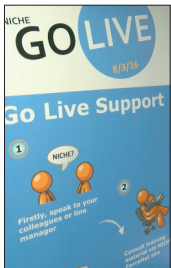


A unique project to merge operational ICT elements across the five East Midlands forces is about to reach full implementation – and in record time.

Record collaboration



While many individual forces around the country are using Niche as an ICT system to service their crime, intelligence, case and custody functions, it is unprecedented for five forces to attempt to harmonise these core operational ICT systems under ‘one roof’. But that is exactly what will reach conclusion later this summer in the East Midlands forces.

The unique project has its roots at a meeting in 2014, when chief constables and police and crime commissioners (PCCs) from Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire agreed to the business case and set the ambitious delivery date of June this year. Since that first meeting the fifth force in the region, Derbyshire, has joined the collaboration.

Lincolnshire Police Assistant Chief Officer Nancie Shackleton, who has been the senior responsible officer for the project, worked closely with Leicestershire Police Deputy Chief Constable Roger Bannister (regional criminal justice lead) and a team of specialists drawn from the five forces. Ms Shackleton says the business case sought to standardise and harmonise working practices, documentation and procedures across force borders.

“The prime aim was to make working across our force borders easier for officers and staff, while making it more difficult for offenders to cross our police boundaries,” she explained.

She cites one of the inefficiencies of the outgoing systems being the double-keying of information within and between force computer systems and the sheer inability to produce information from disparate legacy systems to give a complete picture of offenders and their criminal behaviour.

“Already, one force has saved £1 million in annual ICT support costs by being in this collaboration,” she says. “And the operational gains are already evident even in the comparatively early stages.”

As a system, Niche RMS is designed around an occurrence, which is then used to link people with locations and vehicles. The East Midlands regional Niche solution has been structured as a ‘shared domain’ so that all of the forces operate from a single instance of Niche with a shared database.

To achieve this, detailed design workshops were held which brought practitioners together to outline processes at all levels and across all business areas, to agree a corporate East Midlands way of doing things. The results were then technically configured into the Niche system.

There were early operational gains (see case studies opposite) and now, 12 months on and with four forces live, there are numerous examples of the benefits the project is bringing to policing and protecting the public in the region.

“While the premise of the original business case focused on the prospect of operational gains as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of the improvements, there have been several unforeseen, positive outcomes also,” said Ms Shackleton.

“The project brought people together and that started to build relationships across the region. It has highlighted good practice and forced us to question many of our existing processes and to undertake significant housekeeping audits in a number of areas of our business.”

Mr Bannister says that an example of the divergence in original police practices and paperwork was the custody workstream, which consisted of 363 different pieces of paperwork across the four original forces.

“These have been revised into a single custody process with 36 corporate forms to be used across the whole region,” he said. “This now allows officers to book detainees into any custody suite in the same way and using the same forms across the East Midlands forces.”

Ms Shackleton says that decisions were made within individual forces regarding the back record conversion (BRC) of information into the new system.

“The project board decided that it would not be prescriptive to forces about what and how many records should be transferred,” she said. “Much of this depended on the ability of individual forces to create and then retain ‘read only’ copies of legacy data or the financial drive to reduce ongoing support and maintenance costs to ‘keep a system’.”

Some forces brought case and custody records only, others crime and intelligence records.

“The volume of BRC information from forces ranged from one million to six million legacy records,” she said. “The removing, cleansing and transfer of information from legacy systems has been challenging but is succeeding. The process also ensures the accuracy of the shared data which then becomes ‘regional intelligence’ and is fully MOPI (Management of Police Information Codes of Practice) compliant.”

Ms Shackleton says that by the very nature of criminals offending across borders it was recognised that records would need further scrutiny to merge records, which became duplicated when individual forces added their data.

“Again it was a regional decision to have a shared data quality team to scrutinise and ensure the integrity of the data by removing duplicate entries in the live system. Although there is a technical ICT solution which assists with this process, human judgment is still vital to ensure there are sufficient matching elements to merge a record,” she added.

Assistant Chief Constable Rachel Swann, the force lead for Northamptonshire Police, describes how for seven days straddling an implementation, regional teams are deployed



to augment and support individual force change champions, floor walkers and subject matter experts.

“The additional regional staff have improved local skill-bases, allowed officers and staff to see different cultures and styles of working and built relationships, many of which will last for significant parts of policing careers,” she said.

“We know that individuals who appear once (a golden nominal entry) can now be accessed across the region and this enables us to better serve the public, better support and protect victims and to target those who wish to cause harm. By having a single system, the operational and organisational advantages are there for us.”

Ms Shackleton says she believes any member of the public would expect the police service to operate in a standard way sharing the same technology and information.

“I have immense pride that once the chiefs and the PCCs took the decision to have a single shared system, just two short years ago, that operational and organisational colleagues from around the region grabbed the opportunity, designed the system and delivered it on time,” she said. “It is a significant step forward for policing in the East Midlands, a great tribute to the team who delivered it and it was inspiring to watch it all come to fruition.”



Assistant Chief Officer Nancie Shackleton



Deputy Chief Constable Roger Bannister



Assistant Chief Constable Rachel Swann

Case study 1

In February this year, a CCTV operator saw a man assault a heavily pregnant woman outside a shop in Nottingham.

On the arrival of officers, both parties denied the incident and when the man refused to give his details and became violent he was arrested and taken to a Nottinghamshire Police custody suite.

On searching, regional Niche officers found that he was already wanted for an assault and other offences in Lincolnshire in November 2015.

They were able to establish that both assaults were on the same woman who, after the Lincolnshire assault, had fled to a hostel in Nottinghamshire.

The suspect was interviewed and processed by Nottinghamshire officers who completed and uploaded all details to the regional Niche system.

At the same time, Lincolnshire Police liaised

with the Crown Prosecution Service, which enabled the suspect to be charged with all offences across both counties.

He was remanded to court the following morning where he was sentenced to four months imprisonment.

- Regional Niche enabled Nottinghamshire officers to view detailed information about the Lincolnshire assault and other offences;
- Nottinghamshire officers were able to share live documents with colleagues in Lincolnshire;
- Officers from both forces took active roles in the investigation;
- As a result of this efficient working practice the victim was given quality service and the defendant received swift justice;
- The financial cost to both police and the courts was kept to a minimum; and
- Good police work was supported by regional Niche.

Case study 2

A taxi driver in Nottinghamshire reported receiving a call to his mobile from a woman in distress and being assaulted. It was prior to the regional Niche ‘go-live’ in Nottinghamshire and there was no trace of the phone number on its system.

However, a search of the regional Niche identified the phone number in statement

given to Lincolnshire Police by a woman with an address in Nottinghamshire.

Officers went to the address on the statement and the woman who answered the door said the phone was in the possession of her daughter. Officers went immediately to her address and were on the scene within 30 minutes of the call from the taxi driver.

Case study 3

On the day of Leicestershire Police’s go-live, a stolen vehicle was linked, by regional Niche, to thefts in Lincolnshire later the same day. The offenders were arrested in Lincolnshire and because of the linked intelligence

and information, Lincolnshire Police officers were able to process and charge those arrested for offences committed in both force areas and complete the file for court from the information already on regional Niche.