

VISIT REPORT

SOCIAL AFFAIRS SELECT COMMITTEE – 22 JANUARY 2013

Name of Organisation: Kent Fire & Rescue Service
Name of contact at the Organisation: Stuart Albon, Risk Reduction Manager
Address of the Organisation: Sevenoaks Fire Station, London Road, Sevenoaks, TN13 2HY
Please summarise the work of the organisation: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To tackle fires and raise awareness of the risk and prevention of fires through information with businesses, vulnerable people, housing associations, school visits, attendance at public events, etc.2. To attend road traffic accidents to assist other emergency services to preserve life and to help to promote road safety.3. Promoting awareness and preparedness re flooding4. Key partner in preparing for emergencies
What are the main challenges faced by the organisation? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Funding – resources• Terrorist attacks/major incidents
Do their clients come from the Sevenoaks District or a wider area? <p>Predominantly yes, but can be called to incidents anywhere in Kent or further afield in major emergencies or as back up to other counties involved in an emergency</p>
Who mainly refers clients to them? How do people know about their services? <p>999 call outs</p>
Who are their primary funders? <p>Two principal sources: a central government grant and a small levy on the local council tax. The service is free to the end user in the case of an emergency, although there are some special services that can be charged for and some additional services that can be paid for.</p>
Do they benefit from any contact with the District Council? <p>Not specifically discussed</p>
If so, can this be improved (within existing resources)?

Visit to Sevenoaks Fire Station on Monday 6th November 2012
by Cllrs. Mrs Cook & Miss Thornton

Purpose of the visit – Safer and Stronger Communities

As a follow up to the presentation given at the Social Affairs Committee on 30th October 2012, by Stuart Albon, the Risk Reduction Manager, Kent Fire & Rescue Service.

Visit Details

Mr Albon explained how the station was run, the structure and complement of officers and the 'on call' rota. Sevenoaks is unusual in that it still retains its own housing stock which means that officers can remain at home but can still react to a call within three minutes – their uniform always left ready for an instant response.

It may not necessarily be the local crew who attend an emergency but the most available one, but all fire engines are equipped with sophisticated sat. nav. systems which are updated constantly, however old fashioned maps and local knowledge remain a valuable resource. Mr Albon assured Cllr. Thornton that the matter she raised at the recent Social Affairs Committee, regarding inaccurate navigation information which significantly delayed the arrival of an engine to a car fire in Underriver at the beginning of June, had been rectified.

In a major incident there will be cross border co-operation including back up cover from neighbouring forces.

Whilst they may still be called upon to rescue cats from up trees (for which they have the RSPCA to call upon for advice) they are increasingly being called to road traffic accidents which is not surprising considering the major trunk routes that pass through our district. At least two members of the crew will have been trained to paramedic standards and it is anticipated that, in future, this will be a requirement for all officers.

During the visit we met various crew members who talked us through their protective uniform and equipment before showing us around one of the fire engines. We also spoke to one crew who had just returned from putting out a car fire. Each engine is built to a specific brief to meet local needs and carry a phenomenal amount of fire and rescue equipment to cover all eventualities. Everything has its place on the vehicle and the equipment is regularly checked for wear and tear and for their need of replacement/repair. Specialist vehicles, such as specific platform lifts, are also available within the wider Kent district and neighbouring districts to call upon when required.

All incidents have to be assessed to take account of the safety, not only of the crew, but also other individuals involved. So, for instance, in the case of a house fire a judgement has to be made about whether there are people still inside the building, the structural state of the building and whether anyone trapped inside is likely to still be alive.

Some individual members of the crews based at Sevenoaks have also been trained in specialist fire and rescue techniques, such as search and rescue after natural disasters.

They are sometimes called upon to make up a national emergency response team and sent abroad to help where their assistance is required and requested.

Whilst we were there, Cllr. Thornton met one of the two Fire & Rescue Officers who had been relocated to Sevenoaks when the Seal Fire Station closed earlier in the year. She was reassured by her conversation with him that their transition had been a relatively smooth one and that they had settled in well at their new base and with their new crews.

We were made to feel incredibly welcome during our visit and all the personnel we met were extremely courteous, professional and helpful. It was a shame that more committee members were not able to attend this most informative visit.

Still to consider:

- More about the equipment on board, for instance inflatables in the case of flooding
- The different call up numbers
- The number of permanent officers
- Training and counselling if required