



Mini computers keep bobbies on street

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by Roland Hughes, Daily Post

THE use of hi-tech handheld computers are to be rolled out to more and more North Wales police officers.

Around 300 North Wales officers were handed up-to-the-minute BlackBerry mobile devices to carry out quick checks on suspects.

And after a successful year, even more front-line officers throughout the force are to be given the devices.

The BlackBerry devices allow police to make calls and access the internet and computer files.

Tests have shown that the BlackBerrys cut down on the amount of time officers spend doing paperwork or research in offices. Crime car officers and community beat managers spend 53 minutes and 27 minutes more on the streets per shift, fighting crime, than in the office doing paperwork

Steps to shake up the way police information was stored were first taken in 2002, when North Wales police became the first force in Britain to introduce the new Niche records system.

The Niche system, run by a Canadian company, gives officers access to details of warrants, child protection, case file preparation and custody, as well as data sent to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

It allowed officers to quickly access data on offenders, and helped in the arrest of a man in a high-profile murder case.

Mum-of-four Kerry Edwards, 39, was stabbed in her car while parked in a lay-by near Mold in July 2004.

Within 40 minutes of the report of the attack on Ms Edwards, police were able to confirm she had been a witness to an assault the previous week, and quickly found she had previously been threatened by her ex-husband Peter Davies.

Davies was arrested within 16 hours and sentenced to life for murder last year.

Sergeant Aled Eynon, quality assurance officer on the BlackBerry project, said: "What we realised we needed more than anything was to get that information out on to the streets quicker.

"We came to the conclusion that BlackBerrys were the quickest way of doing that."

Another 140 of the devices are to be handed out to North Wales police officers, including those belonging to the firearms unit.

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