

Our rural plan



Kent Fire &
Rescue Service

together

prepare • act • protect



Foreword

Welcome to the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority's Rural Plan 2025 to 2029.

This is the first-time we have written a rural plan, which brings together work we have been doing for years in our countryside. It also outlines what we will do in future to meet the needs and risks faced by communities in the countryside, and ensure our services are there for everyone.

We spend your Council Tax on delivering a range of services to help keep you and your family safe. We will continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of our customers, to build a safer future for Kent and Medway.

Over the last five years, we have published a ten-year analysis of potential issues which may impact the people of Kent and Medway, along with a more detailed summary of risks, and a four-year action plan.

This year, we are seeking your knowledge and consent to the services we want to deliver to support our rural communities.

To see more information on how we develop our plans, visit **www.kent.fire-uk.org/publications**

Thank you.

Cllr Brian Black
Chair of Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority



Introduction

The aim of this plan is to support our rural communities in meeting the immediate challenges we face over the next four years. We will achieve this by:

- Reducing the number and impact of fires and other emergencies in rural areas through targeted prevention and protection activities.
- Making sure we have dedicated wildfire response teams ready at key locations, with the right vehicles and equipment to reach incidents in difficult rural areas quickly and safely.
- Working with local people, landowners and other organisations to manage green spaces, helping to stop fires from reaching homes and businesses.
- Enhancing the resilience and capability of rural fire stations and our colleagues.
- Improving the skills and equipment of our firefighters and specialist advisors to tackle wildfires and other outdoor fires.
- Helping people to prepare for and recover from emergencies within rural communities.
- Minimising the environmental impact of fire and rescue operations in rural settings.

Understanding the issues facing rural communities

Kent is a diverse county made up of large urban areas, isolated rural communities, and a long coastline. Approximately 85% of the land in Kent and Medway is classified as rural, with one in three people across the county living in a rural community, and 40% of our businesses based in rural locations.

The geography of Kent sees different risks across the county, which include:

- Isolated communities, which can reinforce pockets of intensive deprivation, with many rural areas disconnected from economic opportunities available in the rest of the county.
- Many rural areas have a higher proportion of older people, than in urban communities. People living with mobility or cognitive impairments are more at risk of injury or death from fires.
- A large rural road network, where we see many road crashes, injuries and deaths.
- The rurality of Kent means we have a large agricultural community, with large numbers of seasonal workers living in temporary accommodation.
- Increased demand for water due to a growing population. This, coupled with aging water infrastructure, has resulted in a less reliable supply from fire hydrants.
- Large areas of inland waterways, where we can see deaths from drownings.

How we provide fire services changes a lot depending on how many people live in an area. Our data shows there are fewer incidents in the countryside, but when they do happen, it can take us longer to get there. 26% of our incidents are in rural areas. Appendix 1 gives a summary of how we define rural and urban areas.

Urban and rural areas have different risks, and we use these risks to work out what services we need to offer and how to reduce risk. In urban areas, we have full-time firefighters who are at the station, ready to go right away. In rural areas, we have on-call firefighters who leave their homes to get to the fire station before heading to the incident.

We know that how fast our fire engines arrive is what our customers value most. Several factors determine the severity and outcome of an incident. The time taken for firefighters to arrive on scene is one of these.

Last year, we asked for your opinion on changing how we measure fire engine response times. Instead of using a county-wide measurement, we suggested having separate targets for rural and urban areas. This wasn't about changing how we respond or where our fire stations are; it was simply about measuring our response times more accurately so we know how long it will truly take us to reach people in an emergency. More than 1,800 people responded to our consultation, and 60% of them agreed with our proposal. Appendix 2 gives a summary of the number of incidents in rural areas.

We're dedicated to overcoming the logistical challenges of effective emergency response in rural areas. We will continue to invest in specialist vehicles that are designed to help our firefighters reach incidents in hard-to-access locations. This ensures we can provide the quickest and most effective assistance possible, no matter how remote the emergency.

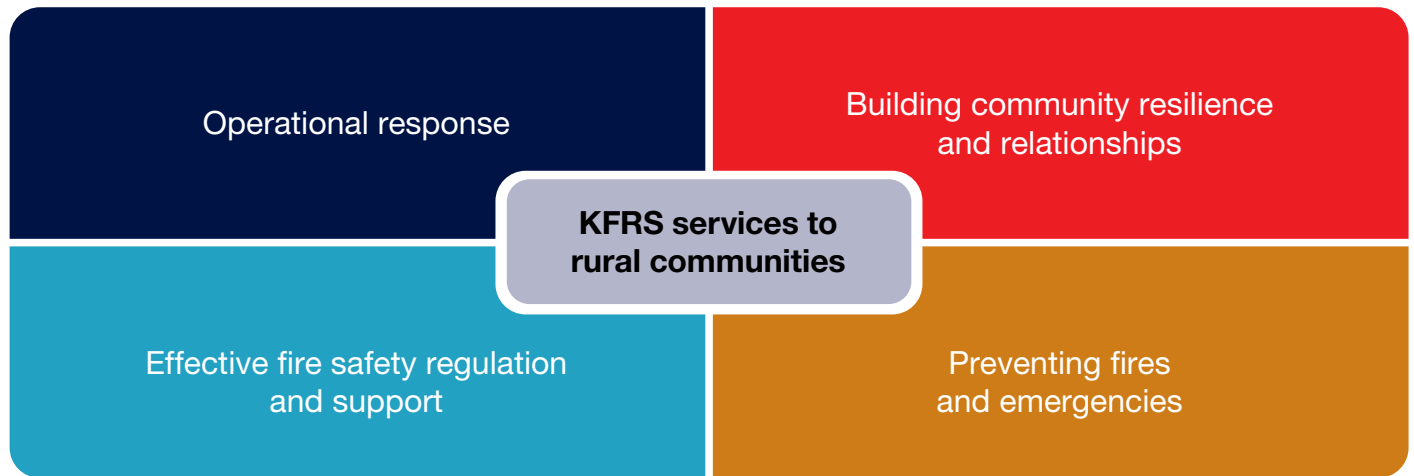
- Emergency – urban – within 9 minutes on at least 75% of occasions
- Emergency – rural – within 15 minutes on at least 75% of occasions*
- Non-emergency – within 30 minutes (regardless of location)



* Urban and rural areas will be based on the Kent and Medway rural urban classification at output area level, published by the Office for National Statistics: KFRS Classification Office for National Statistics Classification

The services we provide to our rural communities

Our Building Safety teams support businesses to be fire safety compliant. Our prevention teams carry out home fire safety visits, education programmes, community safety open days and work to understand our communities. We also work with partners to build community resilience and preparedness to support people living in the countryside. We place extra focus on homes and businesses where people and communities are more isolated and may experience longer travel times for fire engines. We have dedicated rural teams in place and hold events at our fire stations and in other community locations.





Building community resilience and engagement

Community resilience is the ability of a group of people living in the same area to work together to prepare for, respond to, and recover from, challenges or emergencies. These challenges can be natural disasters like floods or storms, or human-caused events like economic downturns or pandemics.

What we do to support community resilience:

- Villages across Kent and Medway are encouraged to complete emergency plans, which identify volunteers, resources and key partners who may be able to offer support.
- This work is co-ordinated by the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum (KMRF), which brings together emergency services, local authorities and other key partners like water companies and the Environment Agency. We support the KMRF and KALC (Kent Association of Local Councils) to build community resilience.

New actions to deliver our plan:

- Develop new partnerships with rural groups to better understand the risks facing people living and working in villages and small towns and helping to put plans in place to address the risks.



Effective fire safety regulation and support to rural businesses

Businesses in rural areas are really important to our local communities. They provide jobs, places to shop, and opportunities for fun and tourism, all of which help bring people together.

We want to help these businesses stay safe from fire. We do this by talking to business owners and giving them information to help them meet fire safety rules and standards.

We focus our efforts on businesses where fire could have a bigger impact. We use a process that flags buildings with a higher chance of a serious fire, making sure that businesses in small towns and villages will be priority areas for our help.

Over the next three years, we will prioritise our work – first, by risk category, and then by urban or rural categories. This means we will prioritise rural areas because of the time it may take a fire engine to reach a business in the countryside.

Combined risk category	Description	Intervention	Priority for intervention
Very high and high	Known highest risk buildings only	Regulatory audit	1. Rural hamlets and isolated dwellings 2. Rural village 3. Rural town and fringe 4. Urban city and town 5. Urban major conurbation

What we do to reduce the impact to rural businesses:

- Inspect business premises to make sure they have appropriate fire precautions in place.

- Campaigns to promote fire safety awareness in business premises.
- Provide talks and information to help business owners in smaller towns and villages to understand fire safety legislation and how they can have a fire safe business.
- When needed, require businesses to make changes to their safety arrangements, or in the most serious cases, prohibit the business from using part or all of the building.
- Give firefighters information on potential risks within a building or a site.
- Carry out a programme of exercises so that the crews can test emergency response plans.
- New actions to deliver our plan:
 - Increase our business engagement, working with small business groups and rural organisations like the National Farmers Union, to improve awareness of building safety legislation and responsibilities for business owners.
 - Carry out detailed building surveys on complex rural buildings to help firefighters respond to incidents.



Fires in rural homes

In rural areas, we have a rich diversity of housing, ranging from centuries-old timber-framed houses, thatched homes to many mobile homes and caravans.

Each building type presents its unique challenges, with some occupants more vulnerable than others. In rural areas, we also see additional challenges where many homes can be isolated, along with not having suitable water supplies to extinguish fires quickly.

We look to reduce the risks of fires in the home through:

- Campaigns to promote safer behaviours across a range of fire risks, including cooking, chimney fire safety and having bonfires.
- Our home fire safety task force and local crews completed 5,000 targeted visits in rural areas last year. They prioritise high-need households, providing advice, installing smoke alarms, and making referrals.
- Maintain fire hydrants through a dedicated water team and using volunteers to report hydrants which are defective.

New actions to deliver our plan:

- Provide tailored advice to customers living in isolated areas on what they can do to prevent fires.
- Develop targeted prevention campaigns to promote fire safety in rural areas.



Supporting farmers, agricultural businesses and workers

Fires in barns, silos, or farm equipment are common and can require lots of fire and rescue resources to extinguish. These buildings often house flammable materials like hay or grain, which can make fires intense and dangerous.

Many rural farms store hazardous chemicals like pesticides, fertilisers, or fuel, which can pose significant risks during a fire or spill. Agricultural machinery can be a cause and victim of fire due to mechanical issues or friction, especially when involved in harvesting crops in hot, dry conditions. This can have a big impact on farms and the local community.

We also support the rescue of many animals in rural areas, including livestock and wildlife, where they are trapped or injured following accidents or disasters.

During the summer months, we can see seasonal workers living in caravans or temporary accommodation, often where English is not their first language. The number of fires in caravans is low, but where they occur, the fire is likely to be severe.

What we do to reduce the impact:

- Provide fire safety advice to farmers and agricultural businesses on how to prevent fires starting.
- A specialist trained personnel and an animal rescue unit to support rural communities with saving wildlife and livestock.
- Use drones to help us make quicker, more informed decisions when tackling fires at farm buildings.
- Work with partners to help report issues such as fly tipping that can result in rural incidents.



- We work with farmers through the National Farmers Union (NFU) to make sure emergency water suppliers (EWS) are compatible with our firefighting equipment.

New actions to deliver our plan:

- Support farmers to identify potential hazards to firefighters.
- Develop site specific plans, where the risk requires it, to plan our response to fires and put in place measures to reduce the severity of a fire.
- Work with partners to reduce risks, particularly deliberate fires and anti-social behaviour in unoccupied, derelict buildings.
- Identify water sources to help firefighters to quickly extinguish fires.
- Work with farming and local community groups to increase awareness of fire safety issues.



Wildfires

Our rural communities are those that are most at risk from wildfire, with large areas of dry grass, scrubland, and woodland. Wildfires can spread rapidly, especially during hot, dry conditions.

Fires in fields and woodland close to homes can result in property damage and the need to evacuate residents. Water supplies in rural areas can often be more limited in both coverage and the amount of water available.

Wildfires can also be difficult to reach due to rough terrain, limited road access, and the fact that they can be spread over a large area.

What we do to reduce the impact:

- Work with landowners, partner agencies and communities to better manage green spaces, reducing the risk of fires spreading to homes and other buildings.
- Carry out wildfire awareness campaigns with people who live in or visit the countryside.
- Providing guidance on best practice and safety for controlled burns.
- Ensure the latest information is on our website to support rural communities.

New actions to deliver our plan:

- Engage with land and property owners to help mitigate the impact wildfire has on communities through the Firewise UK initiative.
- Develop and implement a wildfire prevention plan aimed at reducing the likelihood and impact of

wildfires starting (e.g. geographical areas of risk, malicious ignition, discarded glass, fires in the open etc).

- Work with agricultural leaders (including National Farmers Union) to understand the scale of the damage they experience and how we can better support rural communities.
- Improve information sharing with partner organisations and communities to better manage wildfires that might impact on homes. For example, by improving preparedness and land management to reduce the risk of wildfires spreading to buildings and other property.



Flooding (water safety)

Rivers or streams in rural areas can quickly rise during heavy rainfall or melting snow, flooding nearby areas and roads. Floods may be sudden, and rural communities may be particularly at risk, for example being cut off due to limited road access.

What we do to reduce the impact:

- Work with partners to identify vulnerable customers who might require additional support during flooding.
- Support agencies in pumping of water away from properties, minimising damage.
- Supporting partners through the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum (KMRF) in the logistics associated with a flooding event, building stronger community resilience against future incidents.
- Work with partner agencies to raise awareness of flooding and inland water safety through public-facing campaigns.

New actions to deliver our plan:

- Work with water safety partners to devise targeted programmes, campaigns and materials to help people living in small towns and villages with flooding.
- Making sure we have the right water rescue equipment in the right places.
- Review our rescue methods and training, specifically for rural water incidents.

**ROAD
CLOSED
DEEP WATER**



Road traffic collisions (RTCs)

Approximately 45 people die on Kent's roads each year. A lot of these deadly crashes happen in the countryside, especially on single-lane roads where the speed limit is 50mph or higher.

Rural roads are usually longer and more isolated. This means it takes longer for emergency services to arrive, which can delay crucial life-saving help. You'll also often see large farm vehicles like tractors on these roads, and they can be involved in collisions.

Finally, in rural areas, there might be fewer people around to witness a collision. This makes it harder for fire and rescue services to know exactly what resources they need, where the crash is, or how serious it is.

What we do to reduce the impact:

- We've adopted the Vision Zero road safety strategy for Kent and Medway. We work in partnership with local councils, police, national highways and other agencies share knowledge and deliver road safety campaigns.
- Work with partners to understand the risk of rural roads and the impacts on local communities.
- Enhanced training for RTCs on rural roads, including vehicle stabilisation on uneven terrain, extrication from complex scenarios, and casualty care in remote locations.

New actions to deliver our plan:

- Work with the Kent and Medway Safety Roads Partnership to enhance road safety education.
- Work with the National Fire Chiefs Council to learn best practices for preventing collisions on rural roads.



Water supplies for firefighting

New housing and commercial buildings need water supplies, including water for firefighting. Increased demand has placed strain on an ageing network. Over the past few years, we have seen more incidents where there is poor water pressure. Where this happens, we send more fire engines and use bulk water carriers to the affected areas.

We will continue to work with water companies to ensure there is enough water for us to use in emergencies. We will also look at other ways of ensuring we have a reliable means of accessing water.

What we do to reduce the impact:

- Hydrant mapping and maintenance: Ensuring accurate mapping and regular inspection of all accessible water sources (including static tanks, open water).
- Emergency water supplies: Identifying and developing emergency water supplies (e.g., private ponds, swimming pools for drafting).
- Have a dedicated team who inspect water hydrants to ensure they are available for firefighting.
- Work with the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) and Parish Council to ensure issues with water supplies are reported and fixed at the earliest opportunity.
- Work with water companies to ensure we have water we can use at rural incidents.
- Provide information to our fire crews on the location of fire hydrants.

New actions to deliver our plan:

- Influence developers, councils, and water companies to establish emergency water supplies in areas where there is a lack of water or there is poor pressure.
- Put in place more frequent fire hydrant testing in rural areas, to ensure they are functioning properly and meet our firefighting needs.
- Review the types of vehicles we use for getting water to incidents, and where they are based.
- Explore new firefighting equipment that uses less water to achieve the same operational outcomes.
- Develop prevention campaigns about the importance of fire hydrants and reporting leaks and defects.
- Work closely with water companies during the planning phase of new developments to ensure firefighter water needs are incorporated into the infrastructure design.
- Work with communities in rural areas to identify alternative water sources, such as tanks and swimming pools, and make that information available to firefighters.

Supporting medical emergencies in villages and smaller towns

Healthcare and ambulance services are extremely busy, which means they often have limited resources and can't always respond as quickly as they'd like.

The fire service, on the other hand, isn't constantly dealing with such high continual demand, but we're always ready to respond to fires. This means we have the capacity to support the health sector in rural areas by being the first on the scene to provide life-saving medical care.

At every fire station in the county, our firefighters are highly trained in first aid (called Immediate Emergency Care, or IECR). They have defibrillators, oxygen, and other life-saving equipment. This has allowed us to respond to life-threatening medical emergencies alongside the ambulance service for the past twenty years.

What we do to reduce the impact:

- Over the last five years our crews have responded to thousands of medical emergencies, restarting the hearts of many people, increasing their chances of survival. We are committed to continuing to provide this vital service.
- Work with partner agencies to identify those at risk of falls, or other medical conditions, through our safe and well visits
- Continue to work with colleagues in the ambulance service to further improve our response

New actions to deliver our plan:

- Review the way we currently provide 'assistance to ambulance' in rural areas and implement changes in policies, procedures, training, and equipment to deliver improved outcomes in a more efficient and sustainable way. Agree any improvements, in consultation with partner agencies in the health sector.



A workforce to serve rural areas

Most of the countryside communities in Kent rely on our on-call firefighters. They are often people who live in your local area and have other full-time jobs. They volunteer to be firefighters in their spare time, which means they have limited time available for training.

At the same time, firefighting is becoming more specialised. New technologies bring new risks. We want to make sure our on-call firefighters are well-equipped and highly trained to respond to incidents in their community as effectively and safely as possible.

Challenges and solutions

Like other fire services across the country, we've had a tough time recruiting and keeping on-call firefighters. It's especially hard to find on-call firefighters who can work during the day. This means we often have to send fire engines from urban areas to rural areas when there's an incident during the day, which leads to longer response times.

New actions to deliver our plan:

- We've started a project to look at how to get more on-call firefighters available during the day.
- We're also looking at whether we should train them in fewer areas, but make sure they're extremely skilled in the tasks they continue to do.
- Since on-call firefighters are part of the local community, we want to explore new ways they can support their community. This could include leading safety activities, doing home fire safety visits, attending local events, and even running fitness activities. They're also in a great position to gather information about local risks and help address them.



Evaluation, review and continuous improvement

Improving response and outcomes

We're collecting data on how long it takes us to reach the most isolated areas and checking if our customers are getting the help they need. We will be working to reduce risks. We're also looking at what other fire and rescue services do in similar high-risk areas, like what equipment they use and how they respond to incidents.

Our goal is to constantly improve our service to the community. We'll do this by using information from our incident records and other tools. We're building a culture where our prevention, building safety, and operational teams work together to stay updated on the latest technologies and ways of working.

Targeted prevention and risk management

We regularly review how we identify people at risk of a home fire and how we carry out our risk-based visits. This ensures our methods are accurate and that we're aware of any new risks.

Finally, the community risks we've identified in our Community Risk Management Plan are backed up by detailed risk assessments. We regularly update these assessments, with the frequency depending on how serious the risk is.

Regular monitoring and review are crucial to ensure the effectiveness of the Rural Plan.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

- Rural incident reduction rates (fire, RTC, water).

- Response times to rural incidents.
- On-call availability and retention rates.
- Number of rural community safety engagements.
- Uptake of rural specific safety advice.
- Effectiveness of specialist rural training.
- Feedback from rural communities and partners.
- Using incident data to identify trends, emerging risks, and areas for improvement in rural settings.
- A formal annual review of the Rural Plan with key stakeholders.
- Transparent reporting on rural service delivery at the Kent and Medway Fire Authority.



Appendix 1

How we categorise rural areas

We use the Rural-Urban Classification (RUC) provided by the Office for National Statistics. This is used in England and Wales to categorise areas as either rural or urban.

The 2021 RUC uses three simplified categories of:

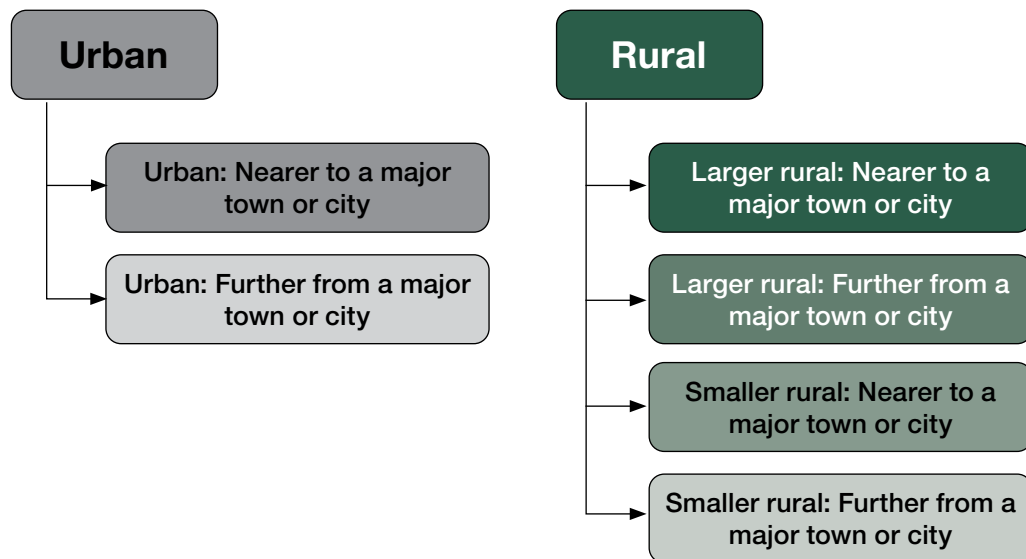
- Urban
- Larger rural settlement
- Smaller rural settlement

Areas are considered urban if they have many homes close together, or if they're part of a larger developed area with at least 10,000 homes. Other areas are classified as rural, and these are further categorised by how close they are to a major town or city, based on estimated travel time.

Based on estimated travel times, each category is then divided into:

- Nearer to a major town or city
- Further from a major town or city

When combined, it provides the following six types of categorisation for an output area



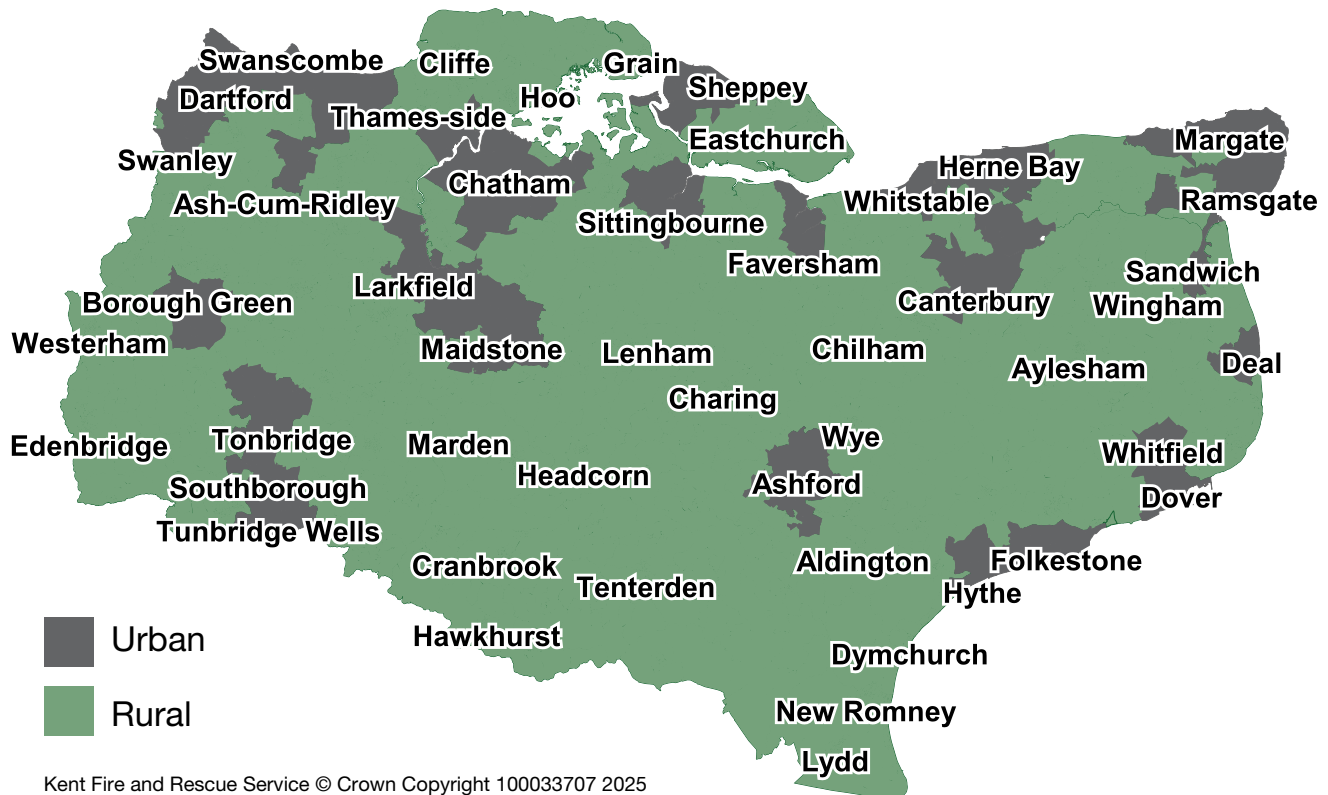
Output area types

Kent and Medway has 5,734 output areas across the county following the changes made during the 2021 census. The current profile consists of:

Number of output areas	Percentage output areas	Output areas classification	How we classify areas
3,032	53%	Urban: Nearer to a major town or city	Urban
1,340	23%	Urban: Further from a major town or city	Urban
565	10%	Larger Rural: Nearer to a major town or city	Rural
120	2%	Larger Rural: Further from a major town or city	Rural
526	9%	Smaller Rural: Nearer to a major town or city	Rural
151	3%	Smaller Rural: Further from a major town or city	Rural

While 24% of output areas are within rural output areas, they cover a greater geographical area. We have used this profile to provide two categories – urban and rural. This allows us to look at the

The map below provides an overview of the county by KFRS urban and rural categories.



Appendix 2

Incidents in rural areas

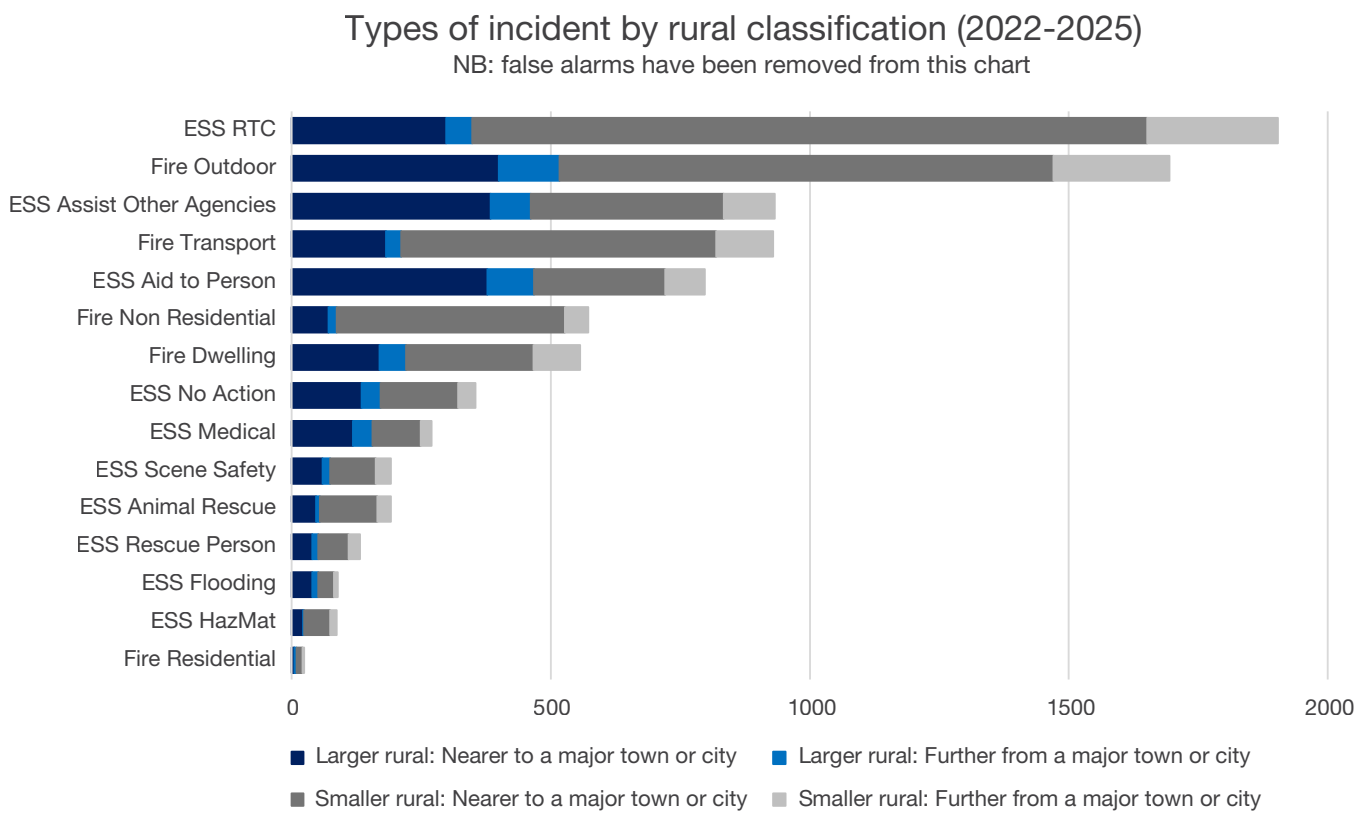
Over the last three years, 26% of the incidents we have attended have been in rural areas.

Area type	Response	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	Total
Rural hamlets and isolated dwellings	Emergency	1,523	1,304	1,273	4,100
Rural hamlets and isolated dwellings	Non-emergency	94	113	129	336
Rural hamlets and isolated dwellings total	All responses	1,617	1,417	1,402	4,436
Rural town and fringe	Emergency	1,584	1,466	1,279	4,329
Rural town and fringe	Non-emergency	243	237	281	761
Rural town and fringe total	All responses	1,827	1,703	1,560	5,090
Rural village	Emergency	1,338	1,156	1,129	3,623
Rural village	Non-emergency	114	102	141	357
Rural village total	All responses	1,452	1,258	1,270	3,980
Grand Total	Total	4,896	4,378	4,232	13,506

Of all the fires and rescue incidents we attended in rural areas over the last three years, just over 40% were either road traffic collisions or outdoor fires.

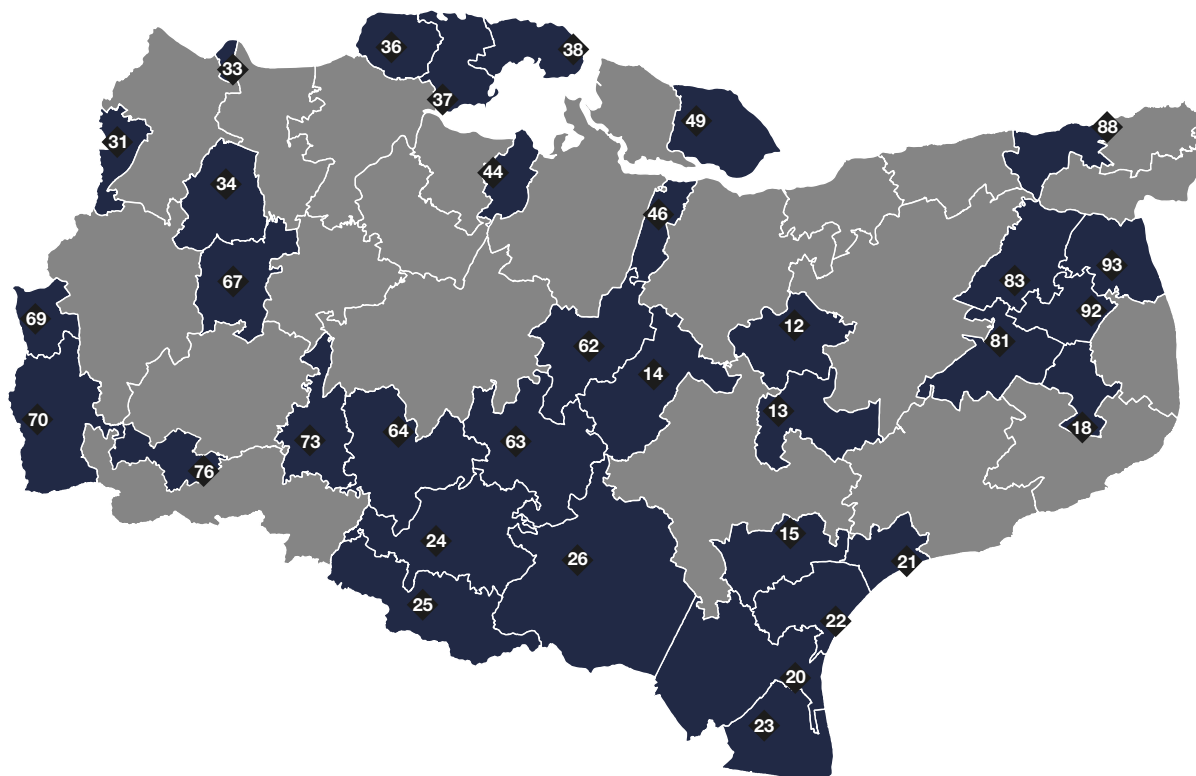
Responding to emergencies in rural areas

We regularly review the location of our resources according to risk, demand, and isolation. Our fire stations are in places depending on the level of risk in each area.





On-call fire stations in Kent and Medway



15 Aldington
34 Ash-cum-Ridley
81 Aylesham
67 Borough Green
14 Charing
12 Chilham
36 Cliffe
24 Cranbrook
22 Dymchurch
49 Eastchurch
92 Eastry
70 Edenbridge
38 Grain

25 Hawkhurst
63 Headcorn
37 Hoo
21 Hythe
62 Lenham
23 Lydd
64 Marden
20 New Romney
73 Paddock Wood
44 Rainham
93 Sandwich
76 Southborough

31 Swanley
33 Swanscombe
26 Tenterden
46 Teynham
69 Westerham
88 Westgate
18 Whitfield
83 Wingham
13 Wye



