Transforming the front line: how police forces can drive efficiency with technology
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Policing is rapidly changing. The evolving face of crime requires new skills and vigilance, as well as ongoing collaboration between forces, improved officer visibility, and even faster response times.

Technology is often cited as the solution to meeting many of these demands, and for good reason – when carried out successfully, digital transformation can make a significant difference in driving efficiencies across organisations in any sector.

However, this transformation often requires a high amount of resources – and it’s no secret that the UK’s vital police forces are facing more pressure than ever.

With cuts to funding, fewer staff and increased public scrutiny, setting out on an all-new digital transformation journey can fall to the bottom of a force’s list of priorities.

As a trusted partner of many of the UK’s public sector organisations, we wanted to get a real picture of the use of technology in today’s police forces, as well as uncovering the shape that it could take in the future.

We sent out a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to 48 police forces in the UK and asked them about:

- Where IT budgets were spent in 2018
- The tools used to collaborate with other police forces
- Whether they plan to adopt a cloud-first strategy within the next five years

We received 37 responses, revealing that although there was a wide range of approaches to IT, over half of police forces were looking to implement a cloud-first strategy in the future.

There is so much potential for technology to transform the way that police forces work, and we’re already starting to see this in action.

In order to create a successful digital future for our police forces, it’s crucial that every component of an IT infrastructure works together, with a focus on building a flexible but secure foundation that supports collaboration, security and availability.
The real challenge of digital transformation

At government level, there’s been a focus on driving digital transformation in the UK’s police forces. In August 2018, the Home Office announced the investment of more than £100 million into projects designed to transform how the police forces use technology, as part of the second phase of investment of the Police Transformation Fund.

The aim of this investment is to improve efficiency, deliver cash savings and boost the ability of the police to deal with major threats, creating, in the words of Nick Hurd, the minister for policing and the fire service, a “modern, agile and responsive police service”.

But are these aims truly filtering down to the front line?

We asked police forces where their IT budgets were spent in 2018, and uncovered that while many are spending the majority of their budgets on maintaining current infrastructure, there is undoubtedly a shift towards boosting efficiency with technology.
Investment in digital transformation accounted for **28%** of police IT budgets in 2018.

The third-party management of IT infrastructure accounted for **32%** of budgets.

**40%** of IT budgets were spent on the maintenance of current IT infrastructure.

However, this picture varied significantly across individual police forces. In some cases, nothing was spent on digital transformation in 2018, while levels of investment among other police forces varied significantly.

*With so many options on offer, one of the main challenges across the private and public sector alike is ensuring that money is being invested into the right digital solutions.*

A recent trend has seen police forces look at handing over the day-to-day management of their IT infrastructure to third parties, with the rationale being that the resulting increase in IT resources can be dedicated to more transformational or strategic activities. However, this third-party management can often take the form of multi-million-pound, long-term system integration contracts, with little flexibility and scope for change without further financial penalties.

When it comes to police forces, for whom responsiveness and acting quickly on information is so key, it becomes even more crucial to get it right. This means ensuring that a perfect balance is struck between control and flexibility, whilst also considering security and availability.
“When it comes to police forces, for whom responsiveness and acting quickly on information is so key, it becomes even more crucial to get it right.”
Boosting collaboration with technology

When it comes to digital transformation, collaboration is just one of many benefits offered by the right solution. Used correctly, technology can boost efficiency, security, and give staff the flexibility to work from anywhere.

However, sharing data in a secure and consistent way remains a challenge for many forces:

Only 18% of UK police officers thought that their policing systems were well integrated.

- Annual Police ICT User Survey

Meanwhile, only half claimed that they could rely on the data held on their force's computer systems, highlighting challenges with inter-operability between other police forces and partner agencies due to inconsistencies in the tools used to capture and view information.

However, this is a picture that is changing significantly. Our analysis found that police forces were commonly using collaboration tools such as Skype for Business and Webex, demonstrating a shift towards the adoption of commercial off-the-shelf applications that can boost collaboration.

This drive towards better knowledge-sharing is further supported by a national enablement programme driven by the National Police Chiefs’ Council, which aims to roll out Office 365 in a standardised manner across forces.

While this move is unlikely to solve the problem of inter-operability in itself, it demonstrates a wider awareness of the importance of being able to collaborate with other police forces and partner agencies in a standardised manner.

Steps are undoubtedly being taken to boost collaboration and ensure that the tools used for knowledge-sharing are effective. However, achieving the freedom to be able to share sensitive data in a consistent way, while ensuring that security is upheld, remains a challenge for today’s police forces.

Many police forces are now using off-the-shelf collaboration tools.
Looking ahead to a cloud-first future

In The National Police Technology Council’s strategic principles, launched in 2017, the organisation outlined the need for forces to adopt a cloud-first strategy where possible, citing time and cost savings as some of the clear benefits of investment in cloud solutions.

By providing a secure and flexible foundation, the right cloud-first strategy can be effective in addressing many of the operational challenges that UK police forces face today, improving the speed and availability of front-line technology.

The flexibility of cloud-based platforms means that forces can move away from a reliance on legacy infrastructure and hardware, freeing up resources for a more forward-thinking IT strategy.

This approach can also provide a foundation for intelligence-gathering technologies that are crucial to modern policing, such as body-worn video and smartphone devices, ensuring that these devices and the data they capture are constantly available.

54% of police forces have plans to adopt a cloud-first strategy in the next 1-5 years.

Several more highlighted that it was something that they were looking into.
Why cloud-first?

One force said that it was adopting a cloud computing programme to help to facilitate timely provisioning and delivery of services

One force had a ‘buy-not-build’ approach to IT

One force stated that savings from removing traditional and on-premise solutions would be reinvested into its cloud-first strategy

Creating a future-proofed IT strategy

Amidst a challenging landscape for today’s police forces, it is clear that many are turning to technology to drive efficiency, free up valuable resources and boost intelligence-sharing.

Our FOI request revealed a widespread move to a consumption-based IT model using cloud services and commercial off-the-shelf business applications, disaggregating these from in-house police IT estates.

This is key to creating a more standardised approach to technology amongst police forces, ensuring that data and insight can be accessed quickly and securely to enable an efficient response to crime.

In order to move away from a legacy approach to IT and successfully undertake a digital transformation journey, police forces need to be considered when choosing a solution. A perfect balance between cost, security, scalability and availability must be achieved in order to create a future-proofed approach to IT that is fit for today’s rapidly shifting policing landscape.
About Intercity Technology
We take a different approach to IT services.

With over 30 years’ global technology expertise, we give honest advice on your business challenges. We work with you to design and build inspiring, bespoke, and secure solutions that put your people first.

With a genuine passion for the brands we work with, we bring together the most innovative, future-proof ideas in managed services, security, cloud services, enterprise mobility, and collaboration tools.

We’re committed to ensuring that your data is safe, with the highest possible levels of security and availability. Our three UK-based data centres and 24/7 monitoring and management capability keeps your infrastructure protected, no matter where your people are, empowering productivity and enhancing performance.

Intercity is accredited by a number of professional organisations with a suite of accreditations which confirms and evidences our commitment to security, quality, service management and environmental management. For a full list of our accreditations and frameworks please visit intercity.technology/accreditations.

If you’re inspired to drive innovation and change in your industry, we can provide you with the necessary tools to empower your people to work faster and smarter. Just tell us your main goals and challenges, and we can deliver a solution that works for you, your business and your people.

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