

Kent drives further blue light collaboration with first multi-agency command and control system

Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) and Kent Police are the first fire and police services in the UK to have a co-located control room and work on a multi-agency mobilising system. The new system provides real-time information on incident location and resources and allows for dynamic mobilising of fire engines from their current location. The system chosen and developed was the Sopra Steria STORM Command and Control system.



Kent Fire and Rescue Service's Control Centre, co-located with Kent Police in Maidstone

KFRS decided on the co-location to Kent Police after the project to regionalise fire and rescue control centres was abandoned by central government in December 2010. This would have meant the move of the KFRS control centre to Hampshire, which was an unpopular move with local residents. After looking at all of the options, including a fire-fire partnership with neighbouring fire and rescue services, KFRS felt that it made most sense in Kent to collaborate with Kent Police. The service co-located its control staff to Kent Police HQ in March 2012.

Mobilising system

The service had put off replacing its mobilising system while the regionalisation project was ongoing. Once it was scrapped, the service had to find a more up-to-date system. This meant finding a new mobilising system for fire control.

After a procurement exercise, KFRS chose the same mobilising system currently used by Kent Police. This allows the two services to share essential information, particularly during major emergencies; provides improved interoperability and the ability to rapidly mobilise the right resource to any incident. This is in addition to existing benefits of the co-location such as giving KFRS access to a countywide CCTV network and improved joint working, especially during large incidents and emergencies.

It is expected that the move to the new

mobilising system will save around £2m.

Sean Bone-Knell, Director of Operations for KFRS, said, "After looking at all of the options, including remaining as a standalone service, the best option for KFRS was to build on the relationship we already had with Kent Police. The first phase - the co-location of our two Control teams - has been a success, improving interoperability and providing a more seamless approach, particularly in major emergencies."

After the move to co-locate, the second phase was to find a replacement for the service's mobilising system, which had been originally developed in the 90s. After a procurement exercise, the Sopra Steria STORM Control and Command system was chosen by KFRS. This system is widely used by police around the country, including Kent Police. Sopra Steria and KFRS have worked extremely closely over the last 18 months to ensure the delivery of all relevant fire specific functionality within the multi-agency STORM solution.

The project also included the replacement of telephony, radio communications, call recording and the use of automatic vehicle location, so that the nearest fire engine is always sent to the fire, whether it is at a station or en route from another incident.

The new system provides real-time information and allows 999 staff to make a mobilising decision very quickly, using the latest technology. It also allows improved service delivery by standardising business processes and enabling KFRS to take

advantage of the additional features within the STORM system, as well as future enhancements.

Appliances can now be mobilised on exact location, informing from Airwave radios, with dynamic mobilising and new mobilising arrangement from fast roads and motorways.

Shared information

When the KFRS 999 team takes a call, it very quickly knows if it is going to be a multi-agency response or not. The information can be shared quickly between agencies to make sure the right resources are sent to the scene.

Sean Bone-Knell, Director of Operations at KFRS, concludes, "During the past three years we moved to the second phase, and KFRS and Kent Police have worked to standardise the system, sharing facilities and equipment. As a result, we now have the only dual service, multi-agency command and control system in the UK. It allows the two blue light services to work closely together and for our two teams to share information about ongoing incidents quickly and effectively."

George Greig, Head of Emergency Services Group, Sopra Steria, said, "STORM has delivered a mission critical solution that brings real improvements and benefits on the sharing of information between the two services on a day-to-day basis. This enables closer working between the services whilst preserving their individual integrity and significantly enhancing any joint response."

"Sopra Steria has worked with KFRS to understand the unique needs of the fire and rescue service, delivering the required functionality and provisioning it through a multi-agency solution shared by these two Kent blue light services in a truly groundbreaking collaborative project that will help ensure a safer county for residents and business."

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A member of the KFRS control team using the new system