



SCOTTISH POLICE
AUTHORITY
ÙGH DARRAS POILIS NA H-ALBA



POLICE
SCOTLAND
POILEAS ALBA

Mobile Working - A Public Factsheet

Factsheet No. 10



February 2023



Summary

Increased efficiency of officers

Within the first 12 months of initial mobile deployment, Police Scotland reported that increased functionality and ability to conduct tasks whilst on the go saved officers a total of 444,496 hours. Following completion of the project this figure has grown to 756,576 hours.

Other key benefits

Reduced paperwork; Allowed more time on pro-active policing; Sped up access of officers to key data and information; Improved data security; Created better officer morale and wellbeing; Enabled new working practice and collaboration.

Delivery of the change was 'exemplary'

An independent review found Police Scotland's Mobile Working project to be "exemplary and that such a situation requires a blend of best practice in the areas of management capability, quality of resources, team working and governance".

What is Mobile Working?

The mobile revolution has changed the way we work, communicate with others, and spend our free time. Digital devices have become ever more common across society, with a range of tasks and processes now performed more efficiently and effectively with their use.

Think about the mobile phone, for example: the Office of National Statistics [reported](#) in 2020 that 84% of adults in the UK use a smartphone. It is now a commonplace piece of digital technology that has merged past tasks into one device that most people carry on them at all times.

Mobile technology has reshaped many sectors and industries. Due to their portability and capacity to provide users with constant connection, many lines of work have adopted digital devices. For example, in the healthcare sector, nurses and other healthcare professionals are beginning to use mobile technology to enhance caregiving collaboration and to communicate with patients.

In retail settings, customer-facing staff are increasingly using mobile devices to access product data, process payments and schedule deliveries for customers. Cases like the ones described here can be understood to fall under what is now commonly referred to as "mobile working".



Why use Mobile Working in Policing?

Mobile technology presents the opportunity to fundamentally transform the way police officers carry out their duties.

Police work is fast paced, dynamic and often requires decisions to be made under pressure. Historically, police officers have relied on traditional airwave radio, manual record keeping and spending significant time back at the station to update records.

The ability of officers to access data and information to assist decision-making in real-time and to update digital notes linked to force systems on the move, aims to drive improvements in both efficiency and effectiveness of policing.

Researchers at Loughborough University [highlighted](#) that law enforcement agencies can utilise mobile devices to support time critical decision-making that requires specialised information.

There are many identified benefits for equipping mobile devices to officers serving the public. By December 2010, the Home Office-funded "Mobile Information Programme" had supplied 41,000 mobile devices to police officers in England and Wales. The National Audit Office [noted](#):

"The programme has, on average, increased the visibility of police officers to the public and officers spend more time out of the station, an estimated 18 minutes a shift, although there is considerable variation. While the Mobile Information Programme did not explicitly set out to deliver cashable savings, these should have followed from objectives to reduce bureaucracy, increase efficiency and contribute to better policing."

Like many other sectors around the world, digital device uptake in policing can be observed in many jurisdictions.

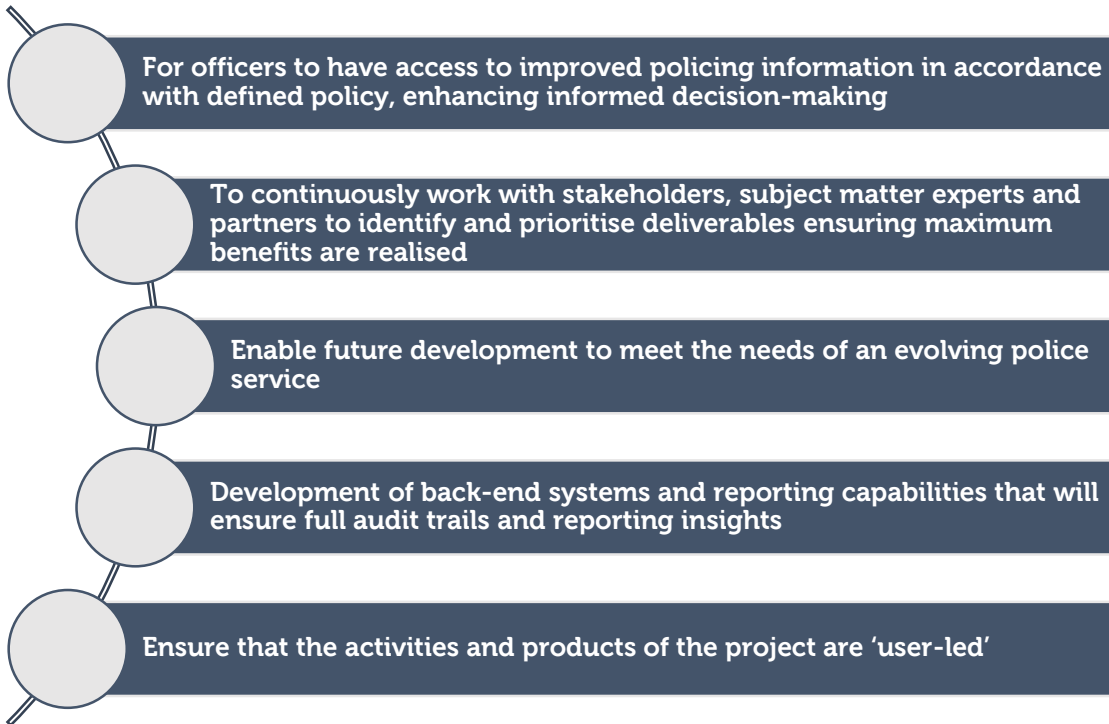
Police Scotland implementation and use of the technology

In order to invest in the use of technology as a strategic objective, the Authority approved the Mobile Working Phase 1 business case in August 2018.

Starting in the summer of 2019, Police Scotland began the roll out of the mobile devices to community and response Officers. By increasing efficiency, the project was funded to provide remote, live access to key policing information systems. This project was run under the larger 'Digitally Enabled Policing Programme' (DEPP) and supports the objectives in the Scottish Government's Digital Strategy for Justice in Scotland. 10,809 mobile devices installed with an array of useful apps were deployed to operational officers as an outcome of Phase 1.

Phase 2 of the Mobile Working project was approved by the Authority Board in September 2020. Between June 2021 and June 2022, 3,633 Crime Investigation Division Officers and Forensic Services staff were given 5,892 mobile devices suitable for their specific operational roles. Applying lessons learned and recommendations from the Phase 1 external research, the full Mobile Working project training & rollout concluded in June 2022, successfully introducing mobile devices on a national basis.

The key objectives for the project included:



Improved effectiveness and efficiency of policing were identified as key benefits of the Mobile Working project, alongside increased officer visibility, improved officer safety and a reduction in costs.

Ultimately, the overarching objective of mobile working is to ensure officers can spend more time in their local communities.

What evidence is there to assure citizens?

Researchers from Robert Gordon University (RGU) and Abertay University were appointed to [evaluate the implementation and impact of the national roll-out of mobile working](#). The findings of the research were largely positive. The research team identified long-term potential benefits in five main areas. These benefits are presented on the next page.

Productivity

- Mobile devices improved the efficiency of policing and increased capacity for officers, allowing more time for proactive policing.

Information

- Mobile devices improved access to information, information accuracy and the speed at which information could be accessed. Additionally, mobile working increased officers' ability for further information sharing, and improved data security (compared to traditional paper notepads).

Connectivity and Communication

- Connectivity and real time communication allowed teams to collaborate better. The devices also gave opportunity for better external communications with partners, whilst increasing visibility of police work to the public.

Officer Wellbeing and Safety

- The devices contributed to better overall officer wellbeing and morale, and mobile device functionality improved officer safety and autonomy when working. During COVID-19 lockdowns, the devices also allowed for social distancing and access to up-to-date health information.

Technology and Culture Change

- Devices have a defining role in both officers' attitudes to technology, and also the public attitude towards a technologically enabled police force. Furthermore, mobile working was found to foster positive attitudes to technology in the organisation going forward, with less reliance on control rooms and station facilities, enabling new working practices and collaboration. Overall it was noted that mobile working also improved relationships across the organisation.

Within the first 12-months of initial mobile device deployment, Police Scotland [reported](#) that increased functionality and ability to conduct tasks whilst on the go saved officers a total of 444,496 hours. Following the completion of the project this figure has grown to 756,576 hours.

In reality, this means that due to the efficiency savings brought about by mobile devices, more officer time was made available to focus on tasks such as community policing.

In September 2019 a Scottish Government 'Technology Assurance Framework Healthcheck Review' was conducted in relation to Phase 1 of the project and assigned it a 'Green' status - a grading which is rarely achieved within the public sector. The report noted;

"The lessons of many similar initiatives demonstrate that the position found at Police Scotland's Mobile Working project to be exemplary and that such a situation requires a blend of best practice in the areas of management capability, quality of resources, team working and governance. The Review Team wish to recognise the quality of the approach and delivery of the Project Team and emphasise that such a level of commendation is not typical of an independent assurance review".

Looking forward

The Mobile Working project formally closed in December 2022 and the ongoing mobile working management and development work has transitioned to Police Scotland's 'Digital Division' for long-term management. This transition has been supported by the creation of a multi-skilled Mobile Working Team who exist to ensure ongoing development and future system integration in the years ahead. This included working with other business areas to ensure that further mobile efficiency can be realised. Such work includes: mobile integration with the Core Operational Solutions in national crime apps and development work; and a planned national mobile device refresh in 2023.

Future development will continue to link into wider digital transformation in support of operational policing.

Further reading

Read the RGU and Abertay research evaluation of Police Scotland's mobile working roll out – [available here](#).

Purpose of these Factsheets

The Strategic Police Plan commits to the provision of Policing for a safe, protected and resilient Scotland. This requires designing and maintaining services which meet rising and evolving demands in a constantly changing environment. To meet these demands, now and in the future, Scotland's police service must adapt and proportionately adopt the necessary technologies which will enable them to protect the safety and wellbeing of our communities (as outlined in the Policing Principles - Section 32 of Police and Fire Reform Act 2012).

This series of public focused and user-friendly factsheets has been developed to provide an overview of the benefits of emerging technology and upcoming developments within policing, the policies that will govern them, and the ethical, privacy and human rights implications.

Keeping up to date

To keep up to date with our work, please keep an eye on the Scottish Police Authority's website where you can find papers and watch livestream committee discussions, and follow us on Twitter:

@ScotPolAuth @policescotland

Date published: February 2023