West Midlands Police Protects and Serves the Public with Enhanced Mobility

West Midlands Police is the second-largest police force in England, serving 2.9 million citizens across 348 square miles. Its mission is to prevent crime, protect the public and help people in need.

Industry
Government

Strategic priorities
• Anywhere Workspace

VMware footprint
• VMware® Workspace ONE®

• VMware Workspace ONE Assist™

• VMware Workspace ONE Tunnel™

• VMware Workspace ONE Unified Endpoint Management™

West Midlands Police strives to prevent crime and help people in need. To empower officers to spend more time serving the public and less on paperwork, it launched a mobility and device management transformation with VMware Workspace ONE. In nine months, the force redesigned and rebuilt the solution, migrating on-premises devices to cloud. Approximately 10,000 frontline workers use mobile devices to gather, store and share evidence and witness statements, navigate faster to crime scenes and access IT support services from anywhere. This increases safety for both officers and the public while saving an estimated 1.8 million hours of administration time every year.

Preventing crime, protecting the public and helping people

West Midlands Police is responsible for public safety in an area home to more than 2.9 million people. With 6,500 officers, it's the second-largest police force in England. In addition to dealing with more than 2,000 emergency calls a day, its officers patrol the streets, respond to incidents to prevent crime and help people in need.

In 2021, West Midlands Police launched a three-year strategy called "This Work Matters" to help its staff be the best they can be as they deliver on the force's objectives. Enabling police officers to maximize their time in the communities they serve is essential to the successful delivery of police initiatives.

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> Alastair Gregory, Head of Delivery, West Midlands Police IT and Digital Team

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Reducing the burden of police paperwork

Accurate and reliable reporting is fundamental to policing. West Midlands Police found that legacy processes—such as manual reports and having to scan documents—were taking much-needed time away from policing. And when officers were in the field, receiving information via phone or radio was sometimes misinterpreted.

"Every interaction we have with the public needs to be recorded and stored properly. If it isn't recorded, it didn't happen," explains Alastair Gregory, head of delivery at West Midlands Police IT and digital team. "When we're responding to a callout, we need to make sure officers have the latest intelligence, so they know if they're putting themselves at risk. We also need visibility of where teams are so we can identify who can be on the scene the fastest."

West Midlands Police introduced a workplace mobility strategy in 2016, and has since rolled out 10,000 smartphones providing officers with access to more than 120 vital apps.

However, there were challenges around device management and the user experience. Officers were responsible for part of the device configuration, which made onboarding time-consuming, calls to the support desk high and user adoption only around 60 percent. The team needed to reduce the IT administrative burden, digitalize more workflows and provide a better experience to end-users. As a government body, the force also needed to follow national guidelines around security to secure its large volumes of public data.

The rise of the connected police officer

Partnering with VMware to transform mobile device management, West Midlands Police migrated from an on-premises unified endpoint management solution to the cloud in just nine months. Where previously it took around three hours to set up a new device, it now takes just 15 minutes. In the first five months of the project, this amounted to time savings of 17,000 hours. Officers are equipped with Samsung smartphones using Android Enterprise management and security features in the Android operating system. The IT team—which had a good relationship with VMware from previous engagements—worked with VMware experts for implementation guidance. They also had regular ongoing meetings and sessions to share best practices. This proved to be vital at challenging points in the rollout, such as retaining password-less authentication for Microsoft Office 365.

"VMware supported identity migration to ensure email addresses and identities were synced with VMware Workspace ONE. User certificates were seamlessly updated with no downtime, which meant we could drive the project quickly despite complex requirements," explains Gregg Hudson, mobility and automation manager at West Midlands Police IT and digital team.

Devices were allocated based on role-specific personas, ensuring that each user group received the right apps and level of data security to empower but not overwhelm them. The force used Samsung Knox Mobile Enrollment to enroll all devices easily and efficiently in Workspace ONE Unified Endpoint Management (UEM), keeping end-user interaction to a minimum.

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Secure, seamless IT support from anywhere

Today, when officers need IT support in the field, devices can be remotely controlled using Workspace ONE Assist, which has increased first-time resolution to 90 percent. "With Workspace ONE Assist, we can do a walkthrough diagnosis from anywhere. Using remote Whiteboard tools, we can even draw on the user's screen and train less technical people on how to use their device," Hudson explains.

IT support staff are divided into security tiers to serve different user groups. Those with the highest security clearance can see everything on a user's device, but lower tiers have limited access. They can help track down lost devices using location services, but can't see the user's personal files or photos. Authorized IT staff can also recover lost files or wipe devices remotely if they're lost or stolen, reducing the risk of data leaks.

"User adoption has increased to 80 percent, and the ratio of support tickets versus requests for new functionality has switched from roughly 80:20 to 20:80, showing how invested staff are in the transformation."

Dean Taylor, Senior Infrastructure Developer, West Midlands Police IT and Digital Team

Boosting security and performance for mission-critical apps

Another solution that has provided efficiency and security is VMware Workspace ONE Tunnel, which ensures secure device access to corporate resources. The flexibility of the solution also helps the team make decisions on how to operate more efficiently. The per-app feature gives greater control over which internal resources each application has access to by switching VPN access on or off according to the applications that are active rather than by device. Apps such as Google Maps no longer need to go through the corporate network.

"A significant benefit of Workspace ONE Tunnel is when we're using Google Maps for GPS. The last thing you need in an emergency is an app that's slow or hasn't updated with recent road closures," says Hudson. "Per-app VPN removes local dependencies for services which we can assure for operation directly over the internet."

Spending more time protecting the public

The IT team created a broad portfolio of apps, making essential resources available to officers from their devices. This has resulted in fewer phone calls and trips back to the office, and more time for community policing. The organization estimates frontline officers have avoided more than 1.8 million administrative hours in one year.

The consumer-like device configuration has reduced the need for training and improved end user satisfaction. This was vital to increase user adoption, and demand has grown steadily since the initial rollout. One of the apps captures digital witness statements. In just one month it captured more than 4,000 statements, saving around 500 hours of officer time.

Officer safety is strengthened through more accurate information about the local area and the ability to quickly access and share accurate, real-time information. As Hudson explains, "Officers aren't guessing what awaits them at a crime scene. Radio messages can be misheard and rely on the officer's memory. Now, they have a visual reference to refer back to."

By taking a user-centric approach to device management, the IT team has removed maintenance tasks—such as app permissions—that interrupt officers when they're trying to work.

"With VMware Workspace ONE, we're giving officers a seamless, intuitive experience, and we have the metrics to prove it," explains Dean Taylor, senior infrastructure developer at West Midlands Police IT and digital team. "User adoption has increased to 80 percent, and the ratio of support tickets versus requests for new functionality has switched from roughly 80:20 to 20:80, showing how invested staff are in the transformation."

With digital workflows and real-time information on the go, officers can spend more time serving the public and delivering against the "This Work Matters" framework. This has resulted in visits from 11 national police forces and the French Directorate of Information Systems and Communication (DSIC) looking to learn from the force.

Smarter intelligence and IT reporting

Following the success of the rollout, West Midlands Police is working with VMware and Samsung to develop a self-service portal to secure lost devices faster and reduce IT support demand. The team is also exploring the use of VMware Workspace ONE Intelligence™ for smart reporting across its workspace environment. This will help further improve the user experience, strengthen security and compliance and finetune IT operations.