

Visiting change



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A new customer management system is enabling Kent Fire and Rescue Service to better target and measure its community safety activities.

Jon Chapman explains

ACROSS ENGLAND, public services are facing the challenges of modernising and improving, under the Transformational Government – Enabled by Technology strategy, published in November 2005 by the Cabinet Office. The aim of the strategy is to transform public services by using technology to release more resources for the delivery of frontline services. For fire and rescue services, this means addressing the 2005 Public Service Agreement targets to reduce the number of accidental fire-related deaths in the home by 20%, and the number of deliberate fires by 10% by 2010.

In an attempt to meet these ambitious targets, Kent Fire and Rescue Service has adopted a new customer relationship management system, Microsoft Dynamics CRM, which was customised by consultant, Optevia. This went live in January 2008 after a year-long trial phase, and is delivering significant improvements in terms of the quality of its recorded data, the effectiveness of its dedicated Home Safety Visit (HSV) team, fire risk profiling in specific geographical areas, and partnership working.

In particular, Kent is one of the first fire and rescue services in England to measure the effectiveness of its fire prevention activities to a sophisticated level using CRM and data analytics, enabling it to target proactive safety initiatives with more accuracy and relevance to those in society who are most at risk.

Data quality

Before adopting the CRM system, a number of data entry clerks were employed across Kent's 22 fire stations which, on occasion, led to inaccurate or inconsistent data being recorded. The new system involves the centralised recording of data at the service's headquarters, producing more consistent data which is almost 100% accurate. The data is geo-coded, meaning that it has 'x' and 'y' coordinates attached to enable mapping to geographical systems and

linking to the local authority Local Land and Property Gazetteer database. The data is also attached to 'output areas' – predetermined physical localities containing between 125 to 150 households. There are around 5,500 output areas in Kent.

The CRM enables faster and more accurate filing of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) return that Kent – along with other fire services in England – is required to send each year to Communities and Local Government (CLG). The IRMP is an action plan that sets out how a fire service intends to meet its aims and objectives, primarily to save lives and reduce risk. The IRMP return is an annual report that each service submits to CLG, which outlines the activity they have engaged in over the year.

'Kent can interrogate its data to establish a clearer picture of risk'

Changes to IRMP datasets that CLG requests as part of this process can be easily accommodated with the new system – for instance, fire services were required to provide data on single families last year. In addition, as it is possible to update the dataset fields quickly and easily through the CRM system, paperwork has been significantly reduced.

In the past, sensitive personal data – around ethnicity, for example – might not have been accurate or even collected, but information is now collected centrally from all callers who contact the service requesting a home safety visit. A set script is used, which ensures accuracy of data.

Cleaner data also means that Kent can now interrogate its own data more intelligently to better understand its communities and establish a clearer picture of risk. For example, simply being in the over-65 age group might rank a person as at risk, but several factors – such as whether a resident lives alone, the quality of the resident's housing stock, and whether they have

The service's HSV programme has been significantly enhanced



mobility issues – could impact differently on that risk. The improvement in the quality of data has been the most significant advantage of the new CRM system.

Home fire prevention

Between 2006 and 2007, Kent Fire and Rescue's dedicated HSV team delivered around 1,500 home safety check visits. From 2007 to 2008, this figure increased to 3,200. This means that, since installing the CRM system, an additional six families per day in Kent receive free advice and smoke alarms, if required, to help prevent accidental fires.

The service has seen an efficiency improvement of more than 100% in its HSV programme. The team now averages 12 visits a day, compared to an average of six before the system was brought in. Not only are more visits taking place, but they are also more effective, as those identified as being in greatest need are visited first.

Previously, each of Kent's 13 fire safety offices, 22 fire stations and headquarters had its own contact telephone number, but the single freephone number now in use, 0800 923 7000, makes it easier and more efficient for the public to contact the service and arrange HSV visits. In addition, the team used to lose half of the working week to paperwork, but centralising the administration has allowed visits to be prioritised. This means that the team has more time for visits than personnel based at fire stations, who have to fit home visits in around their essential emergency response work. The HSV team then takes on the most urgent cases and those involving special requirements or vulnerabilities, such as the elderly, people with mobility issues or those suffering hearing loss, who may need special alarms fitted.

In April 2008, Kent launched new, more sophisticated fire prevention activity targets, made possible by the CRM system. Fire stations are now not only measured by the volume of home fire safety checks carried out, but they must also identify the areas most at risk and deliver checks to 50% of homes in those areas.

Risk assessment

Resources can now be focused most effectively on those most at risk, with methods of outreach – ranging from mail-shots, to engaging with the public in shopping centres, to working with local housing associations and community groups – targeted to best effect.

Like many other brigades, Kent uses the Fire Service Emergency Cover software toolkit. The toolkit ranks life risk by dividing the county into 5,500 output areas, each of which is assigned a risk level and contains around 125 households. This data is overlaid with output from the demographic profiling system Mosaic (which can classify populations according to socioeconomic groups), and with Kent's own incident and HSV data from the CRM system, and a sensible weighting is applied. This returns a list of risk priority areas in which people are considered to be most at risk, because of

their comparison with the frequency of incidents that Kent Fire and Rescue has attended in a similar area. The service can then target its community safety activities accordingly.

Partnership working

For some time, Kent has recognised its pivotal role in the community, and its duty to work across agencies, record this work and be accountable. In helping to automate the business processes and services that support these relationships, the CRM system has delivered real benefits. With the HSV programme in particular, internal collaboration between Kent Fire and Rescue teams has improved, and partnership working has become easier with key public and voluntary sector stakeholders, such as Social Services, local authorities, Help the Aged and the Deaf Services Bureau, some good examples of which follow:

Local authorities

Kent Fire and Rescue is working closely with local authorities to tailor mail-shots to residents of priority output areas. With all the requisite data protocols in place, Kent can now contact households with HSV marketing aimed specifically at their demographic (based on the last Census survey), to establish whether, for example, they would be more likely to respond to the opportunity to understand practical tactics that will help keep their family safe, or a free smoke alarm.

Deaf Services Bureau

When Kent interacts with a citizen with, for instance, a level of hearing loss, an initial visit can be referred to the Deaf Services Bureau. Following an assessment, the bureau can contact the fire service to inform it of any follow-up visit that may be necessary.

Service excellence

Tasked with measuring the performance of fire and rescue services in England, the Audit Commission has commended fire services for responding well to the challenges facing them, and for focusing more time on fire prevention and community safety. However, it has also stated that, while fire services are proactive in their

Key benefits of the system

- output from the dedicated HSV team increased, with more than 100% efficiency gains
- accuracy of data improved by almost 100%, and data administration time reduced by 50%
- essential fire safety work carried out more robustly and consistently, with more sophisticated risk assessments and intelligent data analysis
- customer service improved: a single point of contact and a prioritised, faster and more efficient service



Incident and HSV data is used to identify risk priority areas

prevention initiatives, ‘most fire services are not yet able to identify measurable outcomes from this work; evaluating costs and benefits is a significant challenge’.

‘The service will measure and track the impact of its fire prevention activities’

By implementing the new CRM system, Kent Fire and Rescue is able to analyse its fire prevention and community safety activities and begin to measure their impact, which was not possible before. The service is now starting HSV re-visits – going back to households that were ranked as higher risk during the first set of visits undertaken since the implementation of the system. The service believes that by going back to earlier targeted areas, it will be able to track the impact of the fire prevention advice and assistance it offers. Over time, as a result of those prevention activities, it hopes to see a reduction in risk status within those areas.

What began as a project simply to manage the booking and coordination of home visits is now delivering much more value in terms of appropriate and relevant services, the benefits of which are now measurable. Optevia, the consultant which customised and integrated the system into Kent Fire and Rescue Service, is currently working with the service to upgrade it. The main benefits will include its improved functionality – particularly with workflows – and the potential for other business functions to evaluate running the system, thus expanding its reach within the organisation ■

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