

# Mobile technology creates new ways of working

In May 2008, the Home Office allocated £50m of funding to support the delivery of handheld computers to frontline police officers. The devices give officers on the spot access to vital information and help to reduce the amount of time spent on bureaucracy back at the station. The funding was provided to increase the number of devices used by officers to 10,000 by September 2008. The National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) is managing the roll out of the devices and the distribution of funding to forces.



In the recent Green Paper, From the neighbourhood to the national: Policing our communities together, published in July, the Home Secretary announced a further £25m to extend the programme to more forces and more officers. This means that there will be around 30,000 devices operational by March 2010.

Patrolling officers are now beginning to see the benefits as the new devices come into service. Having access to information when out on patrol gives officers greater visibility within communities by allowing them to complete paperwork and receive information without returning to the station. Inputting

information straight into a mobile device cuts out repetition with paper forms. It also reduces the risk of inaccurate information being inputted at a later date.

## Better managed

Mobile devices allow officers to better manage command and control situations, gain improved intelligence, identify people, complete paperwork, communicate via e-mail plus many other features all depending upon local need.

Richard Earland, Chief Information Officer at the NPIA, said, "We are increasingly seeing a move

towards national standards in information systems for police forces and while each force is responsible for delivering its own mobile solution, the NPIA is helping them gain the most out of using handheld computers. As well as a programme that assists forces to realise the benefits of using this technology, we have also made agreements with suppliers to allow forces to reduce procurement times and to gain from greater economies of scale. Other shared services will become available over the next 12 months."

## Funding

The NPIA, in conjunction with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Association of Police Authorities (APA) and the Home Office, has led on the allocation of funding to police forces. The NPIA is now developing a range of national support services to help forces realise the most from the new technology.

Ian Readhead, Deputy Chief Constable of Hampshire and ACPO lead for mobility, said, "Mobile computers are absolutely critical to a modern police officer. Having information in the right place at the right time, which is up to date and accurate is vital to help officers with their work with the public."

## Police fleet

The evolution of mobile information poses new challenges for the policing vehicle fleet. Mobile Data Terminals, or MDTs, have been around for a while but to date have mostly been fixed to the vehicle. However, as equipment improves, becoming lighter and smaller with improved functionality, the trend is for technology previously fixed to vehicles to now be carried by individual officers.

Having mobile computers carried by the officer has also led to the development of handheld computers that can be attached to a small docking station, which links to a 'slave' monitor and keyboard, giving the officer greater ease of use when in the vehicle.

## New technology

The NPIA Automotive and Equipment Section (AES) assesses any new technology to make sure that it is compatible for use in vehicles and the unit has now been involved in the roll out of mobile devices. Jim Mathison, Head of the AES, said, "Mobile devices improve how police officers work with the public. AES's role is to ensure that these devices function in police vehicles. For example, the team ensures that mobile information does not cause interference with police radio systems. Likewise, AES helps ensure that the installation of docking stations do not get in the officer's way while driving."

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