problems which need to be fixed, we will explain this and then advise you of the actions you will need to take to improve safety and reduce risk. On some occasions we may find more significant safety problems with a building. If this is the case then we may need to use our legal powers to make sure safety arrangements improve and people using the building are not put in danger. We explain later in this document how this process works.

Targeted audit: Sometimes our risk assessments show that there are particular areas of a building or its management which need to be improved. This may happen, for example, if we note there are an unusual number of fires involving electrical equipment in shop premises. In such cases, we may choose to undertake some targeted audits in similar buildings, focussing just on electrical safety.

Post-incident review: If you are unfortunate enough to have a fire in your building it often means that something has gone wrong with the safety management arrangements in the building. We understand that buildings can sometimes be the subject of a deliberate fire, but

often fires are caused by poor fire safety management. When we are made aware of a fire in a business premises we will review the information we have about both the building and the fire, then make a decision on whether we need to make a visit.

Fire safety complaints: On occasions people express concern to us about the fire safety or managerial arrangements in a building. These concerns may come from a partner agency, other regulatory organisation, or members of the public who have visited a building. Our main concern is to make sure that buildings and people using any buildings are safe, so we always take concerns like this seriously and usually visit the affected building within 24 hours. Sometimes we find that the complaint has arisen from a misunderstanding and there are no issues to address in the building.

Where we do find problems we will explain to you what we have found and why they are a concern. We will also provide guidance about what you need to do to put things right. If the problems are significant or place people in immediate danger, then we may need to take more formal action to ensure that people are protected from the risk of fire.

Chapter eight: Ensuring compliance – enforcement

This strategy sets out how we intend to work with building owners, managers, responsible persons and other agencies to make sure that commercial buildings in Kent and Medway are safe for those who work in them, live in them, visit them, or use them in other ways. Whilst the approach we take is one which aims to support businesses and owners of buildings, it is important to recognise that we are the enforcing authority for fire safety legislation so there will be occasions where we need to take a more formal approach to make sure that those responsible for safety in a building comply with their responsibilities.

Fire safety legislation – compliance: We believe that *‘Good compliance is good business’*.

Making sure that your building is safe and well managed means you have taken all reasonable steps to protect the safety of the people who work for you, those who use your building and your business premises. This will help avoid unnecessary interruptions to your business resulting from a fire. In an ideal world, managers and those responsible for safety in a building will fulfil their duties without the involvement of the fire service. However we know from experience that there are times when the conditions in a building become unsafe and informal efforts fail to result in sufficient improvement. There are also occasions when we find buildings with an immediate and serious risk of fire and injury to those who are using it. In both these situations we will need to use the legal powers available to us to resolve the problems and keep people safe.

Better regulation: The principles of better regulation were established in 2007 and are intended to make sure regulators undertake their role in a measured and proportionate manner. We subscribe and work to these principles, which are outlined below with an explanation of how they guide our enforcement work.

Proportionality: We do not take decisions to use formal enforcement powers lightly. Where we do need to follow this route it will be because other options to resolve the problem have not been successful or there is immediate and serious risk to the lives of those using the building. The standards we set and the associated requirements are informed by national guidance documents and accepted best practice. Wherever possible, we will give you the opportunity to present alternative solutions providing they resolve the issues we have identified.

Accountability: When we take enforcement action we will explain our reasons for doing so and what is expected from you in order to improve the safety of the building. Details of our enforcement work are always available, on request, for public inspection. We are looking at how we can improve the availability of this information by publishing it on our website in the future.

Consistency: Whilst the work of the fire service is primarily driven by our focus on risk, the standards we set are informed by national guidance documents and accepted best practice. We regularly exchange information with fire services nationally to ensure that we interpret and apply these standards consistently.

Transparency: We will ensure that businesses understand our approach to enforcement and can openly see records of enforcements we have made in the past. To achieve this we will make our policies and records openly available through our website. In our dealings with you, we will explain the reasons for any enforcement action we take and the issues you need to address in order to make sure your building is safe. We will clearly outline the subsequent actions we will take should you be unable or unwilling to comply.

Targeting: The majority of our audit visits are focused on buildings and areas which our research and professional judgement indicates present the greatest risk to life from fire. We will also visit buildings if there has been a fire or we receive information to suggest there is a specific fire risk in the building. This way we can make the best use of the resources we have available to us and achieve the greatest reduction in risk.

Chapter nine: Using technology

One area which offers a number of potential benefits is modern information technology. We have already looked at a variety of ways in which we can use technology to improve the services we provide to the public and streamline the way we work.

Service users

Many people and organisations approach us for information about the responsibilities they have for managing fire safety, what they need to do to discharge those responsibilities, and for guidance about achieving fire safety in specific buildings.

We already use our website to provide information and guidance for those who are responsible for the fire safety and/or management of buildings. The information we have available is a mix of national guidance documents and our own advice which has been developed over time to support people in understanding what they need to do to make sure their building is safe. It is important that we review and expand on the information available so that it is up to date and meets the needs of those using it. However in doing this we want first to discuss with business stakeholders in the County their requirements and preferences for information to support them in making and keeping their buildings safe.

There are other tools which can support managing a safe building. These include risk assessment templates, guidance for selecting a competent risk assessor, fire safety check lists and forms for recording equipment testing and training. Part of the role of our business education and support team will be to develop these resources and make them available on our website.

In addition to increasing the range and availability of information on our website we will also develop as quickly as we can online booking and contact systems to allow people to book places on seminars, request advice and arrange site visits. This will mean that an increasing number of our services can be accessed 24 hours a day, which will benefit those whose business activities mean they cannot easily contact us during normal business hours.

In addition to businesses, many organisations with whom we work need to submit plans, risk assessments and other documents for us to review. Currently we can only accept these documents in printed format. In the future we will make arrangements for businesses to deposit documents with us in electronic format, speeding up external and internal document transfer processes and reducing the need for costly and inconvenient printing and postage. In cases where plans are amended following discussion or consultation, the benefits of being able to submit revised drawings electronically becomes obvious.

Service provider

We are currently developing an improved system for recording the outcomes of audit visits, collecting building risk data and sharing this with emergency response staff. The primary purpose of the system is to effectively manage our audit and inspection programme, to focus risk control work into the areas where it is most needed, to enable themed working in certain premises types, and to produce information and reports on the overall state of the commercial building stock in Kent and Medway.

This integration allows us to make the best use of risk data, whether it is collected by our fire safety, community safety or firefighting staff. Using a central storage point for this information will make sure that all the relevant information we hold about your building and business is available to our staff, including firefighters, who may attend your premises for whatever reason.

Currently when we visit your site our recording of findings and issues is paper-based, transferred into type and re-sent back to you. The future use of mobile technology to improve and streamline our collection process for audit and risk information and the way in which we communicate that information to you, will reduce the time our staff spend in offices and increase the hours in which they are available to provide the support we want to give to businesses. We are at the start of this journey, but anticipate much progress being made in the next few years as part of this strategy.

Summary

We know that the environment we operate in has and will continue to change. The next few years will be a very challenging period for business. By changing the focus of what we do, we can use our existing skills and expertise to provide support to business and help it keep moving forward in a safe way, from design and start up, and through all its changes. We will make it easier to access information and advice, work more closely with partners to ease disruption caused by inspections, and provide information and education to businesses through new ways of working.

Investment in technology will assist all our business processes and help us share information with the right people in a timely way. We will position ourselves at the forefront of research and development to maintain a high level of technical specialism and influence at national level. However, we remain the enforcing body and will demonstrate the highest levels of integrity and professionalism when we carry out this role. By adopting this approach we will endeavour to reinforce the message that good safety is good business – for everybody.