



A Connected Future for Law Enforcement

The critical role played by technology and digital transformation within the UK's Regional and special police services



Making the case for digital transformation

The day-to-day role of policing across the UK continues to change rapidly.

Officers on the frontline - and their commanders at all levels – face new and evolving challenges. Cost-cutting and talent shortages are heavily impacting current decision making, alongside the nature of crimes to be solved.

Leaders must also grapple with technological transformation, fearful that the adoption of new infrastructure and kit might compromise security or continuity, while forcing them to juggle already tight budgets even more.

However, rolling out a digital infrastructure along with the latest mobile equipment has already transformed many different industries; it has allowed each to work more efficiently and productively, and offered considerable financial savings.

But police services up and down the country have their own unique challenges. Their primary reliance will always be on people not technology; a sustained human presence in the right places - at the right times - is critical to serving communities, keeping the public safe, and catching criminals.

This human element can be positively augmented by technology.

The “thin blue line” undoubtedly has many opportunities for short and long-term benefits.

By creating a new digital frontline, leaderships can complement an improved back-office function, one that is also future-proofed by technology.

To succeed, there are many issues to be navigated. For example:

- Limited funding to replace old and outdated equipment
- Recruitment freezes preventing the best digital skills being deployed
- Siloed IT departments with a lack of time to find and deliver new solutions
- Changing priorities from the top down, such as the Home Office/PCCs
- Establishing training among officers to ensure they trust their new kit
- Making the public feel comfortable with the new technologies being utilised

UK police services are already reliant on technology and digital to beat and solve crime. Looking ahead, its involvement in delivering greater collaboration and secure sharing of information between them all will be even more important.

There is no time to waste. Criminals are already more tech-savvy than ever. The alarm that is sounding signals how and why UK police services must proactively react to this threat to stay one step ahead.



Technology challenges from the frontline to the leadership

All UK police services are having to balance budgets to meet increasing pressures and expectations from the public, as well as from national, regional, and local government, and Police and Crime Commissioners.

According to ONS research focused on England and Wales (published in April 2022), “police recorded crime data show indications that certain offence types are returning to or exceeding the levels seen before the pandemic”. Experts also suggest the difficult economic conditions ahead will also lead to rising crime rates.

The ONS highlighting a 37% increase in fraud and computer misuse offences [year ending March 2022 vs pre-coronavirus year ending March 2020] is also interesting. It is clear evidence of how UK police services must keep pace through adopting the most modern digital technology available.

But our own Zebra research (focused on the current landscape within UK police forces) shows progress in this aim is being held back. Reasons include:

- Being seen to use public money wisely and being able to justify spending
- A rush to panic-buy new systems, platforms, and devices
- Short buying cycles that do not form part of a long-term digital plan
- Pressures from different departments for ‘must-have’ new kit
- A lack of adequate talent, knowledge, or skills within IT departments
- The need to rethink what ‘value’ means and how to measure ROI
- Siloed development making police services slower rather than faster
- Holes in security that could be exploited by doing things ‘on the cheap’
- Loss, damage, and theft of equipment causing budgets to be eaten up
- Officers’ time wasted at the station due to outdated manual practices
- Evidence being mislaid, or lost, through labelling issues or human error

The good news is these challenges are solvable. Digital technology brings speed, efficiency, productivity, and cost-savings – while empowering and improving police services to be better connected to cut crime.



Taking the opportunities from technological change

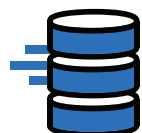
Investing in new devices, computers, digital kit, and technology is a bold step forward – but it is one that also needs the involvement of everyone from the IT department to Commissioners, Chief Constables, and PCCs.

When making a use case as to why the upgrading of archaic legacy equipment and solutions is critical for the future, there are many advantages to highlight.



FREEING UP MORE TIME

Countless hours are spent by officers writing and filing their reports when back at their own station. Time-savings can be achieved here through the rollout of mobile computers to do this from anywhere. Such investment demonstrates to the rank and file how bosses are investing in them, and this boosts morale. It also ensures officers have more time in their communities to fight crime.



FAST INFORMATION ACCESS

The more information officers have at their fingertips when in the field, the faster and more efficiently they can carry out their duties. They can react and respond with less friction, making better decisions. An individual, personal handheld device - with them at all times - means they can instantly look up suspect details, scan vehicle number plates, check evidence, and read crime reports.



DEEPER ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Adopting the latest technology and devices means more monitoring and the gathering of a wider range of analytics. Harnessing artificial intelligence and machine learning to study this granular data identifies workforce trends, performance reviews, crime patterns, and time tracking. Reports generated show where operations can become more efficient and productive.



DIGITAL CHAINS OF EVIDENCE

From photographing crime scenes and scanning documents found during searches, to tagging sample bags with trackers, today's technology ensures officers can safely and securely log and build instantly shareable banks of evidence. This should ensure nothing critical goes missing and it prevents any tampering; there is also clear oversight of where something is, and who has had access to it.



SECURE CRITICAL COMMUNICATIONS

Lines of communication between commanders and those on the frontline must never fail. This is imperative for officer and public safety. Full situational awareness during an incident must be constant through radios, smartphones, and newer wearable devices. Comms must be robust and able to integrate with systems in other forces, government departments, and external bodies.



INCREASED LIFESPAN

With budgets stretched tighter than ever, lifespan and value for money become two major pre-purchase factors, or important when considered as part of an RFQ/RFP. Given the increased public scrutiny on where and how money is spent, this must be built-in when planning what to buy, and from who. Zebra's handhelds, such as the TC58 and TC77/ET85, offer 4+4 years and 5+5 years of lifespan respectively.

Rolling out the most effective solutions

Any investment in new technology and equipment must demonstrate a clear ROI at a time when IT budgets are limited. It must work in unpredictable situations and be secure in the field.



HANDHELD DEVICES

From radios to smartphones to scanners, the latest digital kit enables officers to send and receive information from multiple sources wherever they are. It is critical that such devices are rugged, waterproof, always charged, and unlikely to break if dropped. This saves money by limiting the need for replacements to be bought.



MOBILE COMPUTERS

Laptops, tablets, printers, and now even wearables, all have a part to play in the digital frontline of today's police services. During a critical situation or ongoing emergency, they can deliver situational awareness with access to real-time data and maps used for "on the bonnet" briefings. They can also be used for filing reports.



ASSET TRACKING

Tracking is becoming a major requirement for police services today. Using RFID tags, officers and their leaderships can monitor where critical equipment, evidence, and even people are. This helps prevent human error that could compromise an investigation, while ensuring safety, efficiency, and readiness.



CLOUD

Legacy and on-prem servers and infrastructure within individual police stations is very costly to manually update and upgrade. Most industries now take advantage of cloud technology, and this can be used to securely store and share information, update, or fix remotely, and keep backups in case evidence is lost or destroyed.



APPS

Deploying a cloud infrastructure enables police services to develop their own secure software applications for officers to use on mobile devices. These can be created to solve problems specific to different localities and communities. Over time, these apps can be shared with UK-wide colleagues for collaboration.



5G

The rollout of 5G mobile networks will massively increase available internet speeds out in the field and reduce latency, delivering information with less time lag. Police services will be able to connect the latest digital equipment and devices to swathes of sensors placed around their communities to monitor and collect useful data.

The future of policing starts here

It's clear that tomorrow's criminals will become even more adept with technology than many already are. There is no reason for police services and their officers to be using inferior technology that that used by those they aim to catch.

It is imperative to rapidly construct most robust and secure infrastructure as this will enable the digital frontline to uphold the law and stay one step ahead of those trying to circumvent it.

This doesn't have to wait for a national solution. There are many advances that can easily be adopted and integrated into police stations, police vehicles, officers' kit and within back-office functions at each of the UK's police services.

At Zebra, we have a wealth of expertise in transforming industries through technology, building confidence in its benefits at all levels of an organisation's hierarchy. We can demonstrate with evidence the tangible impacts this makes.

We are a trusted Public Safety technology partner, already helping emergency responders to make better informed safety and efficiency decisions through real-time data available to them during unpredictable situations.

Our experience ensures the mission critical challenges of connectivity, accuracy, empowerment, situational awareness, and community safety can be overcome. We have a comprehensive service wrap that can be bundled with our devices to create full peace of mind given the instability of frontline environments.

Digital and technology not only raises the standards within police services, but it also delivers greater levels of transparency and accountability so the public feel safer; it also helps them to understand the role technology is playing in catching those who commit offences and try to evade arrest.

For officers, it cuts down on much manual entry of information, often done at the end of the day in a rush. This raises the potential for mistakes to be made that later might cause a prosecution to be abandoned.

Of course, any move from ageing and legacy technology to the likes of handhelds and the cloud brings with it a level of organisational nervousness.

But as a trusted partner to many industries, we understand how critical it is for police services to get this right the first time. We also know how difficult it can be to get buy-in from a leadership fearful about breakdowns in continuity.

It is worth the time and effort and capital expenditure. An effective switch from continuous spending to simply maintain outdated equipment will usher in a new era of efficiency, productivity, and savings.

For police services across the UK, this ensures longer life cycles, improved well-being for officers, faster decision making, improved transparency, greater public trust, more money reallocated to the frontline – and the opportunity to gain more from less.

The technology solutions and digital device examples we have highlighted are grounded in solving real world problems for everyone working in law enforcement. We are on your side and part of your team on this path.

Zebra has 50+ years of technology expertise in developing trusted hardware and software solutions that are built for today's critical needs; for the UK's police services we are the right choice to help you tackle the fast-moving changes ahead.



To find out more about the connected future of UK policing,
visit www.connect.zebra.com/policing_en



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