



The East Midlands region has developed the most advanced collaboration on operational services. **Chief Constable Neil Rhodes** explains how consideration of roles and processes across four forces has led to new ways of working and significant savings in firearms deployment.

Aiming together



Neil Rhodes is the chief constable within the East Midlands Operational Support Service who holds the portfolios for Specialist Uniform Operations and Criminal Justice.

The East Midlands Operational Support Service (EMOpSS) provides roads policing, armed policing and firearms training, specialist search, specialist and general purpose dog support and collision investigation to the communities of Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire. That is a population of 2.9 million people across 5,255 square miles.

Teams of officers drawn from all forces work in combined teams, conducting operations and day-to-day business seamlessly across borders. Even in high-risk, complex and sensitive matters, command structures often involve senior officers from different forces. Over recent months this has extended to chief officers sharing on-call arrangements across the four-force area.

Real operational flexibility, increased effectiveness and better service delivery has resulted, together with a really valuable level of savings for all four forces from standardising ways of working, pooling vehicles and integrating staff.

The case studies discussed illustrate a level of operational effectiveness that would have been difficult to achieve in earlier years.

The current budget for EMOpSS is £32.5 million. It employs 511 officers and 51 police staff. That represents a real budget reduction of £5.2 million a year for forces compared to the original baseline cost in the first year. In addition, further efficiencies in the region of £1.5 million will be delivered in the year ahead.

The story

Forces across the East Midlands have a strong history of successful collaboration. In December 2013, four forces – Leicestershire Police, Lincolnshire Police, Northamptonshire Police and Nottinghamshire Police – pushed the boundaries still further when they agreed to an innovative and far-reaching collaboration across specialist uniformed operational services. The EMOpSS was designed to provide:

- Roads policing;
- Serious collision investigation;
- Armed policing and firearms training;
- Specialist search;
- Specialist and general purpose dog support and training;
- Public order training; and
- Planning and coordination of major public order response across the four forces and in support of national requirements.

The leaders of the organisations were in no doubt that providing services across such a large area to almost three million people was a challenging undertaking.

With a real appetite to make progress swiftly, on the back of an outline business case and initial scoping study, a senior management team was appointed to take control of the formation of the new collaborated service.

Chief Superintendent Chris Haward, a Leicestershire officer, was appointed to lead the team. Chief Supt Haward was to be supported by two superintendents and four chief inspectors. Their task was initially to coordinate the four

forces' functions, standardise processes and build a business case for further integration.

Early teething troubles were worked through, budgets were combined, structures and working practices aligned and confidence grew. The four forces' specialist teams worked together under one command. Barriers were overcome, trust built and there was a genuine sense of excitement at what was clearly possible.

By December 2014, the police and crime commissioners (PCCs) and chief constables of the four counties were confident enough to agree a business case to fully integrate their specialist services, allowing pooled resources with formula contribution in both cash and people, and mixed teams of officers routinely operating across force boundaries as day-to-day normal practice.

The core of the case was built on a set of principles to which all parties committed. The principal focus was improved operational effectiveness, with savings and efficiencies seen as vital, but secondary, objectives.

It was essential that the new structure was fit for purpose. The new management team had swiftly realised that very different working practices and attendance criteria existed. The efficiency and savings of the new model were based on a better quality service being delivered by fewer people, with fewer vehicles working far more flexibly across a greater area and across force boundaries. It was a sensitive situation, which needed careful handling and had to be evidence-led.

A commercial company, Process Evolution, was used to measure and process map activity to help design the new structure.

The evidence it produced was pretty stark. All forces had lessons to learn from each other. Time spent training varied significantly with the same roles having different initial training and refresh periods in each of the forces. 'Double hatting', where the same officer had to be trained for more than one specialist role, often meant deployable time was low. Armed response vehicles (ARVs) in some forces had a pro-active combined roads policing role; in others more time was spent on standby to be ready for swift deployment.

We were able to quickly identify over-capacity in specialist dogs and many specialist firearms roles, such as close protection or rifle officers, when viewed through a regional lens rather than at force level.

In policing major events across the region, mutual aid would be provided on several occasions during the year, leading to a wasteful administrative nightmare of cross-charging at artificial rates. Instead, we saw that a reasonable balance could be struck with cross-charging minimised and applied on a core cost recovery basis only.

At the outset, understanding of our costs was very patchy, with budgets interwoven with other force activities and different, sometimes creative, counting methodologies. It was important to get a sharp focus and establish standardised methods so that we could really compare apples with apples.

Designing the new model

At the heart of the new service – and potentially the area carrying the highest level of organisational and reputational risk – was armed policing. We had to get it right from the outset.

An important principle has been getting chief officers involved early and remaining engaged throughout at key

Critical success factors

- **Remaining passionate about the quality of service delivery** – with any multi-force collaboration where savings are looked for service degradation is a real danger. Agreeing principles as the foundation for organisation design was early work. The first principle upon which we agreed, and which shaped many subsequent decisions, was that improving service while maintaining standards had to underpin this work;

- **A commitment to find the best way** – inevitably, bringing four organisations together there are different ways of working. We found that searching for a new way, practitioner built and drawing upon existing experience, gave the most efficient and effective service. It also achieved buy-in and minimised parochialism;

- **Taking the people with us** – significant organisational change, new structures, new locations and fewer roles was tough to sell. Open engagement by the most senior managers at staff seminars and commitment to fair, open and transparent selection processes, backed up by delivery of promises worked well for us;

- **Federation buy-in** – the potential for challenge, disaffection and disruption to the introduction of major change across four very different forces was high. Early honest and open conversation with Police Federation officials, and a degree of flexibility, paid real dividends in terms of practical support when difficult decisions had to be implemented;

- **College of Policing support** – with firearms support at the heart of this collaboration and single training provision a key enabler for that, the help, guidance and support of the College of Policing and two or three key personnel there to achieve the interim firearms training licence was crucial;

- **Culture change for chief officers** – a real enabler was a willingness among chief officers to share command and control of people and resources.

Existing close working gave confidence that a strategic firearms commander from Nottinghamshire could run a firearms operation in Lincolnshire using mixed armed response vehicles teams from four forces. The final piece in the jigsaw was the move to cross-force chief officer cover, where as I type this, an assistant chief constable from Nottinghamshire is the chief officer on call for my force and the deputy chief constable in Northamptonshire is covering Leicestershire as well; and

- **Building that strong business case** – We had to gain buy-in from four police and crime commissioners (PCCs) determined to see the best for their communities and to ensure value for money. Building a convincing business case meant chief officers involved early and staying engaged. Tough decisions and significant business change was necessary. The quality service had to be accompanied by real savings, and the focus was always on cashable savings and surrendering assets rather than simply doing more with the same.

decision points. Following a searching process, a team of assistant chief constables agreed our operating model, drawing on previous approaches. They standardised the way armed vehicles operated: also performing a defined roads policing role and deployed from just five bases across the region, principally located at force headquarters with one remote base to achieve even response cover and patrolling and working seamlessly across force boundaries.

These Roads and Armed Policing Teams (RAPTs) were complemented by two Tactical Roads Policing Teams (TRPTs) located in the north and south of the region. Their role is to provide specialist roads policing capability, conducting pro-active operations and forming part of the tactical pursuit capability to deny criminals the use of the roads.

Dog handler roles were slimmed down with fewer dogs, particularly specialist dogs, with handlers having just one dog. The reduction in training required enabled far more operational days, with specialist dogs – whose activities are easier to plan – also being tasked across the whole region.

Public order training for all officers across the four forces was standardised and rationalised, reducing the number of





East Midlands Operational Support Service –

- (1) Lincolnshire Police HQ, (2) Lincoln city centre, (3) Nottinghamshire Police HQ, (4) Boston police station, (5) Grantham police station, (6) Leicestershire Police HQ, (7) Pytchley police post and (8) Northamptonshire Police HQ.

training days significantly. Specialist search capability is provided by the realignment of existing staff to provide ten Tactical Search Teams (TSTs) of one sergeant and seven constables deployable across the East Midlands.

Specialist firearms capability is now provided by an inspector-led Tactical Armed Policing Team (TAPT), comprising two sergeants and 36 constables, and delivered from bases in Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire.

Close cooperation with the College of Policing was needed to formulate a joint firearms training approach.

Its support was invaluable as we sought to move from four licensed training sections to a structure with one chief firearms instructor, a deputy and two armed police training managers.

Savings could never justify a reduction in standards and the achievement of the single interim licence was a hard-won milestone. In the year ahead we intend to convert the interim licence to a permanent one.

The final element of EMOpSS' operating model, the Serious Collision Investigation Unit (SCIU), was an area that actually received investment, with a budget increase of £227,000 to just under £4 million in order to raise all forces to levels of capacity and capability we needed to achieve. Its staff aim to attend all fatal or life-changing collisions within an hour, releasing other officers as soon as possible.

Improving performance and service delivery

The fully integrated model of deployment went live on May 5 this year. It certainly signalled a culture change for forces.

Lincolnshire's Grantham police station found itself hosting a hub of the TRPT in which only three of the 30-plus cadre were from that force. Problems with radio communications, building access, fuelling vehicles and real issues around

managing duties were encountered and largely resolved.

Around the region similar issues were tackled. Problems, surprisingly, were rarely operational. A raft of really good news stories swiftly began to emerge.

For the most part, specialist officers tend to be seasoned, highly-trained, fit and mature people who have fought to gain their role and work hard to retain it. Impromptu focus groups in the early weeks certainly did find some unhappy or disgruntled people, frustrated by teething troubles, but the overall picture rapidly settled.

The can-do attitude of operational officers, genuinely enjoying working closely with colleagues from other forces, and a few iconic operational successes began to cement the foundations. Hard work by all involved in supervision and management in relationship building began to pay dividends. Work by Northamptonshire duty management staff was particularly appreciated.

A reduction in officer numbers, particularly in roads policing and armed policing, had been difficult. A good quality 'preferred posting' process and positive involvement by local Police Federation officials had helped to work through difficult times.

The value of the new approach began to be demonstrated when supporting VIP and royal visits. A single protection team was able to cross force boundaries, be directed by one firearms commander and deliver a good service at much lower cost. A by-election with many short-notice visits around the region proved an early test.

A major international motorcycle rally in Lincoln in June, coupled with a need to tackle a large, unlawful and problematic rave on that county's southern border on the same day, tested mobilisation and mutual aid capability, with all four forces, plus Derbyshire Constabulary valuably contributing assistance at minimal cost.

In the first few weeks, a mobile firearms-related incident that began in Cambridgeshire was resolved in Lincolnshire by combined EMOpSS teams, with a Nottinghamshire strategic firearms commander and a Lincolnshire tactical firearms commander. That level of interoperability is now the norm.

The TRPT deployed to an operation in Northamptonshire made arrests following a pursuit and resolved an intractable case involving a series of stolen high-powered vehicles that were subsequently used in distraction burglaries. Use of ANPR (automatic numberplate recognition) intelligence and swift deployment were key.

Firearms efficiencies through collaboration –

firearms teams operate with officers from four forces working side-by-side.



All units have similar success stories that more than counterbalance the remaining challenges that are being worked through.

Performance information has been gathered from the creation of the first phase of EMOpSS.

Local commanders feared that a regional integrated service may lead to a reduction in the support provided to local policing. However, six months in, EMOpSS staff still deal with ten per cent of local incidents. The attendance rates of both first and second ARVs to the scene of firearms incidents has improved markedly and Taser deployments have increased. In terms of serious collision investigation there have been large increases in both attendance and investigations retained.

Capacity and capability of all units has increased, including the ability to provide armed support to the regional units tackling serious and organised crime. Surprisingly, given the reduction in dog numbers, the level of deployments has increased.

Where next?

This is the largest, fully-integrated specialist operations collaboration among provincial forces. It continues to attract attention and visits from colleagues around the country. Early in the New Year, we intend to hold a national seminar open to all forces, where we will share our operational practices, financial profiles and lessons learnt, along with the detailed performance data this article only touches upon.

All five regional forces are moving to a common computer platform for both case and custody and crime and intelligence systems (Niche Records Management System).

It is currently fully live in two forces and interrogatable by all. Within the year the platform will be rolled out across the East Midlands providing a spinal, single point of entry, integrated system for all forces and a real enabler for this collaboration.

We discussed driving out a further £1.5 million worth of savings next year, but as we work through the integrated budgets, root and branch, we firmly believe further standardising practices, realising the benefits of mobile data and better procurement will give an extra layer of efficiency savings.

In the year ahead we will begin the move to a rationalised vehicle fleet and enjoy the benefit of a recently-let fleet contract at extremely competitive rates, with a standard specification for the range of vehicles across the four forces.

As we move to the replacement for Airwave (emergency services network) we will be able to ensure the design better enables our collaboration and smooths out some of the remaining wrinkles with command and control over such a massive geographic area.

However, in line with our founding principles, the most important improvements we look forward to are further enhancing our ARV response times, serious road traffic collision attendance, support to local policing and support to proactive and specialist crime investigation.

A busy year ahead.



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