

DPP Video Enabled Justice

Customer: National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC)

CLIENT BRIEF

Digital First was the forerunner to the Digital Policing Portfolio (DPP) and subsequently incorporated into the Police Digital Service. Projects had operated for years within policing on a small and decentralised scale with limited successes. Following work by Sarax undertaking a Landscape Review, the Video Enabled Justice (VEJ) programme – the routine use of video in courts – emerged as one digitisation initiative out of a number Sarax secured Home Office funding for.

Sarax was commissioned to provide national policing with a better understanding of:

- The impact of VEJ in terms of people, process, estates, and technology
- The costs and benefits associated with VEJ
- The impact of policing not being VEJ enabled in the future Crime Service Model (CSM)
- The national picture relating to custody estate and the potential to, if required, accommodate Video Remand Hearings (VRH)
- The national picture relating to police technology and readiness to connect to any future court video networks and, if required, provide facilitating technology
- Local video related practises not previously recognised, force aspirations, and lessons learnt.

We were also tasked with supporting the CSM by providing representation and expertise, identifying and escalating risk to the appropriate authorities across the stakeholder spectrum, whilst taking the opportunity to influence thinking.

WHAT WE DID

There were existing police practitioners operating using local agreements but with no national mandate; we needed to make sure that the impact of VEJ was understood nationally. VEJ development was largely organic and dependent on the approach and appetite adopted by multiple stakeholders, each with their own significant number of interdependencies, challenges and priorities. These included PCCs, Police, HMCTS, CPS and the Judiciary.

HOW WE DID IT

We carried out discovery work involving an initial assessment of the information available, and spoke with forces, HMCTS, CPS and the Ministry of Justice to better understand what they were doing and what the impact was. From this foundation we were able to communicate concerns, risks, issues, and dependencies across the stakeholder groups.

We identified there were 4 strands to VEJ of concern for policing: VRH from police custody; Police Witnesses; statutory applications; and vulnerable and intimidated witnesses. The most pressing element was VRH as this was part of the HMCTS Reform CSM – a core element of which was the reliance on police forces accommodating the process in their custody suites, facilitating the planned closure of courts.

THE WORKS

Sarax involvement encompassed the following:

- Virtual Courts
- The court of the future programme
- Judicial landscape mapping
- PACE, custody estate standards and the operation of Custody Suites
- VRH costs and benefits
- Vulnerable and Intimidated Witness Suites
- Police Witness Suites and processes
- Ad hoc technical guidance to forces
- National standards and process guidance
- Business process development
- Understanding existing process and legacy systems
- Project Management.

We worked collaboratively with police colleagues from many forces nationally, along with wider cross CJS stakeholder groups including:

- Judges
- Magistrates
- HMCTS
- Ministry of Justice
- CPS
- Defence
- Interpreter services

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Prisoner and Escort Contractor Services
- HMPPS
- Home Office.

TOP 5 BENEFITS

- A comprehensive, clear, and concise business case identifying the impact of virtual hearings from police custody suites, enabling policing to decide not to support this initiative on cost and risk grounds
- Identifying the costs and benefits associated with all other uses of video
- Production of the first standards suite for police use of video when interacting with courts
- Being instrumental in setting up and running the VEJ Reference Group, the first national police group for police video practitioners
- Securing the necessary programme funding.

VALUE ADD

- The expertise and knowledge gained during provision of these services was invaluable when forces were required to make temporary arrangements for appearance from police custody into court during the Covid Emergency measures
- Understanding the political landscape and delivering unanticipated outcomes, often in a challenging environment
- Positively working outside of the immediate remit to understand the impact of dependencies such as new prisoner transport contracts
- No surprises, no assumptions approach leading to respect from all stakeholders, despite the challenging messages often being delivered.