

Eastern region innovation network (ERIN)

Using experts from across the region to develop, identify and assist the implementation of evidence-based practice to improve efficiency.

First published

13 December 2024

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Intelligence Leadership, development and learning Productivity
Organisation	Bedfordshire Police Cambridgeshire Constabulary Essex Police Hertfordshire Constabulary Kent Police Norfolk Constabulary Suffolk Constabulary
Contact	Stacey Rothwell
Email address	stacey.rothwell@kent.police.uk
Region	Eastern
Stage of Implementation	The practice is implemented.

Key details

Start date	January 2023
Scale of initiative	Regional

Aim

The eastern region innovation network (ERIN) aims to:

- deliver innovation
- provide flexibility for implementing support
- provide a regional coordinated response
- promote collaboration to benefit individual forces as well as the region
- create a repository for data and research

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of ERIN are to:

- improve communication across the eastern forces
- improve working relationships between the eastern forces
- reduce duplication of research and work
- encourage the sharing of knowledge

Description

Background

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire Rescue Services (HMICFRS) (2018) '[Police to Police collaboration – The Hard Yards](#)' recognised the challenges across the 43 police forces to work collaboratively. The report highlighted that, nationally over a quarter of a billion pounds are spent on police collaborations. After reviewing 6 collaborations across 27 police forces, the report concluded that too many forces were failing to be efficient and effective.

The eastern region consists of seven police forces (Kent, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk) who have worked together in a strategic alliance since 2015. This agreement was built upon the traditional approach to collaboration and built sole functions for the region.

At the 2021 annual summit of the eastern region police and crime commissioners (PCCs) and chief constables, it was decided that the former strategic alliance would change its approach and build a more streamlined function that would instead look to share local best practice. An extensive and in-depth consultation was undertaken across the region's 62 key stakeholders.

Using lessons learnt from the previous collaboration, a new way of working was created, the ERIN model, which focuses on innovation to meet the policing challenges of the future. ERIN is a small team composed of a dedicated network director and network manager funded by the eastern region forces.

ERIN

ERIN provides a unique approach to delivering innovation, sharing, scaling, replication and implementing best practice. ERIN offers support, with flexible options for forces to do what is right for their communities. Innovation is locally driven and regionally coordinated with forces co-operating and working together. Significant transformational innovation projects have been implemented locally, replicated regionally and are now being adopted by other police forces nationally.

A section 22a agreement (Police Act 1996) was formally agreed by the 14 corporation souls and ERIN was formally launched in January 2023. The seven chief constables and police and crime commissioners have strategic oversight of the function, driving innovation locally and regionally.

To prevent duplication and advance regional innovation, ERIN established an innovation development board (IDB) with a nominated innovation lead from each force. This board has improved communication, facilitated coordination, and promoted co-operation across the region.

The IDB allows each force to update the region with progress on current innovation, future strategic gaps as well as the showcasing of best practice, research and lessons learnt. The IDB meets monthly and proceeds the regional seven force deputy chief constables and chief constables' meetings into which ERIN reports. ERIN also reports into the annual seven force summit of the

chief constables and PCCs.

Furthermore, opportunities to work together, await and share research findings or apply jointly for research grants have been identified. Innovations created across the region are subsequently shared so they can be adopted nationally at the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) National Science and Technology Board.

Replication of innovation – blueprints and assisted implementation

ERIN coordinates innovation leads from each force, championing ideas and identifying projects that would have value if shared regionally. Once identified, a blueprint is commissioned and produced at pace allowing other forces to benefit from work completed in the originating force and implement the innovation at speed. The blueprint collates tactical, technical, legislative and project management advice and key documentation to enable forces to replicate best practice, commissioned by the relevant force chief constable.

Beyond the blueprint, ERIN provides assisted implementation support ensuring all forces benefit, negating duplication, and collecting benefits realisation in a standardised way. ERIN builds working groups that work virtually across the region between the heads of relevant enabling departments such as information technology and information security, to promote the sharing of lessons learnt.

Furthermore, upon replication, ERIN identifies improvement and iterations through post implementation support and review that can be shared regionally for any given project. In its first year, ERIN has worked at pace to nimbly support forces by publishing six blueprints for innovation.

Each blueprint details the benefits of the innovation already known to the originating force and the collection methodology. It is a requirement that any of the eastern regional forces that replicate undertake a 6 and 12-month benefits realisation exercise, to enable ERIN to capture the benefits from sharing this best practice. A regional benefits matrix, accessible through the network platform, has been designed to enable forces to easily provide data evidencing the efficiency and effectiveness benefits they are realising from replication.

Academic research and development

ERIN's unique capability to work across seven police forces has allowed it to explore and exploit a regional approach to research with academic institutions, and develop innovation with external partners that will deliver elevated performance. ERIN has coordinated think tanks on topics requested by the region. Think tank topics have included domestic abuse, homicide, collaborative training, and facial recognition.

Research and opportunities to support academia are brought to ERIN, where appropriate presented regionally in the monthly innovation development board and circulated to relevant business leads within the forces.

Funding has been awarded to the region through national funding applications as ERIN is now building innovation with replication in mind and in a way that allows wider force adoption both regionally and nationally. This includes ensuring the region is sighted throughout the innovation journey via the ERIN innovation development board, to ensure that there is an appetite to replicate, blueprints are written in a technology agnostic way, project managers are collecting supporting documentation throughout, and that commercial contracts are negotiated with region in mind by the seven force commercial services.

Communication platform

Prior to the introduction of ERIN, the region's police forces could not work closely together across their areas of business (without making a telephone call to a switchboard). ERIN has created and launched a network platform utilising existing regional capabilities within Microsoft Office 365. The portal gives access to:

- the published blueprints and associated appendices
- force innovations
- a research library containing published academic articles and thesis completed by officers and staff from across the region
- funding and training opportunities
- a project benefits matrix
- a supplier directory
- a skills library detailing relevant regional innovation capabilities

ERIN and innovation leads will continue to develop this capability to maximise collaboration, improve regional joint working and communication to embed a culture of innovation.

Overall impact

ERIN's replication model is effective, demonstrating the ability to scale up at an impressive pace and deliver transformational change to front line policing within several weeks. These types of innovation projects would usually take between 12 and 24 months to deliver and would often be difficult to implement and replicate according to the originating force's working practices and model.

The regional forces have benefited from each other's work and worked together to overcome barriers and issues. The ERIN approach revolutionised the way in which innovation and best practice has been shared across the region's police forces. ERIN continues to identify best practice from the region and has commenced work on further blueprints, some of which are taking best practice from outside of the region.

Forces tend to work alone or perhaps with one other force that they neighbour with geographically. ERIN unites an entire region, and it has set the standard for other regions. The approach detailed above, including blueprints, assisted implementation, an innovation development board, and shared funding and academic opportunities is a new way of working. ERIN has worked with national stakeholders as well as a number of interested police forces and their chief officers to help them understand the ERIN strategy and tactical delivery. Time has been spent with other police forces and at presentations at numerous police and public events such as the Society of Evidence Based Policing's annual conference.

ERIN has also increased opportunities in the region to attend training, conferences and seminars on a wide range of topics that have been shared via the innovation leads and publicised on the network platform:

- Colleagues with rare and specialist skills in this area have been able to share ways of working and coach and mentor each other.
- ERIN has also hosted an innovation day bringing together senior innovators from across the region. They were provided continual professional development from subject matter experts from across the region on topics including computer data science, how 'big data' can be used to better understand incoming demand, gamification and generational diversity.
- A futures conference 'Developing futures thinking in policing' was held with a variety of speakers including the College of Policing, Cambridge Constabulary, the office of the Police Chief Scientific

Advisor, NPCC, and the Defence, Science and Technology Laboratory.

Overall, ERIN has built a reputation for providing an ecosystem that enables testing, implementation and replicability across multiple organisations. ERIN has been described as a 'game changer', fundamentally shifting the way in which police forces share their developed innovations. ERIN has negated duplication, implementing innovation at pace which have ultimately had a direct impact to the service provided to the public.

Other police forces outside of the region, nationally and internationally, have requested to join or work with ERIN or learn from the ERIN model. The network has established good working relationships with these other leading innovative police forces to benefit from their best practice and has met with and will continue to liaise with external partners from academia, science and technology to seek out opportunities for the region.

ERIN represents the eastern region at the national science and innovation board as regional innovation coordinators and regional futures coordinators. ERIN has awarded Gold in the 2024 iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards, Efficiency and Effectiveness.

Learning

ERIN is built upon collaboration with individuals and teams who have come together to deliver innovation. Stakeholder engagement, buy in and support across enabling functions is critical to success and early engagement and continual communication vital. This includes senior stakeholders who are responsible for driving and ensuring the delivery at a local level. This engagement creates a culture of change and innovation that is built locally.

Key to ERIN's success is the coordination of activity and the hard work of innovators, project managers, senior leaders and chief officers across the region. It can be challenging to maintain communication across 11% of policing, seven forces and the network rests on good relationships with individuals.

The chief constables and police, fire and crime commissioners have shown their commitment to ERIN by providing resources, support, funding and strategic direction. Individually the innovation teams within police forces have given up their time to share their experiences and projects with others, they have coached each other and worked collectively for the good each other. The organisations and collaboration have been defined in a formal legal agreement which has resulted

in resources, time, documentation and even software being shared across force boundaries.

The chief constables and deputy chief constables each dedicate at least two hours of their time each month to discussing all collaborative elements across the region and provide direction for ERIN. The senior management teams across all forces contribute to ERIN, by holding collaborative events and meetings, sharing training opportunities and sharing highly specialised staff (computer data scientists and evidence led practitioners) to assist each other. The forces have allocated resources to allow blueprints to be composed at short notice and to provide strategic leads to replicate and implement projects.