



Kent Fire &
Rescue Service

Responding to Emergencies

A strategy for helping people in
Kent and Medway when faced
with an emergency

2013-17

Contents

Contents	48
About this strategy	50
Chapter one: Before an emergency	51
Making sure the right resources are in the right place at the right time	51
Reviewing our water supplies	53
Maximising our response model	54
Making sure we respond to the right things in the right way	57
Making sure our systems are robust	57
Ensuring we can still respond	58
Making sure we understand the risks	59
Maritime firefighting	60
Preparing for a major incident.....	60
Preparing our staff	61
Preparing the public.....	61
Environmental pre-planning for incidents.....	62
JESIP	62
Chapter two: During an emergency.....	63
Taking your call	63
At the scene	63
Environmental risk assessments	64
Significant safety events.....	65
Making better use of specialist skills	65
Enhancing how we use information	66
Chapter three: After an emergency	67
Supporting those involved	67
Learning from what we do	68

About this strategy

Responding to emergencies is at the centre of what we do. Over the past few years we have started to make some radical changes to how we deliver our services; however this is only the beginning...

Like other public services we are anticipating tighter financial times for the foreseeable future but we still need to be able to provide an emergency response. It's therefore increasingly important that we adapt to the environment as it changes around us. To achieve this we need to be confident that we are making the best use of resources and investing in the right places.

We respond to the vast majority of incidents in a 'one size fits all' model. Although this has served us well for many years, new research and our professional experience tells us that this way of working may no longer be the most effective way of responding to emergencies.

Our response to emergencies is cyclical. Information gathered after an emergency is used to inform improvements to procedures, equipment or training, which means that we can improve our response in the future. Typically people associate us with fires and road traffic collisions. In truth we respond to a much wider variety of emergencies, some of which are duties assigned to us through the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 or the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (please see www.kent.fire-uk.org for more information on these Acts). We attend other types of incidents because we, the public and our partners believe we are best placed to provide the response, for example animal rescue, fires on board ships off the Kent coast, and water safety. We plan for and test our plans for major emergencies on a cyclical basis, alongside partner agencies, to make sure we are ready for the incidents we could reasonably be expected to attend.

This strategy outlines how we plan to change and improve our emergency response over the next five years. The document is divided into three chapters which address what we do before, during and after an emergency, and how that forms our overall response. This strategy is one of five interlinking documents; references to the other strategies covering personal safety, safety in businesses, workforce issues and caring for the environment are made throughout.

This document is intended to be for our partners, our auditors, interested members of the public and our own staff. Where we have used a technical term, we have defined it in a footnote.

Chapter one: Before an emergency

Our response to an emergency starts long before we receive a 999 call. A huge amount of planning is done to make sure that we are able to respond when you need us. In fact most work to determine what our response should be occurs before an emergency. As financial resources become more limited it's increasingly important to make sure that we do all we can to understand where most of the incidents are likely to happen and what is needed to deal with them most effectively when we get there. The more planning work we do before we get a call, the better placed we are to respond and provide you with the right type of assistance.

Making sure the right resources are in the right place at the right time

Resources refer to our staff, our stations and our equipment, including our fleet of emergency response vehicles¹. In order to respond to emergencies effectively we need to be sure that our stations are in the best possible locations and are staffed by the right number of people, with the right skills. Our stations are currently staffed by crews providing either 'on-call' cover (firefighters who go to their station when we receive a call) or 'positive' cover (firefighters who are already working at a station) or a mixture of the two.

On-call cover in its current form is still relatively new to us. In 2011 we completed a move from the retained duty system, a system where somebody living within a set distance from a station could be employed as a firefighter offering cover at times when they were available, to a contractual on-call arrangement which, for the first time, gave us absolute certainty about the fire engines we have available to respond to emergencies at any given time. At the same time we reviewed the location of our stations and the number of our fire engines through a project known as the Review of Emergency Response Provision (the Review).

The Review was the first step in a more flexible approach to the way we respond to emergencies, acknowledging that what might be right for one area might not be right for another. By looking at risk², demand³ and isolation⁴, the Review determined the right level of emergency cover for an area and the right location for fire engines in order to meet the risk and demand of both the local area and across the County. In February 2012 the Authority agreed the recommendations of the Review as part of its Integrated Risk Management Plan, (titled 'Towards 2020'). This resulted in a decision to close 11 stations and build up to five new ones in more appropriate locations. It's important to note that the Review also recognised that more than one incident can occur at any given time, and the need to provide cover for larger incidents where additional fire engines would be needed. Over the past 12

¹ Our fleet includes fire engines, as well as a range of more specialist vehicles such as boats, 4x4s, off-road vehicles, mass decontamination units as well as response cars.

² Risk is the combination of factors that add up to the likelihood of an incident in an area.

³ Demand is the number of incidents that happen in a defined area over a defined period of time.

⁴ Isolation is the distance of a place or community, measured in travel time, from the nearest fire engine when it's at the fire station and ready to respond.

months we have started to put in place these changes. Ten stations have now closed; we have started building a new station in Ash-cum-Ridley; and we are drawing up plans for new fire stations in Rochester and Medway. Horton Kirby fire station will be closed once Ash-cum-Ridley fire station is operational.

Although we are confident that the flexible model we have is suitable for the County, we recognise that we will need to adapt how we use our fleet, learning to do more with less and to work more efficiently to make the best use of resources. With this in mind we took the opportunity to restructure the service delivery side of the organisation, moving to a model which links stations together into what we call clusters⁵. The new model not only makes it easier for stations to work and train together but also provides a natural cover for sickness, annual leave, and training.

We're still in the early stages of cluster working but have already seen some benefits, particularly since we put in place a central resourcing team. Although we have always moved resources around as demand dictates, the central resourcing team is maximising operational cover by better co-ordinating our firefighting staff and re-distributing them around the organisation in advance of, not just in response to, an operational incident. In essence we are starting to make the principles of the Review part of our daily business by dynamically assessing the risk in an area and ensuring that staff and fire engines are placed where they are most likely to be required.

In order to achieve this we have been developing a number of toolkits which help highlight where adjustments in our cover are needed to give the best possible emergency response. This enables us to best distribute resources as the environment changes around us. This toolkit is used by our central resourcing team for scheduled moves and by our 999 team for dynamic moves in direct response to operational incidents. We are also starting to explore how the toolkits can be used to improve the way we mobilise those staff with a particular set of skills. By considering skills and qualifications when mobilising we will be able to provide you with a better emergency response by identifying the location of the most appropriate people we have to deal with the situation.

In order to provide you with the best possible emergency response it is important that the positive hours firefighters work match times which are more likely to be busy. We're starting to assess whether or not we have the right balance at present and will look to adjust positive hours and on-call times as necessary. Details of how we plan to do this can be found in the **Workforce Strategy**.

In order to respond to emergencies in the best possible way we need to be sure that our resources are appropriate for a local area. Whilst the Review identified locations of fire stations and fire engines, it didn't assess skills and equipment, and subsequently what type

⁵ A cluster is two or more stations which have been grouped based on those that most frequently work together. Two or more clusters form a 'group' for management purposes.

of appliance would be best suited for an area. This is a natural progression from the Review and builds on its approach by acknowledging that it may be appropriate to review the equipment in some areas according to is the type of emergency most likely to occur. A core level of skill and equipment would need to be maintained across the County to ensure interoperability.

By understanding what equipment and how many staff we are likely to need at any given incident of any given scale, we will be able to identify what options are available to us in terms of transportation. We will also seek to understand the geography of an area and the issues we may face in getting resources to the scene.

Traditional fire engines are large vehicles that, whilst useful in many situations, are not suitable in others where it is not easy to manoeuvre or where it is necessary to go off road. As we challenge what we do at an operational incident we will look at alternative ways of getting our resources to the scene, be it a smaller fire engine, an initial response vehicle, a car, or some other suitable vehicle. We will then review if the use of different types of vehicle improves our operational response. We have already started this process and are in the process of trialling off-road vehicles to respond in particular locations where access can be difficult.

Reviewing our water supplies

Although we are currently reviewing how much water is required to deal with different types of fire and the role of different firefighting media such as foam, water will always be an important resource for us. A fire engine can carry a large amount of water but there will always be occasions where this simply will not be enough. We have special vehicles in our fleet that can provide water in bulk to any incident but this is not always the most appropriate option. In order to make sure we can respond to an emergency effectively we need to be confident that we can access additional water supplies should they be needed.

We have detailed maps which show the location of all the fire hydrants in Kent and Medway. These are displayed on mobile data terminals in fire engines. In addition to conducting our own inspections, we have recently started working with Parish Councils to identify any hydrants that have become obscured or are in need of repair. Once a fault is identified we inform water companies (the 'Water Undertakers') who make the necessary repairs. Notifying water companies of a fault is also part of a partnership agreement we have with them, and in return they inform us of any planned or unplanned changes, or loss of supply. Our firefighters are also informed of any faulty hydrants so that we can put in place alternative arrangements.

There are also occasions where we may require additional water to supplement hydrants which is why we spend time identifying alternative sources such as rivers and lakes. After being confirmed as viable the location of the source is added to our database with a

deployment plan so that crews can be made aware of the location of 'emergency water supplies', and what equipment and staff will be required to use them. We hope to be able to make all data on water supplies and their location available via portable hand-held electronic devices.

Maximising our response model

One of the best ways we can improve how we respond to emergencies is to challenge our thinking to make sure that our response model is as good as possible. Our response model establishes what type of resources we send to your call for help and directly informs how firefighters are trained.

We are anticipating some significant changes to our response model over the coming years which will improve how we respond to an emergency. We will move towards a more 'customer-centred' approach, taking actions at the scene which are intended to provide the best possible outcome for those involved for any scale of incident, be it a rubbish bin alight through to a major terrorist incident. To achieve this will be looking at the resources we send to an incident and how they could best be used. We classify incidents into four levels ranging from the most simple to the most complex. Different staff are trained to work at each of these levels and usually this means that more experienced and more senior officers take charge of the bigger and more complex incidents. We need to make sure that we use the right levels of command at the incident, and can quickly escalate it or scale it back as appropriate . Although delivered during an emergency, identifying the best ways to tackle an incident is established long before it actually happens.

Challenging our actions and approach

Whilst we have always tried to improve, during the past 18 months we have started a more structured approach to challenge our operational procedures, asking the question 'could we do it better?' When firefighters arrive at an incident it can be difficult to decide whether to start fighting the fire in 'offensive⁶ mode' or be more defensive in the actions taken and wait for further information and risk assessment. We prefer to work on the principle that we will begin in offensive mode unless there is information to suggest that a more defensive position should be taken. We are identifying and researching all the various ways of achieving the desired outcome at an incident. This includes exploring how equipment, current and new, should be used in order to have the maximum impact, and subsequently how many staff are required at different types of incidents.

Operational incidents can be highly complex, involving a number of variables and can require dynamic solutions to complex situations. By identifying a suite of tactical approaches

⁶ 'Offensive firefighting' means that firefighters actively take steps to put out a fire. This usually involves entering a building using breathing apparatus and getting as close to the fire as they safely can. The opposite of this is where firefighters take a defensive position to prevent fire spread. This would be from outside the building as it may be too dangerous for firefighters to enter even wearing their protective equipment.

we plan to provide our firefighters with the best possible toolkit from which to work. Our firefighters are highly skilled and are best placed to make decisions on which tactics should be used at any incident., By identifying tactical approaches and integrating them into our training programmes we think we will be able to optimise the skills our staff have and give a better emergency response. The role of tactics at both fires and road traffic collisions is something we are continuing to develop and we are studying the approaches of other fire services in the UK and across the World. Details of how we plan to teach tactical approaches can be found in the **Workforce Strategy**.

In addition to optimising the skills of our staff we want to maximise the potential of our resources, so that we deal with every incident as effectively and efficiently as possible – having the maximum impact with the minimum resources. This does not mean we will cut corners; it requires us to explore the potential of our current equipment and to invest in new equipment where appropriate.

Understanding the actions that need to be taken at an incident identifies what skills our firefighters require and informs the development of any training programmes. Although we will be looking to maintain a core level of skill to enable firefighters to be moved around the County, we will be exploring whether all staff need to be trained to the same level in every skill. It may be better to vary expertise according to the type of activity which is more likely to occur in an area, extending the 'one size doesn't fit all' approach further.

Exploring innovations in equipment

Advances in equipment have a huge role to play in determining our future emergency response. As the resources we have available become more sophisticated, the approach we take has the potential to change firefighting tactics significantly.

We are starting to see the impact of this through a new fire extinguishing system called Cobra. Cobra is a high pressure water jet which has the added benefit of being able to cut through the hardest building materials. The tool allows us to significantly change the environment and dynamics of a fire and how it develops. It can also tackle some fires which are hard to reach. Not only does this type of equipment increase firefighter safety, it also helps to lessen the damage to your property, has a better impact on the environment and can reduce the amount of resources, especially water and staff, needed at an incident. Cobra is currently being used by two stations and will be rolled out to another four locations shortly.

As we review our approach we will be considering how advances in technology can be used to improve our response and have a positive impact on the number of resources we need to use at an incident.

Working at height

We have a range of equipment and skills that allows us to work at height. This includes a number of specialist height vehicles that are mobilised to incidents to provide water towers for firefighting, safe working platforms for crews, access to roofs and lighting. They are rarely used to rescue people from fire because improved fire precaution measures in buildings normally allow for the safe escape of any occupants. Our height vehicles are used for both emergency and non-emergency incidents. For example, where we need to use a height vehicle as a water tower at a big fire, we need to get it there quickly, but the rescue of trapped birds in netting or the removal of overhanging structures which are not endangering the public are not so urgent and these non-emergency functions can be carried out in a different way. We are therefore planning to review how we use our height vehicles in the future with a view to making separate arrangements for dealing with emergencies and for carrying out non-emergency functions, while making the most of the latest innovations.

Better use of our staff

Traditionally the fire and rescue service has operated with a minimum crew of four firefighters on a fire engine meeting a set of qualifying criteria, such as driver qualifications, incident command skills and first aid. Consequently we don't send fire engines out with fewer than four people (although other fire and rescue services do). We think that now is the time to challenge this. As our resources become scarcer it's important for us to make the most of what we have. We know that, with technological advances and improved training and safety, some incidents or tasks could be safely dealt with by fewer than four firefighters. By moving away from a prescribed minimum number of staff we will be able to maximise our use of resources and release those resources which are not required to deal with other incidents. We will be able to improve how we respond to your emergency by getting an appropriate number of firefighters with the correct skills there as quickly as possible, and provide additional firefighters as back-up where necessary. We will not be putting firefighters at risk as a consequence.

Not only will this allow us to improve how we use our on-call staff, it will also let us allocate resources in a more proportionate way according to the risk presented by the emergency. Becoming more flexible in how we mobilise our resources will make us more effective and efficient and will undoubtedly result in a better emergency response. Details of how we plan to achieve this can be found in the ***Workforce Strategy***.

In addition to staff, it's also important for us not to tie up vehicles when they are not needed. Currently firefighting staff and engines are mobilised as one unit; this can result in a large number of fire engines being sent to an incident when it's really just the staff that are required. By separating people from fire engines we are looking to put in place a system that sends firefighters to an incident in a vehicle other than a fire engine. This will allow us to keep at base the fire engines thus released ready to respond to other emergencies. To

maximise the potential of this we will also be exploring how we can re-staff fire engines, more information on which can be found in the **Workforce Strategy**.

Making sure we respond to the right things in the right way

Emergency or non-emergency

The fire and rescue service has a wide remit covering a broad spectrum of activity that can range from a large-scale incident in a nuclear power station to an animal rescue. Although we may not always mobilise resources at high speed and on blue lights, we always send resources immediately. We are now starting to question whether or not this is still appropriate.

We do not want to stop responding to your calls for help. We think that there are some better ways we could support you and our partners, and assist the community, but we recognise that a slower non-emergency response may be more appropriate for some types of incidents. We appreciate that this type of approach may feel unsettling at first. However you can be assured that resources will be mobilised to high risk incidents immediately, with some resources reserved for other high risk incidents that may occur at around the same time. To achieve this though we will need to significantly change the processes we follow when taking your 999 call.

Making sure our systems are robust

Reviewing how we take a 999 call

Fundamental to our ability to respond to an emergency is being able to take a 999 call. We currently monitor how long it takes us to answer every 999 call. It is important that we answer your call quickly, but it is more important that we spend time on your call to gain as much information as possible about your emergency. We think the most important thing is how quickly we get the right resources to you and what we do with them when they arrive.

In 2012 we relocated our Control team to Kent Police's headquarters following the cancellation of the Government's Regional Control Centre Project. Moving to the Police's facilities provides us with enhanced resilience for 999 calls and also opens up opportunities for collaborative working and the sharing of information, which we are already starting to explore.

Our current mobilising system (the technology we use to tell our fire crews to go to emergency incidents) is old and due for replacement. We'd like to move to the same mobilising system as the Police. This makes the sharing of information easier and the potential for Police Control supporting our own Control staff much easier. We hope to move to the Police mobilising system by the end of 2014. Moving to a new mobilising system

provides us with a good opportunity to review the way in which our Control team operates to ensure that it is as effective and efficient as possible. It also allows better integration with other systems and toolkits, all of which will allow us to improve how we take your call and mobilise the right level of resources in response.

The Police has introduced a non-emergency phone number 101, available 24/7. This telephone number has been successful in reducing the number of non-emergency 999 calls and provides a single point of contact for people to use if they are unsure whether or not their situation is an emergency. This is something we wish to explore further when we move to our new mobilising system.

While we need to be clear that the only route for reporting an emergency is via the 999 system, we are keen to explore how social media can assist us in emergency situations. With over a billion people now using Facebook and half a billion using Twitter, it's quite clear that social media is here to stay. We think it's important to look into ways to improve how we communicate with the public and how they can get in touch with us.

Ensuring we can still respond

In order to make sure we can still respond to all emergencies even during extreme conditions, we use a Business Continuity Management process. Business Continuity Management is a process that identifies critical functions and how they can be maintained in the event of any disruption. Identifying where we may be vulnerable allows us to develop plans which are then tested to ensure that they are robust and, should the worst happen, will allow us to get back up and running as soon as possible.

We have a business continuity team that monitors anything that can have an impact on our business, including the news, weather forecasts, and situations around the world, to ensure that we know what is around the corner and are prepared for it should it materialise. Near misses are also monitored just in case they become an issue, and are also used to identify the need for improvements to our plans.

Over the coming years we plan to work closer with our partners, providing them with additional support in the development of emergency plans for high-risk sites and helping to make sure they can continue to operate through disruptions such as power cuts or snow. By working together we can ensure that we know each other's approach towards these situations, can cut out duplication of work, and share the expertise that exists within each organisation.

We're also looking at how we can help members of the community and businesses identify simple steps which will help them deal with disruptive situations. Fire or flooding are two of the reasons that small businesses fail, so although not amongst our statutory duties, we think we can provide support by alerting businesses to the benefits of business continuity

management and signposting them to additional guidance. Further details on how we plan to work with businesses and the community in this way can be found in both the ***Focus on Businesses*** and ***Focus on your Safety*** strategies.

We can also provide additional support to our partners due to the way in which we position ourselves to deal with disruption. In order to build resilience into our services we have identified 'strategic' stations, which act as hubs across the County. These stations have been provided with additional resilience, such as bulk fuel tanks and power generators, to ensure that they can continue to operate whatever the disruption. We are also building resilience in our other stations with mobile generators and mobile fuel supplies which can be moved around the organisation as needed. We will then be able to support our partners during periods of disruption by using our staff and vehicles in a non-operational mode to provide assistance with things such as the transportation of medical staff or supplies.

Making sure we understand the risks

Our Premises Risk Management (PRM) database holds details of all high-risk sites in Kent. Local crews periodically assess each site and update the information in the database, with the frequency of visits being based on the severity of the risk at the site. This assessment is used to develop a 'tactical plan' for each of those sites should an emergency occur. This plan includes detailed drawings of the sites, the locations of any hazardous or explosive materials, the location of water sources, and other useful information for fire crews. This information is available in hard copy for all the stations surrounding the site.

All our fire engines are equipped with a device called a 'Mobile Data Terminal', or MDT. This device holds live information on all the sites in the PRM database, so firefighters can get all the up-to-date information they need to deal with an incident at any site. The device also gives firefighters access to other features, such as satellite navigation with live traffic updates, road closures, live updates on new and existing risks, and lots of other information to keep them, and you, safe.

Preparing for the worst

Preparing for things that can wipe out our resources, be it inclement weather, pandemic flu, a major IT failure or a terrorist attack, is some of the most critical work we do before an emergency. Although rare, when they do occur these incidents can have a significant impact, and are likely to generate a very high demand on our resources.

There are different ways in which we prepare for the worst. Not only do we look at the type of emergency response we would provide and how it would be delivered, we also look at what we would need to do to continue functioning so that we can still provide an emergency response. Preparing for the worst ensures that we will be able to continue to provide services even in the worst-case scenario.

Maritime firefighting

The port of Dover is one of the busiest passenger and freight ports in the world, handling 13 million passengers and five million vehicles every year. The English Channel and North Sea shipping routes are some of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. We perceive the threat to life risk along the Kent Coast to be amongst the highest in the UK. We operate an off-shore firefighting team with the capability to respond to incidents involving fire, chemical hazards, and industrial accidents at sea. Following recent maritime incidents, we will be exploring the potential to develop a maritime search and rescue capability using our existing Technical Rescue Team.

We are currently involved in a project to establish an off-shore marine capability involving fire services in France, Belgium, and Holland. This capability is being largely modelled on our current capability and will provide additional resilience for our teams, should an incident occur at sea.

Although we are confident of our ability to provide a quality response, our work with our European colleagues has driven reform and efficiencies in procedures and processes. In the light of this, we intend to review our team size and response model.

Preparing for a major incident

A major incident can be anything from wide-scale flooding to a fire in a hospital. Often they require a large amount of resources and a multi-agency response so it's important that the action taken is well co-ordinated. To ensure this happens, we work closely with other agencies, (e.g. Kent Police, the Ambulance Service, Kent County Council and Medway Council) as part of the Kent Resilience Forum to identify the best way to deal with major emergencies.

The Kent Resilience Forum is a collaborative working arrangement amongst all the organisations that have a role to play in the response to major emergencies. Using national guidance supported by local knowledge, the Forum identifies and assesses the potential risks in Kent. The outcome is a document called the Kent Community Risk Register which is used to prioritise multi-agency planning. The Forum identifies the best way to share good practice and develops tactical plans for dealing with major emergencies. Like our own business continuity process, the Forum then tests these plans by conducting exercises. Co-ordinated training is also organised through the Forum to enhance the way in which all the agencies work together when providing an emergency response.

We regularly carry out analytical work to determine the resources we need in the County, both to cover day to day activity, and to deal with those occasions when there are significant, or multiple, incidents going on. There is always a possibility that we could be faced with an

incident so significant that it demands more resources than we have available. It would not be good value for money for us to invest in additional resources just in case such an incident occurred. Instead, we have formal arrangements with neighbouring fire services to provide us with support if we should ever need it (and for us to provide them with support on the same basis). There are also some more unusual scenarios, where it wouldn't make sense for each fire service to have its own resource. A National Asset Register has been created, detailing all the specialist response equipment around the country, so that whenever we do need a particular item, we know where it is and who to call.

Preparing our staff

We have an excellent training programme in place to ensure that our firefighters are prepared and competent to deal with anything that they might come up against. More information about our training can be found in the ***Workforce Strategy***.

We are changing the way we provide written information, standard operating procedures and operational instructions to our staff. Our new operational policy framework is being developed following a review of operational policy and procedures across all fire services in the South East. This project is putting in place common procedures to make it easier for us to work with colleagues from other fire and rescue services when we jointly respond to an incident. The procedures that are being devised are designed to give firefighters the important information they need at incidents. It will also align with our Health and Safety model which is very important to us, as firefighting can be a dangerous job.

Preparing the public

We provide information to the public to help them to be better informed when emergencies happen. We provide information to help the public prepare beforehand, stay safe during, and recover after, any emergency. If the public know what to do, then not only does it keep them safe, but it makes our job a lot easier too.

We encourage the public to sign up to services such as the Environment Agency's flood warning scheme, and to put in place their own safety measures. Having a working smoke alarm is obviously a must, but we also think homeowners should look at making their home better prepared for other risks like flooding. More information about community engagement can be found in the ***Focus on your Safety Strategy***.

We are working with our partners to make sure that we can get the message out to everybody that needs to hear it when we have something important to say. We are exploring new avenues for communication, such as social media, more of which is explained in the ***Focus on your Safety Strategy***.

Environmental pre-planning for incidents

We have a good working relationship with the Environment Agency and Natural England and this has enabled us to identify areas of fire service activity that may have an impact on the environment, especially when dealing with incidents. This work has helped us plan intervention strategies on those locations throughout the County which are more susceptible to environmental damage, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

We have produced guidance and training that is designed to help our staff understand the need to protect the environment. All operational personnel have received information on reducing environmental damage and there is an active training programme in place designed to enhance environmental assessment by fire officers making operational decisions.

More environmental information can be found in ***Caring for the Environment Strategy***.

JESIP

The Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Programme (JESIP) is a national programme jointly owned by the three blue light emergency services (Police, Ambulance and Fire). The programme is intended to improve the integration and cooperation between the three emergency services, during routine operations through to major or complex incidents, to ensure the response is confident, assured and in place at the earliest opportunity to save life. We will take the outcomes from JESIP and make sure they are embedded in our operational planning and procedures. There are likely to be opportunities to share resources in the future and provide a more efficient service to the public.

Chapter two: During an emergency

During an emergency is when most people have contact with the fire and rescue service. Our aspiration is to make sure we meet your expectations in the service we provide to you, both in terms of how quickly we arrive and what we do when we get there. This section outlines how we respond to emergencies from the moment we receive a call for help up to the point where any emergency action is considered to be complete.

Taking your call

We will be changing how we mobilise fire engines to incidents, responding to those which carry a high-risk in a different way to those considered to be low-risk. We also need to be sure that we are not over-resourcing incidents and therefore reducing the number of emergency vehicles available for other incidents. We can achieve a more sophisticated way of managing our resources by changing how we mobilise them to an incident, tailoring our response to each emergency, so we will be able to send the right resources immediately. To achieve this we will need your help.

We know that the more information we have about an incident, the better our response is. It's for this reason that we will be putting in place a new call-handling approach where, if you ever have to dial 999, we will ask you more questions from the start to determine more accurately what resources are required. We will also try to keep you on the phone as long as possible (provided the phone is in a safe place, of course) preferably until our crews reach the scene. This will also allow us to provide more safety information to keep you safe until we arrive. The more information you can tell us about what is occurring the more we can tailor our response. The questions we ask you will be specific and will be designed to extract important information that will enable our staff to act as quick as possible. But the principle will remain that as soon as we have enough information to send a response to you, we will, and then get more information from you if we need it.

At the scene

Increasing our focus on the casualty

We will be investigating how we can provide a higher level of casualty care and additional first aid at the scene of the emergency, for example ways in which we can provide more help to someone who has suffered burns at a fire to lessen the long-term impact for them and the health service. What is best for the casualty will be at the centre of all our operational procedures as they are reviewed. In the case of fires this may mean we delay or adapt firefighting action to administer first aid.

We will also continue to run the co-responder scheme where on-call staff at identified fire stations respond to life-threatening emergency calls. We have installed defibrillators on all

our fire engines, and will assist the ambulance service with life-critical incidents. We also intend to install defibrillators on our marked response vehicles. Obviously this increases the role we can take in casualty care and, as such, we will be reviewing the standard level of first aid training that our firefighters receive, to ensure the best possible treatment for the casualty.

In addition to putting the casualty at the centre of our processes, we think that we can improve our emergency response by working with our partners, particularly in how we respond to road traffic collisions (RTCs). It is likely that during the lifetime of this strategy, we will trial a jointly-crewed rapid response vehicle with the ambulance service to reduce the time which elapses between a 999 call and casualty care intervention.

The time between receiving a call and medical intervention is crucial. It's important that any casualties receive attention quickly in order to give them the best chance of recovery. Currently, in the majority of cases, the Police or ambulance service will ask us to attend an RTC. The point at which we are called upon varies greatly, and this means that there may be a short period of time where only limited action can be taken by Police or paramedics until we arrive with the necessary skills and equipment, which is why it's so important that we are called to an incident at the right time. We think that, by working with the other emergency services, we will be able to identify what is the critical point for us to be mobilised. It is possible that this will increase the number of RTCs we will be called to where no action by us is required, but we anticipate that this would be outweighed by a better result for the casualty in many of the other cases.

Environmental risk assessments

The importance to us of reducing the environmental impact of an operational incident has increased significantly over recent years, and we are keen to ensure that all decisions about how to tackle an incident take into account the likely impact on the environment. We have introduced a two stage environmental risk assessment which is carried out at all operational incidents to inform the Incident Commander:-

Stage One

The first stage requires the Incident Commander to assess the environmental impact at the incident by collecting all the environmental data and then using this information to devise a tactical plan.

Stage Two

An officer with an enhanced level of environmental training is mobilised where there is an identified environmental risk or where the size and nature of the incident requires it. This assessment process has been based on the Environment Agency's

“Get your site right” document and integrates the EA into the process as advisors. These assessments are designed to identify the potential risks of pollution to air, land and water.

We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that we continuously consider ways of reducing our impact on the environment, whether through our normal day to day activity or the way we manage an operational incident.

More environmental information can be found in ***Caring for the Environment Strategy***.

Significant safety events

Firefighting is a job that carries risks, we know this and whilst we do everything we can to keep our staff safe, we have to accept that there is a possibility of our staff getting seriously injured or even being killed. We know from other services that this has a devastating impact on family, colleagues, and everybody involved, and it can have lasting impact on the Service. We will make sure that if an event like this does happen, we will deal with it professionally, respectfully, and ultimately as effectively as we possibly can.

We have been working with colleagues in the South East, including those who have had the misfortune of going through these events, to develop a process to respond. As part of this process we have developed means for supporting the family, carrying out specialist and impartial investigations, and training personnel. We hope that putting in place these measures will go some way to supporting the family and easing their pain, and ensuring that any investigative burden placed on the Service does not inhibit our ability to carry on with our day to day business.

Making better use of specialist skills

Some incidents require more specialist equipment and skills. We have firefighters who are trained to use specialist equipment or perform specific roles in certain scenarios such as our Chemical Detection Identification and Monitoring Team, and our Technical Rescue Team . As we challenge our operational processes and procedures we will be assessing who is best placed to provide the specialist actions required, and we anticipate making more use of our Technical Rescue Team.

Our Technical Rescue Team provides a local, national and international emergency response. The team are highly trained to deal with things such as unsafe structures, heavy transport accidents, as well as more extreme situations. In the past they have been sent to earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters. Rather than duplicate less commonly used skills and equipment we will be considering the relocation of some specialist functions, such as use of chainsaws, to our Technical Rescue Team. This will not compromise the service you receive. In fact we think it will make it better by drawing on the skills and

experience of that team, whilst allowing them to continue to provide national and international support as required. It also has the added benefit of freeing up our firefighters and fire engines to deal with other more conventional emergencies.

We're also building on our specialist skills to further support other organisations and the community as a whole. For example we offer up our staff with specialist training in flooding and water rescue to, provide assistance and guidance across the UK. Being overweight is a rising medical problem and we are increasingly being asked to assist other emergency services, for example, when an obese patient needs to go to hospital, as we have equipment that helps provide dignity for the patient in difficult casualty care situations. We are also starting to make better use of our search and rescue dogs to provide assistance in situations you may not expect of us, such as helping to locate missing people or people with dementia.

Enhancing how we use information

We place a great deal of importance on our crews understanding the local risks in an area. Whilst this information is invaluable before an incident, it also has considerable benefits for firefighters at the scene, providing them with additional detail that could determine the approach or tactics they need to follow. For the larger, more demanding incidents we already have a prescribed 'package' of information that is made available to the incident commander.

As part of the preparation for the Olympics we, along with all other fire and rescue services in the UK, signed up to a way of sharing information about the severity of activity occurring in any area and at any one time. This was intended to alert other fire and rescue services to anything of concern and also allow us to look for trends in activity. This approach has been very successful and is something we intend to continue using.

Chapter three: After an emergency

Our response to an emergency does not stop once we have finished taking action at the scene. As previously outlined, our emergency response is cyclical – what we learn from our actions is fed back to inform the future development of our processes. This chapter of the strategy describes what steps we take after an emergency to learn as much as we possibly can, and also what we do to support members of the community who have been involved.

Supporting those involved

Emergency situations are traumatic. Domestic fires in particular can have a profound impact due to the attachment people have to their home and its contents. The impact of these events can extend beyond the residents and can affect the neighbouring community. As outlined in the ***Focus on Your Safety Strategy***, as part of our regular community safety programme we provide advice on how to prevent and, should it occur, deal with, a fire in the home. After an incident we increase the scale of this activity in order to reassure local residents. The timescales are determined by the details of the event e.g. did serious injury or a fatality occur, as defined in our post-incident protocol. In some cases we also refer people to our Vulnerable Persons Team who provide more specialist support. Further details of the type of support offered can be found in the ***Focus on Your Safety Strategy***.

Establishing the cause of a fire: In order for people to move on from a fire it's important to understand why it happened in the first place. In the majority of cases the cause of fire can be identified by the officer in charge of an incident. In some cases however, or following a request from the Police, we use our dedicated Fire Investigation and Research Team, who work with Police Scene of Crime Officers, to establish why a fire happened, and gather evidence for criminal proceedings should this be necessary.

Establishing the cause of a fire is also important to help prevent them from happening again, for example, manufacturers of white goods which have been found to be the cause of fire are informed of the suspected fault. It's also important to identify where fires have been started maliciously so that we can notify the Police and work with individuals to help discourage this behaviour. (More information on how we work with fire-setters can be found in the ***Focus on Your Safety Strategy***). Information about fire-setters is also shared with our Control staff and firefighters to inform the type of action taken to calls at relevant addresses.

Although they are rare, fires where a fatality occurred are always treated as suspicious by the Police. Where children are involved, multi-agency serious case reviews are also automatically completed with Social Services to identify any safeguarding issues.

Fires in businesses are subject to a different level of investigation than domestic properties. After a fire our officers will visit any premises to audit arrangements for fire safety, as this is

one of our statutory duties under the Regulatory Reform Order (Fire Safety) 2005. Full details of this process can be found in the ***Focus on Businesses Strategy***.

Dealing with traumatic situations: Our staff are trained in dealing with traumatic situations. For more extreme circumstances, for example those involving death or serious injury, we recognise that this could have significant impact over time and therefore offer our staff a critical incident debrief which helps lessen the long-term impact of these types of incident. This has proved very beneficial for our staff and over the coming years we will explore the possibility of extending this scheme to members of the public using our staff's experience and skills to help people to come to terms with a traumatic experience and limit the impact it has on their daily life.

Learning from what we do

Learning from what we do has a direct link to how we determine our response to emergencies. By understanding what we do well and where we need to improve we are able to adapt to a changing environment and provide the right type of response.

Actions we take at every incident we attend are critically reviewed so we can determine whether we would have done anything differently, or could have done any better. The level to which this occurs however is determined by the scale and severity of an incident. For small uncomplicated incidents a small 'debrief' at the scene is sufficient; for higher impact, more complex incidents a full operational debrief will be completed. The full debrief process involves an independent chair gathering feedback from those who were involved both at and away from the scene. Areas identified as requiring improvement are then tracked through our internal management processes and communicated to all operational staff. Full debriefs can also be thematic (e.g. to establish the impact of new equipment) or can be conducted at the request of a senior officer. For very large incidents we have a 'Kent Resilience Forum debrief protocol' where all participating agencies meet to look at how we could have improved how we did things.

We have supported a number of big events in recent years, alongside partners, as well as having to deal with disruptions and emergencies. Every time we deal with these incidents we learn alternative and sometimes better ways of doing things. In order to deal with large events successfully we have developed infrastructure, such as our Incident Management Centre which was put in place to support our planning for the Olympics. This was very successful and is something which we are intending to continue using and developing for other incidents.

It's important that we recognise that other organisations will have more expertise in dealing with certain events or will have experience of dealing with rare situations or highly publicised major incidents. It's for this very reason that we will continue to learn from other agencies,

particularly other fire and rescue services, and use their experiences to help inform any future development of our emergency response.

Currently we operate a QA process at incidents which sees a more senior officer than the person in charge making an assessment of the scene where considered appropriate. This is done by answering a checklist questionnaire retrospectively. Over the coming years we are looking to improve how we learn from incidents whilst they are occurring. Prompted by the information we gather following an incident we are looking at how an officer can mentor/monitor what's occurring at the scene either on the ground or via desktop. Not only will this further the development of individuals in charge of incidents, it will enhance any QA and debrief processes which are used to help inform the future development of any emergency response.

Incident reporting

The Government requires us to capture detailed information about every incident we attend including how many fire engines were in attendance, the nature and severity of the incident, what equipment was used and whether environmental risk assessments were undertaken. Whilst this is used to help Government compare performance, we use it to inform how we respond to emergencies. This data is used to build profiles of the type of incidents we attend and help understand how all the individual incidents impact on overall cover and emergency response across the County. As this information has a direct impact on service changes it's important that it's right, so we conduct thorough checks on the accuracy of data inputted. We are also continually reviewing the type of information we gather; we will still meet the Government's requirements but we may also collect some additional data.

After the fire survey

Understanding what the public and businesses think about how we have responded to an emergency is an important tool in assessing whether or not we are meeting public expectation. We use an independent research company to compile survey data in relation to the quality of the service we have provided at incidents. The survey only provides us with an indication about customer satisfaction; we don't ask everyone how satisfied they were with our emergency service, because sometimes this is not practical, for example because we do not have an address to write to.

In 2012/13 the survey showed that when taking everything into account nearly all respondents were satisfied with the overall service they received during and after an emergency incident. We are not complacent however, and think we can improve how we respond to emergencies in a number of areas as outlined in this strategy. More information about this can be found on our website