

Neighbourhood policing app

An app for neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs) hosting key information such as engagement activities, patrol activities and abstractions.

First published
16 October 2024

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Community engagement Neighbourhood crime Digital, data and analytics
Organisation	Thames Valley Police
Contact	Mike Darrah
Email address	mike.darrah@thamesvalley.police.uk
Region	South East
Partners	Police
Stage of Implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	March 2024
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Communities General public Workforce
---------------------	--

Aim

To create an app for NPTs which:

- helps officers and staff access and submit forms
- consolidates all necessary forms and resources within a single interface
- enables officers and staff to quickly record their day to day activities and outcomes
- reduces the need for officers to return to the station during their shift
- helps improve transparency and accountability, leading to increased trust and confidence

Intended outcome

- More efficient and detailed recording of NPTs activities such as engagement, patrols, and abstractions.
- An enhanced ability to demonstrate the impact NPTs are having on their communities.
- A more visible presence of NPTs within communities due to the reduction in need for officers to return to stations during shifts.

Description

Thames Valley Police (TVP) wanted to find a way to better record NPT activities. In particular, the force wanted their NPTs to be able to quickly and easily record key information such as:

- engagement activities
- patrol activities
- abstractions

By having this key information stored in one location, the force would have an improved ability to understand the impact of their NPTs. Such a recording mechanism would also enable NPTs to

spend less time recording activities back at the station when on shift - increasing the visible presence of the teams within communities.

Attendance at a Neighbourhood Tech Conference inspired TVP to create a bespoke neighbourhood policing app to support their NPTs. This idea was approved at the force community policing board chaired by the assistant chief constable (ACC) for local policing.

Development

Development of the app was a collaborative project between two teams within TVP – the community policing command and the digital change team. A digital change officer based in the digital change team led the development of the app, supported by an Inspector and a small team of tactical advisors.

While the digital change officer was responsible for developing and building the app, the inspector had overall responsibility for determining what the app should look like, how it should work, what it should do, and to agree timelines.

The app is accessible on a phone, tablet or laptop and its functions include:

1. engagement log
2. patrol activity log
3. abstraction log
4. what works well form – this form (adopted from Humberside Police) enables officers to submit identified good practice or learning
5. useful information folder (for information such as details of keyholders for local buildings)
6. a link to Orlo (the force system for managing social media) – the link allows officers to send messages via social media
7. a link to the [Hotspot Policing App](#)
8. access to the force community messaging system (VIVAV)
9. 'my activity' - the officers are able to see all of their submitted activities, send a quick email, check calendar appointments and check duties
10. 'global search' –the officers are able to search all their submitted engagements and patrol activities
11. submit feedback – for any feedback, bugs and glitches on the app.

12. access to a news reel

The app took about three to four months to develop and was created using Microsoft Power-Apps (a Microsoft tool for creating custom apps). The app links to a number of Microsoft lists which are populated when an officer submits an activity. Supervisors and managers in NPTs 'dip check' the app submissions to ensure they are of high quality, and export the data to excel to review.

The plan is for the data to soon be visualised in a Power BI dashboard. No specific funding was provided for the app to be created, with the only costs incurred being to time incurred by the development team.

The app was initially piloted in one local police area (LPA). Feedback from the pilot indicated that officers:

- found the app easy to use and fit for purpose
- felt they had been given something designed specifically for them
- found the various functions extremely useful
- had near 100% engagement with the app

Based on the success of the pilot, the force rolled the app out across the force. It took three months for the app to be fully rolled out. To ensure a successful roll-out, three tactical advisors delivered training sessions to each LPA. The TVP corporate communications lead supported the community policing command with promoting the app across neighbourhood policing teams. The launch was staggered, rolled out week by week in different areas, allowing the app to be embedded over a number of months.

Evaluation

No evaluation has been conducted, but the app is monitored on an ongoing basis through the following mechanisms.

- Ongoing monitoring by a tactical advisor and Inspector to ensure it is working well.
- 'Dip checking' entries from a quality assurance perspective. The findings of these checks are fed back to the LPAs by tactical advisors.
- A monthly meeting is held where the team involved in the app meet to review any feedback or suggestions and agree any further developments.

- Data from the app is reviewed at LPA 'health checks'. These health checks are quarterly meetings which include an agenda item of delving into submitted app activities. The health checks look to ensure app entries are meaningful, add value and align with force priorities.
- App data is assessed from a quantitative/higher-level perspective at the force Community Policing Board chaired by an ACC, and at a Silver meeting chaired by a superintendent.

Overall impact

The app has now been rolled out force wide. This covers 10 police areas across Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, and all neighbourhood policing officers and staff.

Anecdotal feedback suggests the officers really like the app, find it easy to use and navigate and are using it appropriately to record their activities.

Although the app only launched in March 2024, the force already have close to 5000 patrol activities recorded (for example taskings, crime hotspot patrols and priority patrols), and nearly 4000 engagements recorded. Additionally, the force are now:

- building up a clear picture of neighbourhood policing abstractions
- obtaining a detailed understanding of the work NPTs are doing across the force, and the outcomes / impacts of those activities
- able to better understand their engagement with all communities - In particular, data from the app is used to support work with seldom heard communities.
- in a better position to assess the performance of NPTs

Following the success of the app, TVP are now in the process of developing a new neighbourhood policing dashboard / toolkit which will allow supervisors and managers to visualise all the collated activities and drill down into data for engagements, patrol activities and abstractions.

Learning

TVP have successfully overcome some initial challenges with developing the app.

- Initially, the digital change officer was developing and building the app on top of their day job, fitting in app development whenever they had time spare. The digital change officer quickly became overworked trying to deliver the app on top of their usual workload. The force resolved

this issue by training up a tactical advisor as support.

- The digital change officer already had a good knowledge and understanding of Microsoft systems and applications prior to developing the app. However, they had to train up on Power-Apps to deliver the app. Some technical issues were experienced in building the app. However, these were overcome by further self-training.
- The tactical advisor who upskilled themselves in Power Apps is now the first point of contact for any issues with the app, and has so far been able to resolve all issues highlighted. This has helped massively, as the digital change officer is now working on other projects and is no longer able to support the app development. The digital change officer sought agreement from the force information and communication technology (ICT) team to obtain longer term ICT support with the app. However, any changes, amendments or glitches can be addressed by the tactical advisor who is now very well versed in Power-Apps.
- Initial negativity – officers did not initially understand why they needed to record their activities and why they needed an app. However, this feeling quickly dissipated once the officers saw how user friendly the app was and how it removed the need to log on to different systems. Officers also quickly realised that the information allowed the force to show what NPTs were doing, plus the impact that abstractions were having on their daily business.
- Uncertainty around how to use the app was mitigated through the single training sessions delivered to each LPA by the tactical advisors. Although this delivery method relies on staff cascading knowledge once the single training session has run, this process hasn't caused any problems due to the apps' ease of use.
- The app was piloted with neurodiverse officers from across the force to ensure it worked for everyone.
- Staggering the launch of the app so it was rolled out week by week in different areas was beneficial in allowing the app development team to secure buy-in and run training sessions. However, this approach was more resource and time intensive than if there had been a 'fast' launch.
- Supervisor engagement - It has taken a while to get supervisors and managers used to dip checking the app submissions for quality. Currently, the force does not have a Power BI platform built (that is in progress), so supervisors, managers and the central command team have had to physically sort through the Microsoft lists and export data to excel. This is not a problem, just slower and more difficult for those not technically knowledgeable. However, these stakeholders are now used to this process and this issue will soon be overcome by a new Power BI platform

which will provide all the data required.

Future plans

In terms of future plans for the app, TVP are now in the process of:

- adding a 'news reel' for updates and news
- improving the global search facility to make it more user friendly and easier to filter
- embedding a PowerBI graph / table in the 'my activities' section. This will quickly show the officer's individual contributions to the app
- creating separate galleries / folders in the 'useful information' section to allow more efficient organisation.
- launching the Power-Bi platform
- creating a neighbourhood policing dashboard - this will sit on the force 'service improvement portal' alongside other force tools and dashboards
- providing LPAs and managers with the ability to review their team activities from a quality perspective and ensure they align with force engagement priorities through use of the dashboard

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.

Tags

Neighbourhood policing