

Digital policing: the path to 2025

Understanding the barriers and benefits



Equipping the next generation of officers

Minister of State for policing and the fire services, **Nick Hurd MP**, says the government is investing in technologies that will save officers thousands of hours



While policing's greatest asset is its people, its biggest opportunity is technology. I see transforming our police forces, so that they are thoroughly equipped for the digital age, as critical to our shared mission – cutting crime and protecting the public.

It is clear there has been a change in the nature of crime, with many more offences committed in the digital space being reported. Having met with police leaders across the country, I am convinced it is essential that the government and policing work together to make sure we are well placed to tackle this emerging threat.

We have made a strong start and I am impressed by policing's commitment to Vision 2025, which sets out the ambition for a digitally enabled police service. The strategy is designed to help police engage with the public through new digital channels, use data to make better operational decisions and improve communication between police and the rest of the criminal justice system. Achieving these objectives will equip police officers with the skills they need for the digital age.

Progress is being made across the country in establishing new ways of working. Greater Manchester Police, for example, has rolled out mobile devices to 80 per cent of its staff and this will increase time they can spend solving crime and helping people – equivalent to 1,000 eight-hour shifts each year. However, it is also clear there is more to do. If all forces delivered the

level of productivity from mobile working as the leading forces, the average officer could spend an hour a day extra on the frontline.

The Home Office has an important role to play, and will continue to invest in the police at all levels, whether local, national or counter-terrorism. In December, the Home Secretary announced a comprehensive settlement, which will increase funding by up to £450m next year. This reflects the significant demands on the police from the terrorist threat and high harm, hidden crimes.

Separately, we are investing £97m in digital transformation through the Police Transformation Fund. The fund is led by the police themselves and it means we can invest in projects that the whole police system needs. For example, last year we awarded £11m for a video-enabled justice trial in the South-East and London, which will help improve access to justice, significantly enhance victim and witness user experiences, and save valuable police time.

The Home Office is also leading a series of national technology programmes to revolutionise police access to vital evidence. Whether it is a fast, effective national system for reading number plates, mobile fingerprint searching or providing the emergency services with a groundbreaking 4G communications network, we are designing crucial systems to give police officers information at their fingertips faster than ever before.

From the start of 2018, I will be having many more discussions with police leaders, such as the one hosted by the *New Statesman* and Virgin Media Business, because I really believe in the need to drive change and solve challenges in this area. Whether it is modern slavery, sexual abuse or fraud, we depend on the police to protect the vulnerable in our society. If we give them the skills, technology and appropriate powers they need, I have no doubt they will rise to the challenges of the digital age and make Vision 2025 a reality.

Challenges and barriers in digital policing

Gerry Arthurs, head of public sector at Virgin Media Business, looks at what's getting in the way of creating a more digitally enabled service

Virgin Media Business provides technology services to over 75 per cent of the UK's police forces, and we believe in listening to the views of the people who commission, manage and rely on our services day in and day out – then acting on their insight to provide meaningful technology solutions. With this in mind, in June 2017, we partnered with iGov Survey to investigate the challenges and opportunities presented by the Policing Vision 2025. The aim of the vision goes far beyond making savings or incremental reform – considering how policing as a whole can be transformed with the public at its heart. Our resulting report contains responses from a cross-section of senior individuals across 18 unique police organisations.

It was encouraging to see that all participants had begun to respond to the vision. However, just under half told us that there are still key barriers preventing them from fully embracing digital transformation. Only 11 per cent were confident that their ICT infrastructure is completely ready, and just six per cent strongly agreed that they had the right mix of skills and experience within their organisation.

We strongly believed that budget would be the number one barrier to achieving the vision. However, this was not the case, with insufficient staffing resource together with a lack of necessary in-house skills stated as the major barrier. Participants also identified the state of their current infrastructure as a key barrier to

unlocking their digital potential, with the majority (88 per cent) citing capacity and speed issues on their own network as the main inhibitors.

Looking to the future, participating organisations told us that their top priority was enabling police officers in the field to work more flexibly, from anywhere and at any time (94 per cent). So it is no surprise that modernising their ICT infrastructure was also identified as key, when taking into consideration the challenges presented by mobile and flexible policing and the need to address cybercrime. In addition, 67 per cent believe that the right technology is crucial to support the delivery of specialist capabilities. We also know that collaboration is becoming increasingly important, with 77 per cent stating that working with partners to identify efficiency and productivity gains remains a priority.

The results of our survey clearly demonstrate a strong desire across police organisations to embrace technology to achieve efficiencies, improve collaboration and drive better citizen engagement. This extends to planning for the future, where the majority told us that they will continue to integrate systems, wherever it is possible. Following digital transformation, respondents told us that they had plans for training, upskilling and redeploying staff and yet, no one felt that the technology was currently in place to support this.

In summary, our survey results demonstrate that police organisations are keen to collaborate and promote local and digital policing underpinned by innovative technology solutions. Legacy infrastructure, lack of resources and limited budgets are still holding some forces back, but with the right digital partner, a flexible and connected force can become a reality.

Download the full report at:
www.virginmediabusiness.co.uk/police-report

Breaking down barriers to make digital policing an effective reality

The New Statesman, in partnership with Virgin Media Business, hosted a group of experts to discuss the challenges and opportunities for policing posed by technological transformation

Policing is undergoing a digital revolution. Technology is transforming how data is stored and shared within forces, new tools such as Body Worn Video have contributed invaluable additional information to investigations, and localised police forces are communicating with the public via new and innovative channels. Policy makers, police officials and data and IT officers intend “digital policing” – the convergence of cutting-edge digital tools and everyday policing – to become standard practice. This aim is a key part of the Policing Vision 2025, a document outlining the plan for policing over the next 10 years, published by the National Police Chiefs’ Council and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners.

The emergence of digital policing, as well as the rapid increase in digital crime, is presenting a plethora of challenges and opportunities to policing leaders. The *New Statesman* and Virgin Media Business facilitated a round table event attended by the Minister of State for Policing Nick Hurd MP, police and crime commissioners, leaders within police

forces, and heads of police technology organisations at Portcullis House to discuss the changing policing landscape.

During his opening remarks, the Minister gave examples of where technology has delivered quantifiable benefits to officers and relieved pressure, such as the Greater Manchester police “who have now rolled out mobile devices to 80 per cent of its staff. [They] say that since the rollout last November the time savings on travel afforded by the technology equated to 1,000 eight-hour shifts. That matters in the current context where the police are very, very stretched.”

“Ultimately policing is a people business, but systems can help people make better decisions, and be more productive with their time. In the context of limited financial resources and [high] demand on the system, this agenda seems really important to me.”

The Minister was eager to understand the issues facing forces on their quest to incorporate digital into their practices. He was particularly keen to understand who, if anyone was in charge of this digital transition, and whether “we, on behalf of the taxpayer, are smart buyers – in terms of knowing what we want, why we need it, if our procurement processes help or hinder, and if we are buying stuff that’s fit for purpose.”

Gerry Arthurs, head of public sector at Virgin Media Business, introduced the findings from a recent survey that Virgin Media Business commissioned in association with iGOV to try to understand the challenges and barriers to digital policing. “We have found that the main driver for digital change across policing and health is providing better outcomes for citizens, rather than just achieving efficiency gains, which surprised us as historically digital transformation has been about savings.”

The survey found that forces were very keen to move forward with this digital agenda – “82 per cent said we are ready to go on a transformational digital journey”, but produced some surprising results when it came to pursuing that agenda. “We genuinely believed that the biggest barrier to adopting digital change

is budgets.” But to their surprise budget was not the top consideration, with some placing it as low as 6 per cent. One of the biggest concerns preventing police forces from adopting new and innovative technology stemmed from issues around legacy infrastructure, with 44 per cent stating there were key barriers holding them back, and only 11 per cent being confident that their ICT infrastructure could support this digital change. “ICT infrastructure is holding them back,” concluded Arthurs.

Some of the attendees disagreed with this assessment, citing a range of complex and cultural factors for a lack of uptake. Katy Bourne, police and crime commissioner for Sussex and chair of the Sussex Criminal Justice Board, “vehemently disagreed” that IT infrastructure was the biggest blocker to implementation, highlighting individual preference. “We know from experience of giving officers MDTs (Mobile data terminals), some will embrace it and many will just put it in the drawer.”

A lack of budget was mentioned by a number of participants as a major barrier to technological progression, despite the findings of the survey. Chief information officer for Sussex police force, Neil Roberts, pointed out that simply maintaining existing structures requires a great deal of resource investment. “We spend about £850m a year [on infrastructure] but the vast proportion of that is on putting an ever bigger Band-Aid on 43 turrets of technology. We understand the infrastructural challenges, we don’t want to manage infrastructure. The police should be good at policing, not running data centres.”

Alison Brown, senior segment lead public sector at Virgin Media Business, explained when you combine legacy infrastructure with in-house skills and expertise a key barrier is produced. In the survey 88 per cent stated network speed, capacity and in-house skills are one of the biggest barriers to implementing technology.

Angus McCallum, chief information officer for the Metropolitan Police, agreed that it wasn’t so much a lack of ambition,



but a lack of money. “We know what change to do but we’re starved of resources maintaining a lot of junky systems. It’s the stuff that we’re maintaining that’s costing us a bucket-load.” In the same vein, a lack of long-term investment was also highlighted as a key barrier. “What we’re not at liberty to do is free up savings and reinvest them in technology, because the chief financial officers get them,” said Roberts.

Similarly, the government funding make-up was accused of being outdated. “There needs to be recognition within the Home Office that there is a changing funding formula required,” said David Lloyd, Hertfordshire police and crime commissioner and chair of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners.

Both police representatives and suppliers agreed that procurement processes are unnecessarily laborious. Alastair Tucker Brown, business sales

specialist at Virgin Media Business, said “what I find a bit frustrating as a supplier is that I get held back by procurement, so I’m not allowed to engage with you because that would give me an unfair advantage,” to murmurs of agreement from around the table.

McCallum said that greater flexibility was required in the procurement process. “Because we have such torturous processes, we choose something that’s right, we sort of half know it’s wrong, but it’s so torturous to go back round the loop that we plough ahead,” he explained.

Not only is it laborious, but unadventurous to the extreme, in stark contrast to the private sector, argued Julia Mulligan, police and crime commissioner for North Yorkshire police. “What is our risk appetite? Our whole accreditation [process] is ridiculously strict.”

Sara Thornton, chair of the National



Police Chiefs Council, agreed. “We do get overly obsessed with the risk.” This led the discussion onto the subject of police force culture, and whether certain idiosyncrasies were responsible for holding back progress. “I think it’s about the way we’ve been organised traditionally, with IT departments and procurement departments, and then there are the people who do the job. It’s still run in this siloed traditional way

The digital transition process must be simplified

with no whole-system thinking going on.” Mulligan called policing a “naive client.” “You get a lot of protectionism, a lot of cultural barriers. Industry can come in and challenge those people and open their eyes to what is possible.”

“I think we made a complete mess of body-worn cameras, don’t you?” Martin Surl, Gloucestershire police and crime commissioner, said of one botched adoption process. “We bought the cameras before we had the data storage. We didn’t build any competition between two or three big suppliers, so we just rushed into it and got it probably wrong.”

Roberts said that the National Police Technology Council is all too aware of the limitations of the police forces when it comes to technological advancement. “We’re all of an accord that we know where we need to go, and infrastructure management is not our forte.”

“I have a sense that the problem is

adequately diagnosed,” joked the Minister. “What is the first step?” There was a consensus that the whole digital transition process needed to be simplified and streamlined. Participants agreed that a unified approach was lacking when it came to digital policing, as opposed to one that varied heavily amongst the 43 police forces in the UK. “Mandation is long overdue around policing technology,” said Jules Donald, head of IT services at Essex Police and Kent Police. “Until we get a greater enforcement, some standards and solutions we have to adhere to, there’s always going to be a problem.”

Mulligan argued that too many programmes were currently in play, stunting progress. “I think we possibly need to take some brave decisions around prioritising and killing some of them, because I think we are collectively trying to do too much at the moment.”

“We need compatibility. If you produce something that is not compatible across the whole of the UK, it’s not much use,” concurred Martin Surl, Gloucestershire police and crime commissioner.

In order to move forward with a unified approach to digital policing and adoption of technological developments, invested parties would have to agree on a realistic path. “I would like to see clearly understood priorities, a willingness to get going. You don’t need to have 43 people all agreeing, you need enough people to know that it’s the right thing to do,” said Robert Leach, acting chief executive of Police ICT Company.

“It’s got to be Home Office, police and crime commissioners and chiefs, which include the CIOs, really wanting to do this,” continued Mulligan. “There are people in this room who together could do something, and if we don’t we will fail the public.”

Virgin Media Business looks forward to working with attendees from the roundtable to continue to identify barriers, and collectively break them down, to help shape the future of modern policing. It is committed to its role as an industry representative in this crucial, ongoing discussion.



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