



“Our trials show that by using BlackBerry devices, officers can now spend more time on the beat, attending incidents and building public confidence.”

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power to you



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Northamptonshire Police covers a territory of more than 900 square miles and serves a population of almost 650,000 people.

The force patrols one of the busiest stretches of the M1 motorway and deals with the 800,000 motorsport fans who descend on Silverstone each year, in particular for the F1 British Grand Prix.

In common with most police forces, Northamptonshire recognised that its officers were most effective when working on the ground within the communities they serve. At the same time pressure on budgets meant that it was essential that the time officers spent completing paperwork was kept to a minimum.

One of the main promises of the Policing Pledge – signed by most forces in England and Wales – is that police patrols will “spend at least 80% of their time visibly working in your neighbourhood.” But making it happen presents a number of challenges, especially completing the reporting and other paperwork processes necessary in a publicly accountable organisation.

Competition for resources

Marc Amphlett, Mobile Data Project Officer at Northamptonshire Police, explained: “It’s not just that officers had to return to a police station to complete paperwork. When they were there, there was competition for resources – a desktop computer or laptop wasn’t always available.”

Northamptonshire Police officers also use computers and laptops to access a growing number of national and local information systems. For example, the Force Intelligence System (FIS) and the Police National Computer (PNC) – the national information system that holds details of people, vehicles, crimes and property – are both vital tools for officers.

But, until recently, policemen and women in Northamptonshire could only access this critical data from their Airwave Radio Terminals or at the station. “We had to get this information to officers where they needed it most – on the frontline, patrolling the streets or when dealing with urgent 999 calls,” says Marc.

The key to achieving these objectives was to provide officers with secure and reliable access to important data while on the ground or on the move, reducing the need for time consuming journeys back to the police station to compete for time using PCs.

The UK National Policing Improvement Agency had launched the Mobile Information Programme to address these issues by providing officers with the frontline technology they need to serve the public in the 21st century.

More than £8.3 million was made available to five forces in the East Midlands, including Northamptonshire. Following discussions with Vodafone, the force began a rollout of a mobile email solution, which includes BlackBerry® Curve devices, to 900 officers.

The impact on the officers and the way they work with the public was immediate. They now access email and their calendars on the move, as well as police information systems, which mean they spend more time on the frontline, improving public confidence in the police and boosting overall service delivery.

"Using BlackBerry devices, officers can now spend more time on the beat, attending incidents and building public confidence," says Marc. "They use their devices more than 20 times a day, which equates to an hour of a ten-hour shift that they would otherwise have needed to spend at the station."

Easier and quicker to complete

But the solution is about more than just public visibility. The technology also supports integration with several Northamptonshire Police computer systems. These include ForceNet, which stores information including duty sheets, policy forms and witness statements.

Marc says: "We've configured these forms with simple drop-down menus, which makes them much easier and quicker to complete using a mobile device." These forms can be completed at the scene, further reducing the need for officers to return to the station or complete the form at the end of a busy shift.

Ease of use is also a factor when it comes to integration with the FIS. "This provides another way of entering live intelligence, via third party software that can be accessed by anyone involved in a given incident. This functionality enables officers to access the intelligence through their BlackBerry devices."

They can check number plates of suspicious vehicles, or see if a suspect or previously convicted individual is registered at a given address. "BlackBerry devices have been useful when tackling anti-social behaviour and identifying offenders," says Marc. Photographs of missing and vulnerable people can also be distributed to officers in a matter of seconds. "We now have a better chance of finding them during the crucial golden hour after a report is filed."

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Marc is also impressed by the way that a growing number of officers are using built-in cameras to capture images that enhance day-to-day communication. “Officers have used the cameras to convey the severity of a fire on an industrial estate to headquarters, confirm the layout of a hospital room occupied by a violent patient and send pictures of a suspect package to colleagues who were able to resolve the incident.”

Solution for all frontline officers

Northamptonshire Police also expects to see a cut in overtime and the associated costs. “It also reduces strain on operators at the station because they no longer have to field calls and look up information so frequently,” says Marc.

“Mobile devices reduce the need to travel back and forth to the police station because the Force Control Room can email this data to the device. We hope to see an overall reduction in fuel consumption, helping to meet the government’s target.”

Northamptonshire Police selected Vodafone for its experience of working with emergency services, coverage and value for money. “Vodafone was selected as our mobile data provider because we felt that it understood our challenges, could offer us a solution for all frontline officers and provide the data capacity that we needed within our budget. This technology gives us valuable insights into the police force of the future.”

Developments that the force hopes to see in the next few years include a mobile fingerprint reader and integration with live and archived closed-circuit television footage. “We now have an affordable solution that is not only fit for purpose but also ensures we can face the future with a detailed understanding of the role of technology in modern policing,” concludes Marc.

Significant benefits

- Officers now spend 10% more time on the ground by managing email and completing forms with mobile devices, spending less time at the station
- On-the-spot incident resolution has increased as officers can access police information systems via their BlackBerry devices and respond accordingly
- Overtime and strain on resources has reduced as officers work more efficiently and make best use of their time on the beat
- Carbon emissions have been cut by reducing vehicle journeys
- The creation of a technology platform for the future enables Northamptonshire Police to plan more effectively

