



Kent Fire &
Rescue Service

Focus on Your Safety

A Strategy for helping people in
Kent and Medway to stay safe

2013-17

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Introduction

Kent Fire and Rescue Service's aim is to save lives and reduce risk¹. This strategy is about helping you to prevent emergencies when you are at home or travelling in Kent or Medway. When you get to work, or visit a commercial building as a potential customer, we still care about your safety. How we help to keep you safe in these buildings is set out in our '**Focus on Business**' strategy.

In this strategy we focus on prevention from three types of emergency:

- Fires in the home or outside.
- Road traffic collisions.
- Flooding in the home or across broad areas, and incidents involving water.

This strategy outlines the research and activities that support our aspirations to help you reduce risk in your daily life and stay safe. It sets out our approach for the next four years which will help us determine our annual action plans.

Chapter one describes how we began our prevention work in the mid 1990s. Chapter two describes how we try to understand the communities we serve across Kent and Medway and chapter three summarises this information. Chapter four sets out how we aim to deal with the important issues our research has highlighted through targeted campaigns delivered by specialist teams.

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.

¹ Risk is the combination of factors that add up to the likelihood of an incident in an area.

Chapter one: How our Approach to Promoting Safety Developed

Our approach to promoting safety in Kent and Medway started in 1997 and was called 'Making Kent Safer'. We realised that we needed to stop fires before they started. And to do this, we recognised that we needed to interact with the community and reduce risk among vulnerable people through education. This was an early informal example of an impact assessment². At that time there was no statutory duty³ for us to engage in fire prevention. However we knew this was the right thing to do, so we carried on doing it.

The *Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004* placed a statutory duty on fire and rescue services to undertake prevention work. This was developed further in 2004 when we published our first annual *Integrated Risk Management Plan* (now called the *Safety Plan*). More resources were allocated to prevention work and we developed our first Community Safety strategy. This evolved into a County-wide strategic assessment of risk, with local delivery plans.

We believe this approach has played a significant part in making people in Kent and Medway much safer than they were in 2003/04 (see **Box 1**, below).

Box 1: Positive outcomes from prevention work

- A reduction in all types of fire of 71%. This means 9,764 fewer fires in 2012/13 than in 2003/04;
- A reduction in the number of deliberate fires of 81%. This means 7,718 fewer fires in 2012/13 than in 2003/04;
- A reduction in the number of accidental fires of 49%. This means 2,046 fewer fires in 2012/13 than in 2003/04;
- A reduction in the number of accidental fires in people's homes of 37%. This means 324 fewer fires in 2012/13 than in 2003/04;
- A reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on Kent and Medway's roads of 40%. This means there were 375 fewer people killed or seriously injured in 2012 than in 2003.

² A process by which local authorities assess the actions they want to take against the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, which seeks to stop discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

³ A statutory duty is an action which is specified in law and must be carried out by a particular government body. For fire and rescue services, the statutory duties are to promote fire safety; to prepare for fighting fires and protecting people and property from fires; rescuing people from road traffic accidents; dealing with other specific emergencies; and to take 999 emergency calls.

Community safety is at the heart of what we do as an emergency service. We have a range of services available to help make people safer, which are free at the point of need⁴ (see **Box 2**, below). We focus our resources to reduce the highest risks.

Box 2: Examples of safety services provided

- **Home Safety Visits:** between April 2009 and March 2013 we completed 49,195 Home Safety Visits with 73,781 smoke alarms fitted;
- **Visits to the most vulnerable people by a specialist team:** between October 2010 and March 2013 we completed 5,994 visits;
- **Work with identified 'fire-setters':** between February 2011 and March 2013, we worked with 768 fire-setters, often referred to us by other agencies;
- **School visits:** between April 2009 and March 2013 we completed 4,489 school visits, seeing 273,135 students;
- **Youth engagement:** provided through targeted youth courses using firefighters as role models, such as Firefighting Chance, Climbing Fit and Firefighter Challenge.
- **Access to skills and qualifications:** Our BTEC⁵ youth course has received County-wide acclaim and we will be developing an ASDAN⁶ youth engagement course to cater for those young people who would be unable to attain the BTEC.
- **Arson prevention:** We predominantly deal with young people who set fires as we know we can bring about behavioural change. Adult fire-setting is much more difficult and tends to be a serious criminal offence. Ideally, we'd measure our success in these areas through reduced re-offending rates.

⁴ All the activities performed by Kent Fire and Rescue Service are funded through the collection of Council Tax, or through Government grant. We do not currently charge for any safety services at the point of service.

⁵ [Business and Technology Education Council](#), a British body which awards vocational qualifications (which are themselves known simply as BTECs).

⁶ ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) is a charitable social enterprise whose mission is to create opportunities for learners to develop personal and social skills through the achievement of awards and qualifications and further enhance their self-esteem, aspirations and contribution to their communities. For more information visit <http://www.asdan.org.uk/>.

Chapter two: Understanding our Environment

Using data

We collect and analyse data from all of the incidents we attend. We also use other data to understand and respond to risk. For example, we use a marketing tool to understand how particular social groups tend to behave. By cross-referencing this data with real incidents we can predict which groups of people are most at risk from three types of emergency on which this document focuses (in the home, on the road and in or near water). This information is used to target community safety work to people that might need it.

Working with partners to build a picture of risk

All twelve Community Safety Partnerships in Kent and Medway produce strategic assessments. They set out where the Police and local authorities should target their resources to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. We have supported their development and highlighted the areas where we can help identify and address risks. For example, we have shown there is a link between rubbish fires and other anti-social behaviour. Working with Community Safety Partnerships between 2003/04 and 2012/13 we have reduced the number of deliberate fires by 81%. Further examples are given in **Box 3**.

Conducting our own research

Below are four examples of research which help build a picture of risk in the County:

County-wide strategic assessment: In 2010/11 we produced our first County-wide strategic assessment. This gives a community profile of the people living in Kent and Medway. Firefighters were also asked to think about the risk in their areas and set local priorities to address these risks. The risks identified locally were then added to our assessment. In this way, our research was validated on the ground by those closest to the local community.

Human behaviour: Innovative research into the human behaviour of people who have fires in the home is currently being conducted. This research is a world first as there is, perhaps surprisingly, no research into how people behave in fires at home, but lots for how they behave in commercial buildings. This has already produced some interesting findings and challenges our assumption that people “get out, stay out and call the fire service out”. We now know that often people don’t do this. We are sharing findings as they are produced with other fire and rescue services to shape national campaigns as well as our own. We want to ensure the advice we provide to you is effective and will be followed if the worst happens.

Box 3: Working in partnership with others

Working in partnership is a cost-effective and efficient way of reducing risk. This can be joint research, joint campaigns, or simply talking to other agencies who share the same risk groups. Below are some examples of work which we will continue during the lifetime of this strategy. We will keep the partnerships we support under review, to make sure we are getting the most out of them.

Troubled families: We are working with partners on the Government's '*Troubled Families*' initiative⁷. Troubled families are those that have difficulties and cause problems to the community around them, putting high costs on the public sector. The Government is committed to working with local authorities and their partners to help 120,000 troubled families in England turn their lives around by 2015. The Government wants to ensure the children in these families have the chance of a better life, and at the same time bring down the cost to the taxpayer. We support this aspiration and, as we potentially have easier access to some people than other parts of the public sector, will do all we reasonably can to help troubled families turn their lives around.

The Margate Task Force: We lead the Margate Task Force, which is a multi-agency approach to dealing with significant issues in two electoral wards in the Margate area. The Task Force has recently won two awards for innovation and reducing levels of benefit fraud.

...**"And Fire"**...: We chair important groups which are much broader than you might think that a fire and rescue service would be involved in. We do this because we have an important role to play and can make a significant contribution. But we know we need to do more to raise our profile so that we become one of the first organisations thought about as a preferred partner. For example we chair the Kent Community Safety Team⁸ and the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Group⁹.

⁷ For more information on the Troubled Families programme please visit

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-troubled-families-turn-their-lives-around>

⁸ The Kent Community Safety Team comprises Kent County Council, district councils, Kent Police, Kent Probation Services and Kent Fire and Rescue Service.

⁹ The Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy Group comprises Kent County Council, Medway Council, district councils, Kent Police, some voluntary sector organisations and Kent Fire and Rescue Service.

The ABOUT toolkit: The strategic assessment for Kent and Medway and local plans include a detailed profile of the local community. These profiles identify the highest risks in an area. However, it is difficult to maintain this quantity of information and it is recognised that it can be almost too much information to take account of at a local level.

We are developing a new tool called ABOUT (the Area Based Overview User Toolkit). This will provide managers and staff with a wide range of area-based data and supporting analysis to identify and assess risks. It will provide staff with an interactive tool which will enable them to select geographical areas and types of data and will always be kept up to date.

Meeting your changing needs: We also think there are particular times in your life when you may become more vulnerable and may need our advice or one of our services. This could be if you have experienced having an emergency in your home, like a fire, or even a near-miss in the car which makes you want to seek help or reassurance (see **Box 4**).

Box 4: The times in your life when the Fire and Rescue Service can influence behaviour

- Early in your education when you are in key stages one and two;
- At key stage four, when you start to think about learning to drive;
- When you leave school and choose to live more independently;
- When you start to drive;
- When you have children;
- When you buy or rent your home;
- If you have specific needs or a disability;
- As you get older or become infirm or less able to look after yourself;
- When you live alone.

Chapter three: The Issues in Kent and Medway

We have identified the following issues:

An ageing population: Life expectancy and the proportion of the population over 65 are both increasing with a related rise in mobility problems and disability. People are being encouraged to live independently rather than relying on care provision and this can make some of these people more at risk from fire.

Mental health issues: Research suggests that the number of people with mental health problems is also increasing. We are the lead fire service on a national project responding to the Prime Minister's dementia challenge. This project intends to ensure that we all raise the awareness of the fire risks in the homes of people with dementia, and provide effective prevention advice for families and carers. We will also provide training for staff and our elected Members so that they can spot the early signs and give advice when in people's homes or in meetings with constituents.

Deprivation issues: Our research shows that the risk of fire increases with a rise in deprivation. In addition, there is a growing transient population in the little-regulated private rented housing market and some of these properties are in poor condition. Recent joint operations with local housing authorities have helped make some of these buildings safer but we are concerned that we do not know the full scale of the problem. There are also some vulnerable people who live in otherwise affluent areas, who are 'property rich but cash poor'. We believe these people are also at greater risk from fire than their neighbours.

Domestic abuse: Recent tragic cases have shown us how fire can be used as a weapon. Domestic abuse sadly seems to be an increasing issue and when it involves fire the outcome can be devastating. We will work with the community and partner agencies to help those at risk from arson.

Road safety: More traffic is likely to be on the roads in the future, although this in itself may not translate into more accidents. However, we have identified that young drivers are at more risk of being involved in an accident. The main causation factors are inexperience in assessing and reacting to risk, and passenger distraction.

In August 2013, the majority of our community safety resources were used for fire prevention (around 50%), with another 45% going to road safety and the remaining 5% to water safety, a relatively new area for us. This balance may change over time.

Chapter four: Building Safer Communities in Kent and Medway

We know that the consequences of a fire, road crash or other emergency can be severe and that is why we put so much effort into prevention. Our aspiration is that by 2020 there will be zero deaths and far fewer injuries from fires. We know this will be difficult to achieve and maintain but it shouldn't be impossible. In 2010/11 nobody died in an accidental house fire in Kent and Medway but sadly most years that is not the case. Although in recent years the number of people injured each year in fires has not reduced significantly we are encouraged by the fact that the severity of injuries has reduced. How we intend to improve the way we respond to emergencies is covered in more detail in the ***Responding to Emergencies*** Strategy.

Our community safety initiatives have had remarkable success over the last fifteen years, but the way we have delivered that service has not been reviewed for some time. As less and less is spent by central government on fire and road safety initiatives, we have a greater responsibility to ensure that work still continues in Kent and Medway. This strategy sets out our priority areas.

To achieve our priorities we must engage effectively, and any activity we do is informed by research. Delivery to the public will also be structured according to this research, to make sure it is targeted, efficient and has measurable value to the people of Kent and Medway.

This way of working is reflected at an organisational level, where we will have separate teams for commissioning and service delivery, recognising the specific skills required for the two areas. The commissioning team will focus on research and development, with service delivery staff taking the campaign, message or product into the community.

Alongside this we will have staff focused on working with the most vulnerable people in our communities, who for reasons of health, deprivation or circumstance are at heightened risk. We'll also make sure all our staff are clear about what we need from them so they can help us achieve our priorities for people in Kent and Medway.

Engagement: Our prevention work in the community has often involved passing information out to the public in a relatively passive way. We want to make better use of these opportunities to engage and find out more about public perceptions, attitudes and behaviours so we can tailor our communications to assist people to help themselves and stay safe. We want members of the public to be more risk-aware so they can make informed choices about keeping safe. To achieve this, we will improve engagement by:

- agreeing priorities for engagement activity based on detailed analysis of incidents and risks.

- having clarity on how we gather and use existing intelligence to inform our understanding of particular groups, issues and risks.
- using this knowledge to commission engagement plans.
- setting a corporate approach to measuring and evaluating our engagement activity.
- ensuring staff are clear about their role and have the skills and support to be effective.

We will always aim to use the most efficient and cost-effective way to reach local communities. This will often mean working with partners such as health or local authorities. Where others have more direct access to people at most risk – for example elderly people with mobility problems – we will actively seek out ways where we can work together to promote our safety priorities.

We will also continue to respond to the constant shifts in the world of technology, which offers a huge breadth of opportunities of means to communicate. While online communication is usually associated with the young, older people are increasingly preferring to access public services through these methods, and it's essential that we monitor and react to these changing behaviours.

Though we will generally use our own staff or volunteers for face-to-face engagement work, if there is a particular need for specialists, for example with a particular risk group, or we need extra support for a short term project, then we may look to work with or commission other organisations. An essential part of any such work would be pre-agreed outcomes that can be measured and evaluated.

Keeping in touch with local needs and looking ahead to future risks: Over the next five years we will keep refreshing what we know about the population of Kent and Medway, as risk can change over time. We will monitor the success of our engagement and campaign work and revise our plans when necessary. And when risks change, or new issues arise, we will develop new work based on detailed research into the group at risk.

Customer service: We want to provide the best possible service to anyone who needs to contact us with a query, whether by telephone, in writing or online. We are developing our website and increasing our use of social media such as YouTube and Facebook to provide safety advice and information to the public.

By providing simple and informative step-by-step guides, often in the form of short films, we can offer alternative ways to share our safety messages. This is important not only to assist those people with specific needs, but also as we know that people don't all absorb information in the same way. It's sensible for us to make our information and services available through as many sources as possible, whether that's face to face, through the media or through promotional materials.

The most cost-efficient way of handling queries is online, and this also provides a service for businesses and the public who are seeking information out of normal office hours. We will increase our use of features such as 'frequently asked questions' and online forms. We are also keen to improve how we handle general (non-999) queries. We now use a single-number telephone system, and have a centralised call handling team for non-urgent enquiries. We will develop this function further in the first year of this strategy.

The last thing we want is for people to go through the distress, disruption and potential tragedy of a house fire. But when this does happen, we want to know whether we delivered what the victim needed. We measure this using our After the Fire survey, which we use to improve our services and how we respond operationally. We will also look at research being carried out across the world to ensure we give people the latest and best information on how to keep themselves safe.

Delivering our safety initiatives

Targeting home safety visits: We will continue to provide free home safety advice for all, and specific home safety visits for those most at risk. These include vulnerable elderly people, families with children under five and people with mobility difficulties.

The percentage of people we visit with our home safety service who are 'above average and well above average' risk is just over 50%. We want to increase this so that in the future around 70% of our visits are to people with an above average risk of having a fire in their home. Partner agencies equally target vulnerable households for similar issues. This provides an opportunity to work together to provide common safety advice. We will also work closely with Social Services teams in Kent and Medway to help reduce risk from fire amongst their clients. This may include very serious cases involving children suspected to be at risk of abuse. Our specialist vulnerable people team have the skills and training to provide this support.

Another area that can lead to death in the home is carbon monoxide poisoning. We currently supply carbon monoxide alarms to those vulnerable people who would benefit. However, we will be reviewing the advice we give about this, and to whom.

Delivering education: We have been very successful over the years in developing a popular education programme for children of all ages. We have undertaken 4,489 school visits, seeing 273,135 students, between April 2009 and March 2013. We will develop this work and look to have more robust evaluation for the future.

Our primary school programme focuses on home fire safety. Our secondary school programme focuses on arson and criminal damage from fire as well as road safety. We will review what road safety education we provide in schools and at our new road safety centre at Rochester.

We are building a new specialist road safety centre next to our new fire station in Rochester. The centre will provide high quality road safety education in an interactive style. It will initially be targeted at school and college students but in the future could be used for a variety of different initiatives. The centre will provide an auditorium, themed learning zones and interactive installations. The learning ethos will encourage students to think about their actions and how the decisions they make could impact on themselves and others. In the future we'd like to share resources with road safety partners, and be commissioned to undertake driver diversionary courses¹⁰.

Our road safety work focuses on young drivers as our research shows they are the group most at risk of being killed or seriously injured. We have staff with strong communications skills for engagement with young people and we will utilise their experience in the centre as well as developing a number of volunteer roles.

Our vision is that the centre will become the hub for high-quality road safety education, will become self funding and will have a significant impact in reducing death and injury on the roads. We will measure how well we are doing by measuring the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads in Kent and Medway, and assessing into what age groups they fall. **Appendix 1** provides brief details on some of our current road safety initiatives.

Helping you during and after an emergency: Knowledge gained through the human behaviour research project has identified that people that have a fire in their home don't follow the advice of 'get out, stay out and call the fire service out'. People have a strong inclination to try to save their pets or personal possessions, and use the gap between making a 999 call and the arrival of a fire engine to go back into their home. Therefore, our staff who take 999 calls will try to keep callers on the line so we know they are safe and to get more information to help the firefighters travelling to the incident. We will continue to measure how quickly we answer calls, and how quickly we then dispatch a fire engine or other vehicle to the incident. We will also assess how effective our work at the incident was through our quality assurance process, which is described in the ***Responding to Emergencies*** Strategy.

Having a fire in your home is very distressing, and we think we can play an important role in supporting people afterwards, as well as dealing with the fire itself. We know that we can provide greater post-incident support and we intend to explore how we can use our volunteers to provide this service to people who suffer a fire to help them recover and return to normality. We also want to look at how we support the rehabilitation of people who suffer fire injuries working with the voluntary sector. We will also continue to work with the British Red Cross to provide emergency clothing and shelter at incidents when required.

¹⁰ Driver diversionary courses are often used as an alternative to penalty points being added to driving licences for offences such as speeding.

Water Safety: In 2000 the World Health Organisation estimated that over 400,000 people drowned, which makes it the second highest cause of unintentional death globally after road traffic collisions. In the UK 420 people drowned in 2010. We rescue people who have got into difficulties in and around water. We have produced a water safety plan that identifies the work we undertake to prevent deaths and injuries.

This is a relatively new area of preventative work for us and research shows this is an increasing risk with more people using inland water areas for recreation. The risk peaks in the summer and we incorporate water safety messages in our seasonal summer campaign targeted at schools and youth groups.

We will know how successfully we are preventing incidents like these by measuring how many incidents we attend, and what the outcome was. Our aspiration is that by 2020, from the incidents we might reasonably be expected to attend in an emergency, there will be no fatalities and far fewer injuries in water-related incidents¹¹.

Being a role model in the community: We work with partners across Kent and Medway to tackle some of the most challenging issues facing local communities. We are able to use the advantage of the high level of public acceptance that fire services enjoy to reach out to communities and groups, including young people who might be resistant to other agencies. In districts where a partnership project exists there has been a reduction of up to 35 per cent in reported anti-social behaviour, young people going off the rails have gone on to further education and full time employment, and vulnerable people are safer in their homes.

¹¹ This aspiration is deliberately worded as we do not attend all drownings. The Police have their own capability to deal with such incidents and where they arrive first at the incident, might choose not to request the attendance of the fire and rescue service.

Appendix 1: Our Current Road Safety Products

Our aspiration is by 2020 to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured in road crashes by 33%, and the number of children killed or seriously injured by 40%, compared with 2004-08. Every year over 500 people are killed or seriously injured on the roads in Kent and Medway. Through our prevention work this number is steadily declining.

Three of our road safety initiatives, Licence to Kill, RUSH and Biker Down, have received national awards. We want to build on these successes. We are active members of the County-wide casualty reduction group and alongside our partners we focus on young drivers and people that ride motorbikes or scooters. Cyclists are also a high-risk group, and we support our partners in the work they do to reduce injuries and deaths of cyclists across Kent and Medway.

Our research into young drivers is being used to shape our future interventions and we are developing new approaches to reduce the numbers of young people killed or seriously injured on Kent and Medway's roads. For example:

- We are buying a 'hot hatch' car which we will use as an engagement tool mainly with young male drivers, as a means of giving safe driving tips.
- We will adapt a fire engine as a mobile exhibit that provides education on the equipment we carry for road traffic collisions.
- Our research has also told us that parents have a huge influence on the driving styles and behaviours of their children. We are developing a scheme called 'Drive4Life' which involves educating parents and children in safe driving, driving laws, safe and properly maintained vehicles and ways to reduce risks as a driver or passenger.
- There has recently been an increase in the number of scooter or moped users. This increase has not just been amongst young people, but also older men who use them to reduce their transport costs. We are developing a safety programme to focus on scooters and mopeds which we will use in schools, with businesses like fast food/takeaway delivery services, and the 'driving business safely' initiative, and also for pleasure riders. This is because scooter or moped users appear to be at significantly higher risk of being involved in an accident on the road.

We will know how successful we are in preventing road collisions by measuring how many incidents we and our partners attend, and what the outcomes are. We will also measure the impact of our road safety initiatives through feedback from people who attend our road safety initiatives and our road safety centre.