

Engaging the community

A customer relationship management system in Kent is revolutionising the number of home fire safety visits that take place – and that means it is playing a crucial role in public safety.

To make homes safer, Kent Fire & Rescue Service (KFRS) offers free home fire safety visits (HFSVs). HFSVs are essential to fire prevention work and involve KFRS personnel conducting home visits to deliver fire safety advice and, where necessary, fitting 10-year smoke alarms free of charge. This is a national requirement.

Traditionally, local fire stations managed the generation and delivery of these visits, often resulting in confusion for the public not least because KFRS had upwards of 36 different contact telephone numbers in use.

Additionally, the public were only able to request a visit, rather than agree an appointment time at first contact – stations would call customers back, arrange a time and send a completed paper copy risk assessment to administration offices upon completion of the HFSV. This manual paper-based process was prone to forms being lost and the information included in them being misinterpreted or misunderstood.

KFRS worked with Optevia, a public sector CRM consultant & Microsoft Gold Partner, to deploy and customise a new customer relationship management (CRM) system based on Microsoft Dynamics CRM. Optevia also deployed its range of value-add Optevia Essentials software products. Optevia Essentials aim to reduce the effort, time, cost and risk of implementing Microsoft Dynamics CRM by automating data capture through familiar web forms, automating integration of CRM with internal and external systems and mapping the data workflow with existing business processes.

In addition to the Optevia Essentials range, Optevia has deployed its Optevia Dynamics, a set of cross-sector software products specifically aimed at enhancing the base Microsoft Dynamics CRM solution for local government, central government agencies and fire & rescue services.

The CRM system went live in April 2008, following considerable development and testing involving all fire stations and HFSV teams. It is now in use by 26 staff in the head office administration team and by KFRS' 22 whole-time and day-crewed fire stations.

Use of the CRM system has expanded throughout 2009 and 2010 and KFRS has implemented Windows Mobile as well as Microsoft Dynamics CRM Mobile, and KFRS is currently developing a strategy to deploy mobile working to its dedicated home visit and vulnerable person teams.

Other planned developments include integrating MSCRM to KFRS' unified communications platform, mobile working and web portals for customer self service.

KFRS 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. And the system has delivered significant gains: 36 telephone numbers have been replaced by one free phone number; and five call handlers

now handle all customer facing interactions, ensuring consistently high standards of customer service. Initial risk assessments carried out over the telephone allow for the HFSV to be tailored to the specific needs of the individual (for example specialist equipment for the deaf).

The CRM system allows the call handlers to book appointments directly into the diary of the customer's local fire station, making the process considerably more efficient for KFRS while improving customer satisfaction and – importantly – customer safety. Fire stations are electronically notified of these appointments and can enter the data directly at the station, eliminating the administration burden associated with paper forms.

More accurate data has enabled KFRS to develop sophisticated predictive models to prioritise HFSV delivery. This has dramatically improved partnership working, particularly in terms of vulnerable people (KFRS now shares data directly with Social Services among others).

Jon Chapman, ICT manager at KFRS, said the focus on reducing risk for the local community has resulted in much stronger customer focus in recent years, adding: "Those individuals requiring greater levels of advice or intervention now receive follow up home visits and, in cases where appropriate, KFRS works with other agencies such as social services, housing associations or local support groups."

In 2007/2008 (before the launch of CRM), KFRS completed 6,500 HFSVs; in 2008/09, following the CRM deployment, this rose to over 12,000 without increasing delivery resources. 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. This year (2009/2010) KFRS will deliver 16,000 HFSVs.

The CRM system also enables faster and more accurate filing of the services integrated risk management plan (IRMP) return which KFRS – along with other fire services in England – is required to send each year to the Dept of 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 fire risks.

Jon Chapman concluded: "The actions taken to address the effectiveness of HFSVs are helping KFRS meet its aims and objectives of saving lives and reducing risk."

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