

Olympic challenges

Dave Hughes, Utilities Practice Director at ABeam Consulting, discusses ways for forces to prepare for the unprecedented challenges that the 2012 Olympic Games will bring.



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➤ Dave Hughes,
Utilities Practice
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Lord Coe, chairman of the organising committee for the 2012 Olympic games, recently brushed off criticism that the country will not be well-equipped enough to deal with the unique security challenges arising from the Games. Security is apparently at the top of the organisers’ agenda – more than £800 million of the overall £9.4 billion budget has been allocated to ensuring the safety and security of athletes, sports fans, and members of the public.

While the Met will take the lead role in controlling policing for the Games, all security services will play a vital role in their own right across the UK. Many police forces outside of London that will host some of the events have kick-started preparations already to be able to overcome effectively any hurdles that the Games will put in their way. Dorset, for example, home of the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy which is hosting the sailing events, has already completed a high-tech Olympics operations room equipped with the IT systems needed to manage resources, and communicate and share intelligence with the Met and other security services.

Yet, many other local police forces across the UK will find the Games a massive burden on resources. Even though extra financing has been ploughed into policing and other security services by the organisers, some forces are yet to put the necessary resources aside and start preparations for the games. So, how can forces meet the particular challenges of the Olympics while ensuring that the quality of day-to-day services won’t be jeopardised?

Undoubtedly the biggest policing challenge posed by the Olympics is resource management. This is not so much a question of finances, but of how forces can use the resources available to them as effectively as possible and to the benefit of the public. The pure scale of the Games will prove problematic. It will be difficult to estimate how many officers will be needed to support each event taking place across the country. And, while prominent police presence will be essential to ensure the safety and security of everyone involved in the Games, forces need to be able to handle their other, day-to-day policing operations also.

Collaboration between forces will be an effective means of reducing the burden on local forces in those areas in particular that will be hosting major events and are likely to

attract huge numbers of spectators. There are a few collaboration champions in the UK already – in the South West of England, for example, five forces are working together to improve efficiencies by sharing certain back-office functions and front line policing operations. Similar initiatives are needed in other regions to help forces deal with the varying demands posed by the Games.

During the Olympics the ability to shift resources quickly from one site to the next, depending on where support is required, will be crucial. All forces should introduce robust mobile working practices by 2012 to ensure a sufficient police presence on the streets and that any issues can be dealt with as soon as possible, on site.

While mobile devices and other new technologies can deliver many benefits for officers, it is worth bearing in mind that any technology roll-out can pose its own challenges for forces with already limited resources. Following Dorset’s lead, many forces have highlighted the need to upgrade their communications, intelligence and other IT systems ahead of the Games.

The training of not only regular officers, but also temporary and community support officers brought in specifically for the Games, will require a great deal of time and resources from individual forces. Furthermore, according to the National Policing Improvement Agency, a high number of officers are expected to retire between now and 2012. At the Met, for example, as many as 40 per cent of officers will reach retirement age in the next four years. There is now additional pressure on forces to fill vacancies and the skills gap, so time needs to be dedicated to bringing everyone up to speed with new working processes to make the most of any new investment.

Admittedly, the resourcing challenges that the Games will pose for forces across the country are many. Nevertheless, forces should not be apprehensive but instead grasp these opportunities to truly transform their day-to-day operations towards front line policing. The advantages of adopting more effective ways of working through collaboration, and a complete rethink of IT through the introduction of new intelligence and communications technologies, can provide a lasting positive legacy for police forces as a direct result of the Olympics.