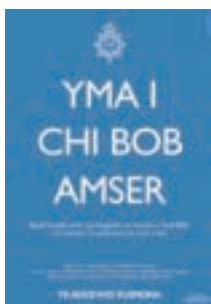


The Policing Pledge



A success story in the making: enabled by technology

Two things were striking about the Policing Pledge public awareness campaign of Christmas 2009: first, although the Pledge seems to have been with us for some time, it was only launched as recently as summer 2008; second, it impresses as an initiative that really intends to succeed, writes Paul Kennedy, Senior Manager, Analysys Mason.



"Furthermore, the evidence suggests that regardless of any change in Government, the commitments of the Policing Pledge will be sustained."

Both the recent advertising campaign and announcements by the Prime Minister in March 2010 – including the resurrection of commitment to a national single non-emergency number – demonstrate that the Policing Pledge commands genuine enthusiasm on the part of central Government. Furthermore, the fact that all 43 Police Forces in England and Wales have embraced the initiative, without which support it would be doomed to fail in the long term, indicates that the Pledge, even at this early point really is a success story in the making.

Key to the Pledge's fundamental aim of putting the citizen at the heart of police services is the use of technology by forces in both innovative and, more usually, established but increasingly effective ways. The role of technology in enabling delivery of the Policing Pledge has been pronounced in at least two ways – in the effectiveness of public-facing communication, and in the mechanisms by which Pledge-related services are delivered.

Although the HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) Strategic Overview graded the progress of three-quarters of police forces as "fair", it was keen to emphasise the good practice achieved in communications with the public.

An initiative that has caught the media's eye, for example, is Humberside Police's "talking poster" in Hull, with a "sonic box" within the poster to broadcast the Pledge commitments in several languages including Urdu, Kurdish, Polish and Mandarin. Similarly the release of the NPIA's national web-based crime maps with detailed information on criminal and police activity searchable by postcode has proved popular. All of Thames Valley Police's Neighbourhood Policing Teams have their own websites, together with contact details and photographs, and there are many more examples of mainstream communication avenues being exploited. The freedom for forces to decide how they will best fulfil their commitment to proactive public communication has led to effective mobilisation.

In terms of how policing services are actually being delivered to the public, what is striking is how a number of ambitious programmes of the last five or so years are being

taken advantage of in the context of the Policing Pledge to take advantage of, particularly on a national level.

As recently as 1 March 2010 the Prime Minister strengthened the Policing Pledge commitment to include officers spending a full 80% of their time actively on the beat. Putting aside concerns about what this will actually demand of police resources when it is implemented, there is no question that this would not be possible without recent developments in access to mobile data. Credit must be given to the programmes put in place and funded not just by individual forces but also the National Policing Improvement Agency, which has made tens of millions of pounds available for exactly this purpose since 2007.

It could be said that every technology project aimed at reducing administrative burdens on the police supports achievement of the Pledge – from the progressive implementation of PDA-type devices that allow secure remote access to information potentially to confidential level, through to the Lantern mobile fingerprinting device, which 90% of officers surveyed in 2008 estimated to save at least 30 minutes per incident. The Pledge's emphasis on tackling anti-social behaviour in particular has received recent impetus from the PM's announcement that the national 101 single non-emergency number is to be re-established. What is important is that by brigading 101 with the Policing Pledge – and therefore sensibly confining its scope solely to the police – the probability of force buy-in and thus effective, actual improvements to the service provided to the public must surely be improved.

While it may be early to be pronouncing success or failure of the Pledge (acknowledged by HMIC in its Strategic Overview, which accepts that the Pledge demands are "relatively demanding to deliver every day, everywhere, consistently"), based on the evidence to date the Policing Pledge can be fairly said to be progressively accumulating success, enabled by increasing use of both innovative and established technologies. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that regardless of any change in Government, the commitments of the Policing Pledge will be sustained.