


Making an impact

This month will see the first stage in providing a way for police officers to search other local forces' systems to track information on an individual. Sir Michael Bichard, heading the Bichard Inquiry into how child killer Ian Huntley slipped through the net and gained a job as a school caretaker, made a key recommendation for forces to be able to access a national IT system to help prevent such a tragedy happening again. Michael Hollowes, deputy director of the ACPO Implementation Team IMPACT (Information Management, Prioritisation, Analysis, Co-ordination and Tasking) Programme reports on their progress setting up such a system.

 Plans to create a national information sharing and intelligence capability to meet the operational needs of the police service are well under way following the Bichard Inquiry earlier this year in light of the Soham murders.

Indeed, the IMPACT Programme, a joint approach by the Home Office, ACPO and the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO) - is the most significant initiative for intelligence-led policing in England and Wales.

The work has been given added impetus as a result of the Bichard Inquiry, which looked at the adequacy of child protection procedures, national and local intelligence systems, vetting procedures and information sharing, after Ian Huntley was allowed to slip through the net to become a school caretaker.

Events in Soham highlighted

that there is a considerable amount of information held by individual forces that must be shared more widely and made available nationally.

The IMPACT Programme is designed to deliver on key recommendations made by Sir Michael Bichard. The first being, a national IT system for England and Wales to support police intelligence should be introduced as a matter of urgency. The Home Office should take the lead and report by December 2004 with clear targets for implementation.

IMPACT is not a programme to deliver a single IT application to all police forces, rather a range of capabilities that contribute to a national IT infrastructure that makes intelligence-led policing a reality.

The programme will build on existing national systems such as the Violent and Sex Offender

Register (ViSOR) and the Police National Computer (PNC), as well as local and regional information systems that either already exist or are being developed. It will incrementally deliver the capability for police forces to store and share information, to analyse and present that data in a coherent way, and to use the data for briefing and tasking.

Making changes

Changes will be introduced in managed steps. The immediate focus is on making information available in a common standard and improving the quality of data. Initially, it will be possible to search on a person's details to identify if any of the 43 forces in England and Wales holds information about them. This will be through a series of flags advising which forces to contact for more information.

This first stage will begin this

month with a pilot of the National Nominal Index (NNI). This is a 'technology demonstrator' to show how a core part of the IMPACT functionality will be delivered. It will provide a way of searching an index of local systems and other forces' systems to identify where information on an individual is held.

Some of the work that helps pave the way for IMPACT has been in train for a while, such as the Cross Regional Information Sharing Project (CRISP), an initiative to provide an information sharing capability between participating forces.

The Central Customer team within PITO identified a national intelligence-sharing requirement through its Police Service Capability Strategy. It has been involved from the outset in investigating CRISP and other force-led

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elements, such as the Force Linked Intelligence System (FLINTS) and Sleuth, which will provide foundation for further development.

The Police Information and Technology Organisation (PITO) is working closely with the Criminal Records Bureau and the NNI rides on the back of the CRB's i-PLX system, which is used as part of its vetting procedures to identify candidates who may be unsuitable for certain work, especially that involving contact with children or other vulnerable members of society.

This stream of work addresses Recommendation 2 of the Bichard Inquiry: The PLX system, which flags that intelligence is held about someone by particular police forces, should be introduced in England and Wales.

Three forces; Hertfordshire, Staffordshire and West Midlands Police, will use the demonstrator in their recruitment vetting process. Following a successful pilot, an enhanced version of NNI, which includes a link to the PNC and VISOR, will be available from March 2005.

Alongside this work, PITO is undertaking a 'Landscape Survey' to map the current position of forces' IT capability and forces are preparing their data in line with the Corporate Data Model

(CoDM). Also, a technical evaluation of the various commercial and police-developed solutions that could be used as part of the wider IMPACT programme is under way.

Detailed searches

As IMPACT evolves, officers will be able to search on objects; including vehicles, phone numbers and property, locations and events, such as crimes and incidents, from all force and national systems, using a range of tools to support intelligence-led policing - searching, analysis, tasking, briefing, de-briefing and data management.

The full IMPACT capability will be made available progressively between 2005 and 2007. This will include modernisation of the PNC, another of Sir Michael's key recommendations, although he noted that PITO had already begun this work.

Investment should be made available by the Government to secure the PNC's medium and long-term future, given its importance to intelligence-led policing and the criminal justice system as a whole.

The IMPACT Programme will support the National Intelligence Model and Information Systems Strategy for the Police Service (ISS4PS), as well as embrace

emerging guidelines such as the code of practice on information handling for police recommended in Sir Michael's report. This will provide a solid foundation to expand the sharing of information to other agencies and add functionality to address wider needs.

Achieving intelligence sharing on this scale requires the collective commitment of the police service and other partners. Activities will be co-ordinated by the IMPACT Programme Board.

IMPACT champions have been nominated by all 43 forces and a briefing day was held in October to prepare them for the changes ahead.

The Home Office has overall responsibility for delivery of the IMPACT Programme and has bid for funding in the sum of £167m over the three years of development and implementation.

PITO is responsible for technical delivery across four portfolios of activity - National Infrastructure, Information Sharing, Functional Transition (of PNC) and Intelligence Toolset.

An ACPO Implementation Team is working alongside the Central Customer within PITO to ensure that the programme is business-led and delivers the IT tools and functionality needed to achieve the IMPACT vision:

"To deliver an effective, inte-

grated national, regional and local information sharing and intelligence capability, which will improve the ability of the police and partner agencies to proactively use information for intelligence purposes to prevent crime, bring offenders to justice, safeguard children and vulnerable persons and further professionalise the investigation process".

Sir Michael Bichard has now asked the Government to report on progress in taking forward his recommendations. In a letter to the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, he has requested an account of "what the Government has achieved; what is intended by when and whether the necessary resources have been allocated to deliver that".

He said: 'Officials have, from time to time, kept me informed of progress which has been reassuring and I hope to be able to report favourably on all that has been achieved by Government and others with whom they have been working.'

The task ahead is not easy but the multi-agency IMPACT Programme provides a tremendous opportunity to shape the future for information sharing and intelligence within the police service.

