

Look to the future

Jamie Wilson looks at the role that technology will play in delivering the transformational reform necessary for policing England and Wales

Having a vision of the future is important, but to make it a reality you need a plan that will get you there, the right people onboard and access to appropriate resources. I

am of course referring to the Policing Vision 2025 (formerly Vision 2020), which was the focus of the Police ICT Summit on 18 January 2017. The summit – hosted by the Police ICT Company and the National Police Technology Council (NPTC) – explored how transformational reform could be delivered together. Delegates included senior stakeholders from policing, the Home Office, the College of Policing and other policing bodies, as well as key partners from industry.

The Policing Vision 2025 was drafted by police and crime commissioners (PCCs), chief constables, and other policing bodies not under the auspice of the Home Office. It sets out a plan to shape decisions around transformation and how the 43 police forces in England and Wales use their resources to keep people safe and provide an effective, trusted and accessible service that offers value for money. In the context of digital policing, the intention is to “make it easier for the public to make contact with the police wherever they are in the country, enable us to make better use of digital intelligence and evidence, and transfer all material in a digital format to the criminal justice system”.

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While the Policing Vision 2025 is about delivering transformation, it has become inextricably linked with the drive for efficiency gains and cost savings, set against a backdrop of seemingly ever-shrinking budgets. The pressure to find these elusive gains and the role of technology and cross-force collaboration, is a message that has been pushed relentlessly at forces for many years, perhaps most notably by the then Home Secretary Theresa May, when she addressed the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and Association of Police Authorities National Conference in 2010.

This message was reiterated at the recent summit with Brandon Lewis, the policing and fire minister calling for a response to the changing police landscape, while highlighting the need for collaboration, the

need to identify greater efficiencies and for systems to interlink and “talk” to each other.

Forces that have already begun such a transformation (not only in England and Wales, but globally) are already recognising and reporting the benefits of systems, such as digital evidence management and incident investigations systems, to their cross-force and cross-border colleagues. So, while forces struggle with dwindling budgets (and some believe austerity is here to stay), there appears to be consensus that transformation is long overdue – and even a sense of optimism.

During the summit, Sarah Wilkinson, chief digital data and technology officer at the Home Office, explained that smaller budgets require fresh thinking and transformation, while saying that £175m will be made available in transformation funds.

The changing face of crime – such as the rise of online crime, and old crimes being carried out in new ways – and the availability of new forms of digital evidence, fresh opportunities to strengthen engagement with the public and archaic back-office processes all require transformational reform. Furthermore, the new Emergency Services Network (ESN), which replaces the current Tetra radio network, will allow even greater levels digital information, communication and collaboration.

Julia Mulligan, PCC for North Yorkshire and chair of the Police and Transformation Board, shed light on some of the key areas in which forces should be working together. These included the need to provide an easy, consistent way for the public to make digital contact with the police, while also making improvements to the storage, interoperability and use of digital intelligence and evidence (including the ability to transfer this material to criminal justice systems). Mulligan stressed that IT touches all aspects of policing.

What is clear from attending the Police ICT Summit is that there is not only an acknowledgement that digital transformation needs to begin now, but also that there is an appetite for it, despite the challenges imposed by budget constraints. However, there is also a lot of support available in the form of the Police ICT Company, the NPTC and the newly formed Information Management and Operational Requirements Co-ordination Committee (IMORCC), which will be the voice of technology requirements for all 43 forces in England and Wales.

Regardless of whether it is Vision 2020, 2025 or even 2050, forces need to be able to adapt to the ever changing cultural, technological and criminal landscape. ■

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