

ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

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High Level Overview of the Emerging Trends and the use of Technology at West Midlands Police

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Cover Report

1. Police and Crime Plan

- 1.1 This report is intended to give a high-level overview of the use of Technology across West Midlands Police, including emerging trends, economic and environmental factors and the impact on operational efficiency.
- 1.2 Technology is a significant resource for policing. WMP are expected to proactively scan for emerging trends and prioritise the effective and efficient use of new and existing technology, ensuring that police officers and staff have the right hardware and software to undertake their roles to the best of their abilities.
- 1.3 Data is a major resource for policing. To ensure an evidence-informed and learning culture, WMP will collaborate with academia to develop a robust technological knowledge base. WMP will promote efficient exchanges of ideas between policing and industry and explore opportunities with national partners and programmes. By collaborating with statutory partners locally, regionally and nationally, WMP will support data-sharing initiatives to drive crime prevention and mitigate harm.

2 Achievements and Challenges

2.1 Proactively scanning for emerging trends and prioritise the effective and efficient use of new and existing technology.

2.1.1 Challenge

Technology change is fast paced and it's difficult for public sector organisations to keep up with the pace of change.

2.1.2 Achievement

WMP has initiated a Regional Innovation Group; WMP, West Mercia, Warwickshire and Staffordshire meet bimonthly to discuss new innovations at local and national levels. These working groups are formal, chaired by an Assistant Chief Constable (ACC), and also include representation from the Home Office, Police Digital Services and the College of Policing.

The Corporate Development department assist with horizon scanning and this function ensures that WMP has a presence at national conferences, observes industry trends and liaises with regional forces to collaborate, share and learn.

This function also highlights any National funding opportunities and facilitates the application process – WMP have benefited from circa £130K from Home Office innovation funding since 2023.

2.2 WMP to fully exploit and support the evidence and best practice resources provided by the College of Policing.

2.2.1 Challenge

Although the College of Policing toolkits are primarily operationally focused, most do require IT changes or support. WMP have many competing demands on the IT function which makes fulfilling all new requests challenging.

2.2.2 Achievement

In order to ensure that work of the IT function is prioritised in line with the needs of WMP and external commitments, additional governance has been initiated. The Assistant Director of IT, along with the ACC for Change and the Director of Commercial Services meet with the Deputy Chief Constable (DCC) monthly; the IT Delivery Plan is reviewed and prioritised, with the DCC as the ultimate decision maker. National Initiatives, including those from the College of Policing (CoP) are highlighted and scheduled for delivery – thus ensuring that the appropriate resource is allocated and CoP initiatives are implemented. Windows 11 and the future use of M365 are current examples of this.

2.3 Ensuring that police officers and staff have the right hardware and software to undertake their roles to the best of their abilities.

2.3.1 Challenge

One of the biggest challenges for policing is ensuring that officers and staff have technology that is secure, interoperable, and reliable while operating within tight budgetary and compliance constraints. Balancing user needs, security standards, and system compatibility often means difficult trade-offs between innovation and practicality.

2.3.2 Achievement

Within the IT department at WMP two teams have been designed to address these issues:

2.3.2.1 The User Experience Team

This team works with front line colleagues to understand operational needs; conducting interviews, shadowing, and workshops with officers and staff to understand how they use technology in real world scenarios – on patrol, in custody suites, in vehicles, or at desks. Thus, allowing pain points to be identified, such as slow systems, difficult interfaces or poor connectivity.

By engaging with frontline users early, simplifying system design, and continuously iterating based on feedback, the User Experience team bridges the gap between technical capability and real-world policing needs, leading to higher adoption rates and greater efficiencies.

2.3.2.2 The Continuous Improvement Team

This team of IT developers work with the User Experience team to ensure that post development feedback, and analytics that highlight where any system improvements / changes are needed, can be delivered and deployed quickly. This ensures that new systems evolve with operational needs and remain fit for purpose as policing practices and technologies change.

The dedicated Continuous Improvement Team ensures that learning, innovation, and efficiency become part of the day-to-day business rather than reactive projects.

All recommendations from the User Experience team are weighted using industry standard scoring models, allowing prioritisation to be given to those changes that will generate the most benefit. These proposed changes are then reviewed by the DCC at the monthly IT prioritisation meeting and resources are assigned accordingly.

2.4 Use of technology will be lawful, ethical and proportionate at national, regional and local levels.

2.4.1 Challenge

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is growing across all sectors exponentially. This poses a challenge for WMP and Policing in general because of the need to balance innovation (using new technology to improve policing outcomes), data access (enabling intelligence – led decision-making), and information assurance (maintaining legality, ethics, and public trust).

2.4.2 Achievement

The use of AI across WMP is currently limited so the approaches outlined below are in preparation for the introduction of AI. These approaches are in line with industry best practice which recommends that AI governance should start before deployment not after.

2.4.2.1 Formal Assessment

AI initiatives that have been requested across the force, or suggested by suppliers, are currently recorded on a formal register and are being individually assessed for security, credibility, reliability, usability and business benefits.

2.4.2.2 Ethics and Privacy by Design

The detailed AI assessment will also include Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) and Algorithmic Impact Assessments (AIAs). Every AI design will also be assessed on data minimisation, purpose limitation, explainability, and auditability.

2.4.2.3 Legal and Ethical Standards

All AI assessments will include a compliance test against:

- Data Protection Act 2018 (Part 3 – Law Enforcement Processing)
- UK GDPR principles (fairness, transparency, accountability, proportionality)
- Human rights Act 1998 (Article 8 - Privacy)
- Code of Ethics (College of Policing)
- Surveillance Camera Code of Practice
- Equality Act 2010 (avoiding bias and discrimination)

The ICO's guidance on AI and Data Protection and the NPCC's Policing Digital Ethics Framework are also being used to benchmark compliance and good practice.

2.4.2.4 Data Access Controls and Information Assurance

Balancing innovation with security means WMP needs to ensure appropriate access while maintaining data integrity and confidentiality. In order to achieve this, the following measures will be applied:

- Role and attribute-based access controls to limit who can use AI systems and under what conditions.
- Enforcement of National Police Information Risk Management standards and Police Secure Network security requirements.
- The use of quality assured, accurate and lawfully sourced data.
- Clear audit trails for all data processed or decisions made by AI.

2.4.2.5 Testing, Validation, and Continuous Monitoring

The following steps will be applied in order to provide a continuous level of assurance pre and post AI deployment:

- Pre-deployment validation: Test models for accuracy, fairness and potential bias.
- Post-deployment monitoring: Regular review of system outcomes.
- Decommissioning process: Clear definition of when and how to withdraw AI tools that no longer meet assurance or proportionality standards.

2.4.2.6 Governance

All AI initiatives will be subject to a formal Change Paper tabled at the Change Board, as part of this process, the results of the formal evaluation will be discussed and each proposal will be assessed on its individual merit. The purpose of this board is to approve, monitor, and review all AI and data-driven initiatives to ensure they are lawful, ethical, and proportionate. Microsoft Co-Pilot is the first example of an AI initiative being assessed by the Change Board. Although Microsoft Co-Pilot has been live in other forces, it only gained National Accreditation recently which is why WMP are now formally considering enablement.

2.5 Using technology to reduce carbon footprint and enhance operational efficiency.

2.5.1 Challenge

WMP have 4k desktops, 11k laptops and 10k mobile phones; these devices have to be replaced when they can no longer be updated with security patches, resulting in a lot of 'old' kit for disposal.

2.5.2 Achievement

Force devices are now being recycled:

Mobile Phones: All mobile phones are now being recycled, WMP receives between £10 - £15 per device, this results in £50k - £75k revenue per year.

Desktop Computers: All desktop computers are now either being recycled or re-sold (depending on age and condition). 2025 will be the first year for this process and the force can expect to gain between £206k - £320k depending on the recycling:resell ratio.

Laptops: Negotiations are underway with third parties with regard to the re-sale / recycling of laptops, with a view to recouping around 5-10% of the original value of the device (estimated at this stage).

The force is achieving a financial gain and each device resold / recycled is helping the force reduce its carbon footprint. In addition, all devices are now replaced every 5yrs

instead of every 3yrs, so WMP are “sweating the assets” as much as national accreditation allows.

3. Actions undertaken

As outlined in Section 2.

4. Future Work

4.1 Emerging Trends:

WMP will keep focus on the Police Emerging Science and Technology Trends (PESTT), the National Policing Digital Strategy (PDS), and “Policing in England and Wales Future Operating Environment 2040”. The PESTT report identifies seven science and technology trends likely to impact UK policing over the next 1-10 years. These encompass Biometrics, AI, Autonomous systems and Immersive Environments. Criminals will use the same / parallel technology (AI encryption) and as such, WMP must be ahead in both defensive and investigative technology. Ensuring work in this field is current is essential, the UK’s national PDS strategy 2020-2030 predicts forces’ digital adoption will accelerate, but challenges will remain because criminals have easy access to advanced technology without the limitations placed upon policing.

4.2 College of Policing:

WMP will keep focus on the tools and best practice coming from the College of Policing; ensuring that effort is not duplicated. This will be checked and challenged by CoP at the Regional Innovation Groups.

4.3 Artificial Intelligence:

In order to achieve a balance between innovation, data access, and information assurance, WMP will implement the structured AI governance framework (outlined in 2.4.2).

4.4 Carbon Footprint:

Work will continue with Corporate Asset Management and Contracts and Procurement to ensure IT disposals and purchases are in line with WMP’s Environmental Strategy and meet the needs of social value and purchasing ethics.

5. Financial Implications

In addition to the cost savings highlighted in Section 2.5, the roll out of Windows 11 will allow WMP to remove the need for laptops to have an integrated Smartcard reader; 2 factor authentication requirements (previously provided via Smartcard and PIN) are no longer required. WMP can now procure cheaper laptops and procure new devices via national frameworks. This will realise significant cost savings – estimated at £100 - £150 per unit. When aggregated across our estate of 11k laptops this is an estimated saving of between £1.1m - £1.6m per re-fresh cycle.

6. Legal Implications

Any contract renewals or new contracts are subject to existing internal governance and are led and managed by the Contracts and Procurement department.

7. Equality Implications

All IT systems and mobile applications are fully DDA compliant by design. Members of the WMP Diversity and Inclusion team sit on IT boards and User Experience working groups to ensure that the voice of all our user groups are heard and catered for.