

Knowledge Exchange Network: technology

The [Knowledge Exchange Network](#) meeting on 16th November explored how technology can be used to enhance policing and to engage with young people, and how it has changed the landscape of crime.

Robyn Long, YourPolice.uk Project Lead, presented on the national youth engagement project. The project was created due to the significant proportions of young people on social media, the high numbers of young people having negative experiences online and the low levels of reporting of inappropriate content. It seeks to deliver a centralised, youth-centred media presence that provides reliable information and advice through targeted content and meaningful engagement, simultaneously embedding procedural justice principles. The Instagram page is available [here](#).

Gail McGreevy, Head of Communications for the Probation Board of Northern Ireland, presented on their Changing Lives app. It supports service users who may be experiencing difficult times and while seeking to tackle the root causes of their offending. Features of the app include: probation appointment reminders, self-assessment CBT tool, a thoughts journal, legal information about probation orders, a community service tracker and an alcohol tracker. It can also provide victims with support. More information is available [here](#).

Lewis Prescott-Mayling, [data and targeting](#) lead in Thames Valley's Violence Reduction Unit, presented on a number of initiatives that use data to drive operational activity and improve crime prevention. The serious violence dashboard is a visualisation tool which uses heat mapping to identify 'hotspots' and 'hot people', and is also available to officers on patrol through an app. They also utilise social network analysis which seeks to recognise the 'contagion' of violence.

The Network then split into workshop groups where the following themes were discussed.

Using technology to engage

The Network suggested that engagement with young people through use of technology can offer a false dichotomy. While online engagement allows communication en masse, we should not rely too heavily on it. It is still very important for young people to see the police otherwise it risks a perception that police in the 'real world' do not portray the same dignity and respect.

Similarly, police use of technology can help point people in the direction of other services that they could go to for support but this can often lead to situations where the police are accused of not doing enough themselves.

Technology has also proven useful when appealing for missing persons. It is often also used as a tool to put officers and/or missing persons who need non-police support in touch with the charity [Missing People](#). Police must stay aware of the fact that often underlying reasons for missing persons are health or relationship related, where there is not necessarily any suggestion of criminal behaviour.

Thames Valley Police routinely use social media (Twitter and Facebook) to post crime-related updates. The VRU has recently worked with [Crest](#) to look at the role of social media in the lead up to violence and found that social media played a role in the lead to a number of homicide cases.

Sheffield Hallam University, the University of Sheffield, South Yorkshire VRU and Thames Valley VRU have recently received funding from the N8 Policing Research Partnership to undertake a [research project](#) to understand the impact of sharing knife images on social media.

Technology can also be used to 'target' certain types of people or vulnerabilities with support. For example, where analytics might suggest someone could be a potential victim of domestic abuse, their account might be targeted with pop up messages or banner adverts.

While police use of technology was viewed by the Network as inevitable and largely positive, it must be used carefully. Each social media post must be thought about in terms of where it is posted, what kind of post it is and what it aims to achieve. If this is not considered a significant challenge posed can be 'too much' public involvement, where legal cases risk being interfered with. It was agreed that good practice should involve posts being 'signed off' by communications departments for oversight purposes. Concerns around privacy and confidentiality are also a constant challenge.

[#WeCops on Twitter](#) has had very positive feedback regarding engagement.

Using technology to prevent crime

Following Lewis' presentation, there was some discussion around the kind of policing that followed a 'hotspot' being identified. Thames Valley's pilot is not used for enforcement purposes. It looks at 'predicting vulnerability' based on how often someone has been a victim or has gone missing, for example, rather than looking at 'predictive perpetration'. Police Community Support Officers then follow a script when knocking on the doors of 'hot people' identified; this is merely an offer of support with feedback often suggesting that this reassures people. In the future, the aim is to have navigators/outreach workers going to people's doors to offer services, rather than a uniformed presence.

It was agreed that gathering and analysing intelligence should be a full time role. At present, in some forces, police officers and staff are expected to look at intelligence but too often do not understand what has been gathered and for what purpose. Dedicated teams should have the purpose of understanding the intelligence and its gaps and help ensure conclusions drive police activity appropriately and effectively.

Two key challenges with this were identified. Firstly, there are many products on the market and forces often have various which requires continuous learning. They then quickly become outdated and practices have to change. Secondly, "intelligence is only as good as the information going into the system in the first place". The human side of technology and data analysis must be understood. This can of course impact the quality of data which can cause more issues than are solved. There are also ethical challenges and concerns around officer bias being reproduced which can result in policing activity being steered in the wrong direction.

[This report](#) on data-driven policing may be useful.

Technology and investigations

The group discussed how technology has made crime more complex. A huge proportion of crimes now have a digital element. The sheer volume of evidence gathering is becoming an increasingly difficult challenge for investigations. Concerns were raised that traditional methods of investigations



were too often being ignored by an increasingly young, tech-savvy workforce. Compounding these issues is the largely outdated technology used by many police forces. For more insight, see [this report](#) on digital forensics.

The next Knowledge Exchange Network meeting will take place on Tuesday 8th February at 7.30am. New Zealand Police will be speaking about Prevention First, their strategic approach to prevention. We will hear about their 'journey mapping', which is an initiative launched to look through young people's life journey and identify points at which interventions could have made a difference. They will also talk about their social wellbeing boards, which provide a cross sector prevention focus to the work of local services. Click [here](#) to join the meeting.

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