

Digitally transforming investigations for swifter and more effective justice

Despite being classed as a 'rural force', Northamptonshire Police deals with its share of metropolitan-level crime. Because of its proximity to key road and rail networks, the force has found itself in the 'cross hairs' of organised crime groups and County Lines crime.

And in common with most UK forces, it is having to manage a greater variety and volume of digital evidence needed to solve crimes, particularly the manual processes around collecting, analysing and sharing it.

To meet these challenges, Northamptonshire Police realised it needed to turn to digital transformation. So the force initiated a strategic plan, dubbed Futures Project 25 (FP25). Among other things, it called for the use of technology to support improved collaboration and a more productive and effective workforce, along with digitally transforming investigations for swifter and more effective justice.

The solution was NICE Investigate – a one-stop software package for transforming manual processes around the collection, management, analysis and sharing of all types of digital evidence.

Detective Inspector Andrew Tuff, based in the Digital Hub at Northamptonshire Police, got his first glimpse of the software at Merseyside Police.

"We visited Merseyside to get a demonstration and I was able to immediately see its value in terms of progressing our force digitally, and managing the large volumes of digital evidence involved in investigations," he explained. "It's not just about saving time. It goes back to our mission of putting the public first in all we do, and addressing victims' needs by concluding investigations faster and better."

Det Insp Tuff says the key to more efficient and effective investigations is improving a detective's understanding of what material is available and relevant to a case, and making that information readily accessible.

Because it sits on top of Northamptonshire Police's other digital evidence systems, he says NICE Investigate does precisely that and goes one step further by automating the case-building process. It can automatically search across all connected data sources for evidence. As soon as a detective logs in, the evidence is waiting for them

in an electronic case folder, meaning there is no need to access different systems, or drive to go and collect evidence.

"NICE Investigate helps detectives understand immediately what they have to work with, and puts that material all in one place in front of them," Det Insp Tuff added. "This is a big step forward for us and we will be integrating more of our systems as the roll-out continues across the force."

To date, Northamptonshire Police has integrated the solution with its NicheRMS records management system, STORM command and control system, 999 call recording and FotoWare for crime scene investigation and other images. The next phase will see the force integrate its body-worn video and interview recording systems.

Det Insp Tuff says it has given the serious and organised crime team "a huge leg up" in investigating crime, thanks to its integration with NicheRMS.

He explained: "There's a common saying among detectives – 'You don't know what you don't know'. So any system that helps us to uncover new lines of inquiry and evidence, especially for complex and serious crimes, is a real win-win for us."

Det Insp Tuff says the integration between NICE Investigate and Niche has been helpful in this regard by uncovering new intelligence without the time-intensive trawling of data. It accelerates case building by using RMS data to enrich evidence searches across all systems connected to NICE Investigate and by automatically ingesting evidence into case folders. Investigators get a complete evidence view in a "single pane of glass". Officers can also conduct lightning-fast searches across connected systems using criteria such as collar numbers, assigned officers, time and date, location and address, case types, involved persons, vehicle numberplate, ownership registration details, and more.

It is also making it easier for detectives to gather evidence from the public without leaving the office. Using the system's Community Portal, an officer can create a public appeal for any active investigation in seconds, with a secure link that can either be emailed to an eyewitness or shared on social media. The recipients simply click on the link to submit their videos, photos and tips. The content is automatically uploaded to the NICE



PICTURES: NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE

Investigate cloud and detectives are immediately alerted when their new case evidence appears.

Businesses and citizens can also use the Community Portal to register their cameras and share video evidence remotely, so investigators do not have to physically travel to the scene to manually retrieve it.

Northamptonshire Police is now considering “onboarding local businesses” to streamline the process of requesting and sharing surveillance camera footage. “We take a lot of volume calls that officers don’t necessarily need to attend, for example, low-level thefts from petrol stations,” said Det Insp Tuff.

The software also makes it easier to collaborate with the wider policing community. Now, instead of driving to a neighbouring force, detectives can share evidence with their colleagues in other forces or organisations electronically, simply by emailing a digital case file link.

“We’ve used NICE Investigate to electronically share some phone downloads related to a homicide case, which would have taken considerable time to transport in person, or days to send through the post,” said Det Insp Tuff.

The AV team at Northamptonshire Police has also used NICE Investigate to share interview recordings related to sexual offences that have occurred outside of its area. “Even if the alleged crime occurred in another jurisdiction, we still take the responsibility for interviewing victims when they come to us because it’s really important,” said Det Insp Tuff. “That said, the host force needs the interview recordings to conduct their investigation. So we’ve been able to streamline the sharing of those interviews through NICE Investigate.”

He also cites an example where Northamptonshire Police needed to share CCTV footage related to an alleged crime committed by a prisoner who was already in the custody of a neighbouring force: “By sharing the CCTV footage while the other force was on the phone with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), they were able to use that footage to support a remand application.”

Without NICE Investigate, Det Insp Tuff says the force would not have been able to respond in time and the suspect would likely have been bailed.

“Being able to share footage with CPS in this way is far more impactful than simply submitting a viewing statement from an officer,” he said.

The initial focus has been on promoting its use in CID and detective-based roles. Next, says Det Insp Tuff, the force will roll it out to response officers who primarily handle volume crimes as well. **PP**

‘Significant’ roll-out of BWV cameras

Audax Global Solutions has been awarded a £13.2 million contract to supply 20,000 body-worn video (BWV) cameras to a national police force.

Audax described the roll-out as “globally significant” and it is expected to start in December 2021 with final delivery completed by May 2022.

The cameras will be used to assist in the Government’s aim to modernise policing, assisting with border protection and security operatives dealing with organised crime.

Adam Liardet, founder and owner of Audax said: “The use of body-worn cameras promotes transparency and openness, which inevitably leads to improved officer performance and increased public confidence in national policing.”

The rugged, all-in-one, Bio-AX® camera is designed to protect both the police and the public with its intuitive recording function and live-streaming

of securely encrypted video. The camera’s internal GPS provides location on the video and live asset tracking is possible via mapping in the control room.

A unique innovation of the BWV camera is the ability for staff in the control room to turn on the live-stream remotely. This not only provides managers with visibility and situational awareness of their assets ‘on the ground’, but also ensures complete oversight for compliance and professional standards.

Audax says once completed, this will be the latest in a series of global BWV camera deployments, with both public authorities and law enforcement. These include 8,000 cameras to Vietnam and roll-out to a number councils and private security firms in the UK, together with a large volume of local police users in France and other users in several EU nations as well as the US.

New contract for response platform

The managed hosting and cloud provider UKFast has been awarded a £1 million two-year contract with ResilienceDirect – the company’s second consecutive G-Cloud 12 framework award for the contract.

Funded by the Cabinet Office since 2014, ResilienceDirect enables organisations such as the police, fire and rescue, ambulance, local authorities, utilities, shopping centres,

arenas, search and rescue and coastguards to securely share information, training and best practice when responding to incidents.

The platform has been used to coordinate 7,620 live responses to date, including the G7 Summit, unexploded Second World War bombs in Exeter and Goole, floodings and a coordinated response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

AI-enabled in-car video for police

Motorola Solutions unveiled its first artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled in-car video system for law enforcement in Chicago this month.

The M500 features new backseat passenger analytics, which automatically start the in-car camera recording as soon as someone enters the back of a police vehicle. Motorola says this is a major step forward in automating an everyday policing challenge of ensuring that the

presence of an individual in a police vehicle is securely recorded and the video evidence is automatically tagged and saved to the incident record.

Motorola Solutions said it “represents the future for the police vehicle”.

The system is also equipped with advanced numberplate recognition, which uses AI to raise critical alerts, such as identifying a vehicle that may be associated with a missing child or person of interest.