

Mobile - empowering the front line

Mobile devices, says Bedfordshire police inspector, Jim Hitch, are merely the next step in police communications – following on from the whistle, police box and the 2-way radio. He does not see their introduction so much as a technology project but as a cultural change: “It’s about getting people to work differently.”

At a roundtable organised by Research in Motion (RIM), Hitch reported that Bedfordshire officer ‘time-in-station’ had dropped by nearly a quarter to just 36% of duty time following introduction of BlackBerry mobile technology – and that each device cost just £270 a year per officer.

This impressive improvement in efficiency was echoed by Keith Gough, mobile information manager at Thames Valley Police, who said that introduction of the technology had saved the equivalent to “one hundred extra officers on the street”. Gough pointed out that PNC checks over Airwave take an average of three minutes and involve two members of staff - one back at the station doing the check - while those on mobile devices could run the check themselves, instantly.

The National Police Improvement Agency’s (NPIA) mobile information programme manager, Gary Cairns, says that NPIA is looking at whether one mobile device can meet voice and data comms requirements after the current Airwave police radio network agreement expires in 2015. What that device may be is still under investigation, but it is safe to say it will be a device that combines the qualities of both today’s mobile data devices and Airwave radio communications. Indeed, the long term aim of the NPIA’s Future Communications Programme is to converge access to police ICT systems to enable one access point for officers to the information

Incident reporting rolls out nationally:

National deployment of the Fire and Rescue Service Incident Recording System is complete, with FRS able to use it to log, store and disseminate attended incident data. Developed by Informed Solutions in cooperation with CLG, the fully automated data capture and data sharing system enables data on all incidents attended by FRSs to be collected and verified at source.

Best use of technology: Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Forensic Pathways scooped the Orange Best Use of Technology in Business category at the National Business Awards for using FPL’s Forensic Phone Analyser system to drastically increase and improve its ability to manage intelligence. The system can manage billions of items of data relating to mobile phone and telecommunications networks, helping investigators make sense of, and use, it to identify and catch criminals.

they need, when they need it, where they need it.

David Davies, Conservative MP for Monmouth and, pertinently, a special constable with the British Transport Police, sits on the Home Affairs Select Committee. He confirmed that a future Conservative government would undoubtedly oversee cuts in public sector spending. Therefore a convincing business case for mobile devices demonstrating that they can save money in the long term would be needed, he said, to secure short term investment. However, he added that as a special constable “I have seen the benefits of mobile data and it is something I would want to support.”

Mobile devices such as the BlackBerry, approved by CESG to carry data up to ‘restricted’ levels, allow quick and secure access to information from the Police National Computer (PNC), the warrants database, intelligence briefings, and the DVLA database.

To date the government has handed out £80m via the NPIA to enable forces to trial such devices. NPIA says that around half of all police officers currently carry one. RIM estimates approximately 39,000 devices are in use today by UK police forces – around half of these are Blackberry smartphones.

Culture, however, is a major issue. Hitch estimates that around 80-85% of devices handed out are heavily used. The remainder are not. When pressed, he confirmed that lack of uptake was more prevalent among older officers who were not comfortable with the technology.

Encouraging universal use of new technology is a major block to delivering promised efficiency savings – the police are not alone in encountering this problem.

Lincolnshire Police has implemented IT service management software Sostenuto, from Sunrise Software. It is working towards ITIL accreditation, in line with the NPIA ‘Information Systems Strategy for the Police Service’ directive, which lays down a framework to improve police performance and efficiencies.

Police can keep records for 100 years

Five police forces which challenged a ruling that they should delete records on criminal convictions from their database have won their appeal.

The court of appeal said that convictions, however old and however minor, can be of value in the fight against crime and could be kept for 100 years. If the forces had lost their appeal they may have been forced to delete details of as many as one million people – effectively creating a “liars’ charter” where people would be able to deny criminal convictions on job applications if they knew the deletion deadline had passed. The appeal was made by the chief constables of Humberside, Staffordshire, Northumbria, West Midlands and Greater Manchester.

Union and Tories criticise plans for fire service reorganisation:

Plans for nine regional hi-tech fire control centres based on the Government Office Regions, replacing 46 local control rooms, will lead to a worse service, fire fighters and the Conservatives have warned. The move will lead to the loss of local knowledge, which fire fighters warn could lead to delays. The FireControl project, originally established by John Prescott, is years behind schedule, beset by technical problems and more than £400m over its original £1bn budget. The Tories have called for it to be scrapped and alternatives investigated - such as the tri-service centre model used in Gloucestershire which draws together all three local emergency services under one roof.

Crime maps to ward level: The Home Office has launched a new interactive national map collating data from the 43 individual police force crime maps - giving the public access to local statistics and details on crime in their area. Developed by the NPIA, the online map allows people to view figures for all crime as well as burglary, robbery, violence, vehicle crime and anti-social behaviour in their area at the touch of a button. It also enables comparisons of one force’s figures with another, and provides details of neighbourhood police teams and local policing priorities. <http://maps.police.uk>

Reducing travel to maximise inspections

GGP Systems has launched an innovative route planner for UK fire and rescue services. Designed to reduce travelling times and costs and maximise the number of building inspections made by fire safety inspectors, GGP Routing utilises the most up to date street maps to ensure optimal routing taking into account a range of user defined options, road network characteristics and other variables. www.ggpsystems.co.uk

