

CASE STUDY: WEST MERCIA POLICE

Maximum efficiency under lock and key:
Lanner PRISM and West Mercia Police



About West Mercia Police

Spread across three predominantly rural counties, West Mercia is the fourth largest police force geographically in England and Wales. The force employs 2,345 police officers, 277 community support officers, 1,878 police staff and 241 members of the Special Constabulary.

West Mercia Police has a strong track record for adopting new, innovative approaches, including the application of technology to both front line policing and back office processes, and has consistently been recognised as one of the top performing forces in England and Wales.



Taking Custody of Change

Until recently, West Mercia was split into five territorial policing units which included:

- Herefordshire
- North Worcestershire (covering Kidderminster, Bromsgrove and Redditch)
- Shropshire
- South Worcestershire (covering Worcester, Malvern, Droitwich, Pershore and Evesham)
- Telford & Wrekin

Each of these units had its own command unit and its own custody facilities, which were operated independently of each other. However, a review was launched recently to ascertain the benefit of consolidating all units, and adopting a single, unified policing footprint with just one command layer.

West Mercia identified that as a result of this devolved management structure, each region's custody management processes were different. Typically, West Mercia's larger custody facilities were sometimes underutilised while others were stretched beyond capacity. As a result, potential economies of scale were not being exploited, and peaks and troughs in demand were not being managed effectively.

Adam Thomas, Chief Inspector, operational services command, West Mercia Police explains: "We have primary custody facilities in five major towns across West Mercia: Hereford, Worcester, Kidderminster, Redditch, Telford and Shrewsbury. If they are operated in isolation, it stands to reason that there is a lot of duplicated effort and frankly, missed opportunities for more informed decision making and greater efficiencies."

West Mercia also identified that it needed a range of contingency plans to account for the occasions when one facility was offline, for example for refurbishment work. This issue became more pressing following a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorates' of Constabulary and Prisons in December 2009, which specified that some of the custody suites across the region required refurbishment.

Lastly, West Mercia was keen to investigate the benefit of collaborating with neighbouring forces in the West Midlands region, in order to optimise capacity management of custody facilities.

As part of the review, a benchmarking exercise to establish current practices was necessary. To create this benchmark, West Mercia looked at a range of options including specialist consultancy, and ascertaining how other forces were handling the issue of custody management.

During its research, West Mercia learned that The National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA) was sponsoring the adoption of Lanner's PRISM solution, which is a suite of easy-to-use, rapidly configurable simulation models covering key police processes. After an introduction to the solution at an NPIA event, West Mercia selected PRISM as its chosen approach.

Chief Inspector Thomas continues: "PRISM offered the most cost effective solution to the custody management issues we faced, whilst still delivering all of the improved processes needed."

The solution: 'The Lanner Machine'

Lanner's PRISM Custody Management module was adopted by West Mercia police and is now deployed on a desktop within Operational Support Command.

PRISM allows West Mercia to easily see how custody management processes should be best configured, managed and resourced on a more scientific basis. By deploying it on the desktop at the local level, users can experiment with "what-if?" scenarios in a safe, risk-free environment and test ideas on making key capital or resource decisions.

Chief Inspector Thomas explains: "One of the first things we did with PRISM was to look at the staffing and resource changes that a move to a single command structure would necessitate. Firstly, we needed to know what changes would be required to existing staffing levels in order to maintain our current throughput of detainees. Secondly, we wanted to experiment with how we could optimise these resources to get even more done with the same resources.

"Since then we have developed contingency plans for when a facility is out of action, looked at the changes in staffing levels that arise from holidays, and found our pinch points. We have even looked at the changes we would have to make, as and when numbers of detainees rise or fall. All of this has been done in a virtual, risk-free environment, so we know that by the time we commit to real world action, we are as prepared as we can be."

PRISM simulations have also been used as part of our business cases for capital investment. These have ranged from assessing the operational issues of where the detainees may be sent whilst refurbishment is carried out, to proposing the likely impact of entirely new facility upgrades. Crucially this has all been done without additional cost to the force.

Simulations are typically turned around within just 48 hours. Thomas explains how PRISM has become part of the culture at West Mercia: "We have a computer called 'the Lanner machine' and when I need information, I simply ask my team who then launch the software and quickly come back with answers. We have replaced gut feel and instinct with accurate data and simulation. As a result our confidence in decisions is rock solid."

The future: beyond the CSR and into collaboration

As the impact of the CSR spreads throughout the public sector, savings from an efficient, effective custody management system will play a key role in maintaining the reputation for financial prudence and cost effectiveness that West Mercia has achieved.

Regional collaboration and the sharing of nearby custody facilities is likely to be a big part of this, and underpinned by PRISM, will expand savings out from West Mercia into other forces.

Chief Inspector Thomas concludes: "We will be making use of PRISM for a long time. The benefits we have seen in terms of improved decision making, operational processes and businesses case development have been tangible and swift. Lanner PRISM has been instrumental in implementing our custody management strategy as we move towards a new command structure."

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