

WEST MERCIA POLICE AND CRIME PANEL 27 NOVEMBER 2018

ICT STRATEGY AND ATHENA

Recommendation

1. Members of the Panel are invited to note this Report.

Background

2. The purpose of this report is to provide Members of the Panel with an overview of the Athena programme as part of the wider ICT programme, as requested at their September meeting.
3. The Athena programme is one of six programmes of work integral to the alliance Transformational Change Programme. The six programmes are: Athena, Operations and Communications Centre (OCC), Technology Enabled Change, Policing Change Model, Services to Policing and Digital Service Transformation. All but one of the six programmes include some sort of investment or upgrade involving an ICT system or other technological enabled tool.
4. The agreed strategic intention of ICT Service is to ensure that ICT infrastructure, systems and services are consistently available, accessible and secure to drive business change and efficiency through the delivery of innovative ICT solutions.

Introduction

5. Northgate Public Services (NPS) are the developers and operators of the CONNECT ICT System, created for the use of the police service. Where the system is used by a single force it is marketed as CONNECT and where it is shared by a consortium of multiple forces it is 'badged' as Athena.
6. A total of nine police forces, including West Mercia Police are in the Athena Management Organisation (AMO) consortium. All nine Athena Forces are now live on the platform with the final force, Kent, having gone live on the 8 November 2019. The AMO arrangement allows for the sharing of both data and the costs of system development between the AMO forces. All forces activities are driven through the AMO, who are effectively "the Customer".
7. Athena provides a combined system of four modules that creates a workflow through 'lean thinking' to link the process management of four of the most demanding business areas in terms of cost, complexity and harm namely: Investigation, Intelligence, Custody and Case.

8. A business case to proceed with Athena was agreed in 2015 when Athena was identified as being at the leading edge of process management, and one of the few commercial options available that would align with the wider alliance transformation programme. Initial scoping indicated that the implementation of Athena would provide significant savings in processes and efficiencies and it was proposed that a post implementation review should be carried out to ensure that all possible benefits were realised.

Implementation

9. An Athena Team, including a dedicated Delivery Lead and Programme Manager, was created under the Transformation Programme with a Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) to oversee the transition to Athena.

10. It was intended that a process of back record conversion would take place prior to implementation; however, due to recurrent issues with the processing, a decision was taken to go ahead with live Investigation, Custody and Case data only.

11. In preparation for its implementation, a significant training programme providing 4000 officers and staff across the alliance with a total of three days training on an Athena training system. A small number of super users received an in depth two week training programme on all four modules of Athena.

12. On the 4 October 2017 the Alliance went live with Athena. An Athena Help Hub was established to assist in the smooth transition to the system staffed by super users, which later evolved into the additional provision of locally based floor walkers to provide personal interaction with both individuals and teams. This was complemented by Athena road-shows and an informative Athena intranet site.

Process issues

13. The implementation of Athena gave rise to a number of process issues across all four of the system modules. These can be broadly summarised as:

- Timeliness – including the time taken for officers to create crime reports taking longer than anticipated and quality assurance time extending leading to backlogs.
- Data quality – including a dip in quality of data sent to Victim Support
- Management information – including a backlog of management information in the system a lack of certain management dashboards.
- Interface – between Athena and external systems such as the Police National Database
- Stability – the system has suffered from outages, in part as a result of internal ICT platforms, but also because of consortium-wide system changes, upgrades and the requirement to achieve a live status for all nine forces.
- User – the implementation of Athena presented officers and staff with a whole new system to familiarise with, and some of the Athena processes are not intuitive to use.

- Demand – despite the tremendous effort and achievement in attaining a live Athena platform within the alliance, there remain a number of system generated demand pressures that were not foreseen pre-implementation

Intervention

14. The process issues arising from Athena quickly led to number of interventions being put in place to address or mitigate some of the process issues arising and an Athena Critical Incident Management Meeting (CIMM) was established. The CIMM was closed in August and an Athena Governance Group at both tactical and Strategic levels has been introduced to take forward a programme of activity to address a number of ongoing process issues.

15. Most recently Chief Officers have given approval for officers to build post-charge files outside Athena using an improved File Builder. Criminal Justice (CJ) staff will then input the files in to Athena and complete the linking and associations before sending to CPS. The file builder was initially piloted in Shropshire and will now be rolled out across the alliance.

16. It is estimated that this support will remove three quarters of the CJ-based Athena tasks that are currently undertaken by officers. This saving will also:

- Increase the timeliness of files delivered to the CPS
- Increase file quality
- Increase officer morale
- Increase availability of officers to meet public demand

17. This CJ support function will remain until the new Digital Case File builder is available within Athena (likely early 2020).

18. In addition to the improvement plans that are currently in place to reduce the backlogs in the organisation, the alliance have contracted the services of 'Process Evolution' from September 2018 to review and analyse the current investigative models and processes within the alliance. The Company are an evidence-based consulting service designed to produce practical and actionable recommendations for change that deliver real efficiency savings and performance improvements.

19. Athena Express is in the process of being developed by Northgate and will provide a new 'skin' to Athena, with the intention of providing a much improved interface for Athena users. It promises to bring a fresher look to the platform together with a more refined and intuitive approach to workflow which will include processes that auto link or suggest nominals to the user – reducing processing demand within the Investigation Management Unit. It will initially be applied to Investigation and Intelligence functionalities before progressing to Case. It is anticipated that Athena Express will realistically not be available until Q2 of 2019/20, and only once version 6 of Athena has been implemented.

Governance

20. There are structured governance arrangements in place for the ongoing oversight and development of Athena. This is as follows:

21. Strategic Athena Management Board - consisting of the senior responsible officers from the Athena consortium and senior Northgate representatives, is responsible for the national strategic oversight of Athena and the AMO. At the national tactical level there are a number of AMO User Groups, reflecting the four Athena modules and associated areas of police business.

22. Alliance Athena Strategic Governance Group – this commenced in October 2018 and is chaired by the Alliance Athena SRO. It comprises of key strategic stakeholders within the alliance. The aim of this Group is to ensure delivery and improvement of the day to day running and use of Athena, oversight and decision making in respect of the Athena Development Programme, the Innovation Sub Programme, the Athena Improvement and Enhancement Plan, the Athena Roadmap and interdependencies with other change programmes that impact upon Athena including external change programmes

23. Alliance Athena Tactical Governance Group – this commenced in August 2018, replacing the tactical actions and enhancements that were previously tabled through the alliance Athena CIMM. This Group is chaired by the Athena lead for the Alliance. The Group’s aims are to assist the alliance with the overview of Athena business as usual activities and continuing to embed Athena within the Alliance.

24. Athena Development Team - a small Alliance Athena development Team exists at Hindlip under the Transformation Change Programme. The Team’s functions include the creation and maintenance of an Athena intranet for users and their current focus is forward looking towards Athena upgrades, the development of the existing Athena modules and the opportunity to purchase an Athena enhancement that shares information with partner agencies through the Police and Partner Sharing Service (PPSS) as well as an opportunity to purchase and utilise an Athena enhancement to process and update the public when reporting crime and incidents online. This product would work with the Home Office “Single Online Home” product being considered by all police forces.

25. As Athena is one of the six programmes within the wider transformation programme, it is subject to oversight at the Transformation Board overseeing the whole change programme.

26. The PCC is represented within the Athena Governance structure at the Strategic Athena Management Board, the alliance Athena Strategic Governance Group and at the Transformation Board. A senior officer from the PCC’s office sat on the Athena CIMM while it was running.

Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Scrutiny Post Implementation

27. In addition to ongoing engagement with the force through the governance structures the PCC has used his holding to account process to proactively challenge and scrutinise the organisation’s response to the process issues arising from the implementation of Athena.

28. In November 2017, the PCC held a dedicated holding to account meeting to discuss Athena. Issues addressed included the availability of management information, resources levels in the investigation management unit (IMU) to cope with demand, case file quality and the impact on victims.

29. In January 2018, as part of a thematic holding to account on domestic abuse the availability and quality of management information and its impact on the recording of domestic abuse and referrals to support services was raised.

30. In February 2018, the introduction of direct crime recording in the crime bureau and its impact on improving data quality in relation to recording vulnerability factors was raised.

31. In March 2018, as part of a thematic holding to account on victims the PCC queried whether the quality and quantity of referrals to Victim Support had improved to comply with the Victims' Code of Practice.

32. In May 2018, the reduction in the number of vulnerability key words was raised, and assurance sought on interventions to increase data quality.

Contact Points for the Report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Head of Legal & Democratic Services) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

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