

Apps to improve investigation standards and quality

Three power apps launched to improve the standard and quality of investigations.

First published

31 March 2025

Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Criminal justice Neighbourhood crime
Organisation	West Yorkshire Police
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of West Yorkshire Police
Contact	Jo Loftus
Email address	jo.loftus@westyorkshire.pnn.police.uk
Region	North East
Partners	Police
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.

Key details

Start date	May 2023
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Workforce

Aim

The three apps – the investigator's guide app, the interviewer's guide app and the case file assistant app contain a wealth of material to assist officers at crime scenes, when dealing with victims and suspects and in the preparation of case files. They are easily accessible on officer's handheld devices and aim to do the following:

- empower officers to deliver the best possible standard of investigation and service for victims
- provide officers support from initial attendance through the investigation to the desired outcome, without requiring intrusive supervision
- alleviate the supervisory burden on sergeants and empower officers to operate more autonomously

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are as follows:

- improve efficiency and accuracy
- enhance decision-making
- improve victim support
- reduce miscommunication

These benefits collectively contribute to a more efficient, effective, and responsive police force, ultimately enhancing public safety and trust.

Description

West Yorkshire Police (WYP) has designed and introduced three bespoke power apps, available for use on officer's handheld devices and via SharePoint, to improve the standard and quality of investigations.

Investigator's guide app

The app provides officers with comprehensive guidance on achieving a gold standard in primary investigations and providing an alternative option to engaging their sergeant for procedural guidance. This is designed to assist officers who initially attend a crime report by enabling them to efficiently collate evidence, support victims, and direct them to additional resources. The app contains a wealth of information originally created in Word documents and stored on SharePoint. Importing this data into the app was straightforward, utilising Microsoft Lists.

Interviewer's guide app

The app was developed to offer officers step-by-step guidance for managing detainees, from the initial pre-interview disclosure with a legal representative to selecting an appropriate disposal. This provides template scripts for various stages of the interview process, including disclosure, introduction of the interview, special warnings, and more. The app was developed in response to frontline officers not routinely interviewing suspects, leading to a decline in their skills.

Case file assistant app

This app will ask a few basic questions about an officer's case, such as whether it is suitable for Magistrates' or Crown Court, the anticipated plea, and any factors such as if it is a domestic abuse or harassment case. Then, it will indicate whether charging authority lies with the force or Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and provide a list of documents required on the file. It will also provide information on the correct way to attach to Niche and required document naming standards. Links are provided to the existing case build app which gives guidance on how to fill in the documents themselves.

Apps roll out

All three apps have a simple design, with each front screen containing a list of departments and guidance, such as statement guides, safeguarding and modern slavery. Officers can download apps on their devices via the Power Apps store. These apps contain information that has always been readily accessible to officers; however, by meticulously sifting through the numerous documents on SharePoint, the apps collate a bespoke package tailored for attending officers, interviewing officers, and officers submitting files to the CPS. Corporate jargon was removed and streamlined into salient, precise points, to enable officers to receive and process information quickly and efficiently.

The apps were built in house by two sergeants, with varying experience in software development, using Power Apps. Due to this being managed outside of the IT set up at WYP, there is no budget for this work. This work was kept cost neutral, given to the sergeants as a workstream. The apps are maintained within existing officers time and budgets. Maintaining the apps is the responsibility of sergeants who created them.

Evaluation

Users and their usage of the app is continuously monitored through a PowerBI, though the force is unable to see what sections are accessed more than others. This data has been used to cascade to districts to identify officers who have not downloaded the app and assist them in putting it on their phones.

Though a formal feedback loop is yet to be created, officers are encouraged to email the sergeants directly if they have any questions or concerns. Positive feedback has been received, including that officers like the look of the new apps and find it easy to access the materials within it.

Overall impact

The apps have provided an accessible mode for officers to view and use guidance.

Monitoring data shows:

- between May 2023 and July 2024, 48% of all frontline officers had the apps installed on their mobile devices.

- the investigator's guide app has been downloaded by 2,480 officers and it has been launched/used 8,698 times
- the interviewer's guide app has been downloaded by 966 officers and it has been launched/used 2,386 times
- the case file assistant app has been downloaded by 2,497 officers and it has been launched/used 9,911 times.

Since the apps have been launched, West Yorkshire Police have seen:

- increases in outcomes 1-8
- reductions in outcomes 14 and 16 (victims not engaging)
- shortening of investigation lengths over the last 12 months

Though there is no direct correlation to app usage, benefits have been noted by the performance team since the apps were introduced, suggesting they may have impacted positively on increasing positive outcomes, victim engagement, and investigations being completed quicker.

Learning

- Monitoring data of app usage has been very helpful to identify officers who have not downloaded the app and assist them in putting it on their phones. Download compliance has to be rigorously driven and monitored through accountability meeting structures, for example the investigation improvement meeting, investigation governance group and crime board.
- To implement this project and build the IT infrastructure, detailed understanding of Microsoft 365 and its various functions is essential. In addition, both senior leadership team and wider force buy-in is essential.
- As the apps are not IT owned products, it is down to the creators (the sergeants) to update the apps. If they were to leave their departments or force, these products would either cease to exist or have to transition to an IT server, making the installed apps on officers' phones inoperable, meaning officers would have to have them re download the app.
- The investigator's guide app and interviewer's guide app were designed through PowerApps using numerous 'screens' to hold the information, for example one standard operating procedure document would have eight sections, which equated to eight screens. In the second iteration of the app, the data is held on MS Lists, all eight sections would be on one list and therefore one page. The Sergeant was able to remove seven screens, which made the app quicker to load and

use with ease.

- The apps are available on the Power Apps store, which is on all officers' mobiles. Unfortunately, IT were unable to auto install it or push it to their devices. To bypass this, a QR code appeared on all force communications for the app via the intranet and emails, which would take officers to the Power Apps store. Communications were also accompanied with a video showing officers how to install the apps and open the guides, and posters displayed in all stations.

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

Operational policing Information communication technology (ICT)