



UK emergency service modernisation

UK emergency services are going through major changes and this has only been viable due to the ability to share data, so regional and multi-service control rooms can be set up.

Government services in Britain are undergoing a transformation as part of a major modernisation programme. The transformation of local government is well underway thanks to the e-government initiatives of the last decade that enabled councils to offer centralised services such as multi-service contact centres and web information services. Most council's have realised that with the introduction of standardised data formats the provision of services no longer needed to be confined in-house or restricted to council information, services could be shared with other public bodies, bordering authorities and the private sector.

As the tremendous potential of shared services dawned on government, attention turned to Britain's emergency services. Previously operating as fairly autonomous regional organisations within traditional county boundaries, real improvements to services would always be seriously restricted by geographic boundaries. As pressure to improve response times, optimise resources and improve efficiency increased so did the realisation that major changes needed to be made.

Over the decades each fire and rescue service, police force and ambulance service had evolved their own systems and datasets for their own region without the need for national standardisation. So, the problem is easy to see but the solution is not that straightforward.

Fortunately for central government, their earlier investment in local authority e-government has helped create a platform that will ease the transformation of the emergency services. With the standardisation of addresses through schemes like the all-important National

Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) and Scottish equivalents, together with developments by key software vendors in the GIS sector, the essential technologies and services already exist. What remains is a major management challenge to see through what will be very significant organisational changes over the next decade.

Centralised and national standardised address gazetteers provide the key to the sharing of information that is essential for changes in the way services are provided. The gazetteers are not only more accurate and more comprehensive than traditional address files, but they are designed for easy integration allowing everyone to access the same information - thus breaking down the barriers created by disparate systems and geographic boundaries.

Tom Watson MP, speaking as the Cabinet Office Minister for Transformational Government said, "More and more people are using the Internet to carry out everyday tasks like banking and shopping, and they have the right to expect that the public services they rely on are available in the same way. The Government is committed to making our public services stronger, more efficient and more accessible than ever before, and we can only achieve this by making the most of the opportunities that the digital age opens up."

In Scotland, changes are already underway following the announcement that a partnership of IT service companies, led by Infotech Enterprises and consortium partners GGP Systems and Infoshare, has successfully bid for a competitive Tender issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS), to provide a centralised address gazetteer for police services across Scotland.

Lothian & Borders Police, who are representing the eight Scottish Police Forces and the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA), are overseeing the implementation of the contract, which will see the creation, implementation and use of a definitive national location gazetteer together with Gazetteer Management Software and Web Services throughout police services in Scotland. Infotech Enterprises as Prime Contractor will deliver programme management and project support office services, working with GGP Systems and Infoshare to deliver the contract over a three year term. The contract was completed via the BuyingSolutions GISS framework.

Deputy Chief Constable, Tom Halpin, ACPOS National Command and Control Project Executive said: "This Contract is a key part of the wider ACPOS business change programme and represents groundbreaking improvements for the Scottish police service. The new system will help us to identify precise locations and allocate the best equipped and nearest police patrol."

This project will see the creation of a national gazetteer detailing every property in addition to the location of police "incidents" in Scotland. It will involve data from each of the eight Police Forces together with additional detail from Point X's Points of Interest dataset and Experian's QAS Names data being matched, cleansed and validated by Infoshare against a Primary Dataset. Infoshare will use their ClearCore Product suite to create this Primary Dataset by evidence based matching, cleansing and validating the Royal Mail's Postal Address File (PAF) and the One Scotland Gazetteer (OSG), which is made up of address data from the 32 Scottish Councils, to provide an accurate up-to-date database of land, property and locations.

Once created, the data will be accessed using advanced spatially enabled Gazetteer Management Software from GGP Systems. Every force will be able to search the gazetteer from the desktop system or remotely using web-enabled devices. By providing real time access to the centralised data, the project aims to improve intelligence for frontline service provision via integration to the new national



Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service

Control & Command system. This enables back office analysts to have access to accurate incident records enabling detailed analysis leading to successful resource allocation. This is key in crime prevention, in tackling crime and in emergency planning. By using GGP Systems Web enabled solution, Officers will also be able to provide feedback to the centralised gazetteer; adding locations, noting exceptions and validating the data with real world observations.

In England, Fire and Police Officers from across the country recently gathered at Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service's (CFRS) headquarters to look at advances the service was making following the introduction of a new system that is revolutionising the provision of back office services, whilst reducing costs and achieving gains in operational efficiencies. Representatives from over 15 organisations were taken through the Service's selection, procurement and implementation process before being given the chance for hands-on demonstrations of the system - GGP Response – a suite of gazetteer management and geographic information software specifically developed for the Emergency Services.



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“By working closely with other services we hope to share our experiences, demonstrate best practice and even let others learn from the mistakes that we may have already made,” commented Jackie Watson, Project Support Officer at Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service. “This event was designed to demonstrate all aspects of the project from the point when we decided to adopt the NLPG and the realisation that our current software and operating processes were simply not up to the job right through to the selection and ongoing implementation of GGP Response. During this process we came to realise the importance of partnering with a single supplier for all our spatial requirements in terms of cost savings, support and future development needs”.

The use of the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) initially formed the foundation for the Service’s risk assessment information enabling joined up working with partner organisations. The NLPG is integrated with every internal database

and system enabling the Service to introduce a comprehensive, map based information management architecture.

“The NLPG is a more holistic database than those based on just postal addresses and we obviously needed gazetteer management software that not only complied with the national addressing standards but offered flexibility and compatibility with existing data, software and processes,” commented Nicola Smith, Business Information Manager at Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service. “GGP gives us the tools we need to manage the data on a day to day basis plus the support and confidence we need to roll out the database so it becomes a truly corporate resource.”

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service undertake many functions beyond the provision of frontline emergency services. “In the course of daily activities we visit properties across the region,” continued Smith. “We therefore not only rely on the database as an essential management tool we are also continually updating the information held within. Using GGP NGz we are moving away from being just a ‘receiver’ of data and will become an active contributor to the national programme.”

Other services to adopt the NLPG include Surrey Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS) who have introduced a new state of the art command and control system for mobilising its crews and appliances, using the NLPG as the primary source of property and building information. The system ensures the despatch of the nearest, and most appropriate vehicle and is expected to dramatically speed up response times, potentially saving lives and ensuring the safety of its personnel.



GGP Library

The software which has been designed specifically for the mobilisation task includes a real time map interface, enabling command and control centre staff to see ‘live’ vehicle locations. As an incident is reported and logged on the system the nearest, best-equipped and most appropriate appliance is automatically selected based on the type of fire. For example a fire in a fourth floor flat will require an appliance with a ladder of appropriate height. The system also calculates the best routes to the scene based upon fire appliance travel time ensuring the correct vehicle is mobilised.

SFRS has been working closely with their local authorities, the police and the NHS to build on the data quality of the NLPG and further improve the information needed to support the system. It has also migrated all of its internal ‘risk intelligence’ to the NLPG, with which the command and control system is now fully interfaced. SFRS are also building a web portal to post change and update information gleaned from operations as it becomes available. Local authority gazetteer custodians will then access the portal in order to continue updating, validating and further improving the NLPG.

These examples of pioneering organisations clearly demonstrate the benefits of working in partnership to gain improvements in service delivery, efficiency and performance for all. Only by sharing data, information and experience through open dialogue and integrated systems can the full potential of shared services and joined up working be full realised.

Robert Peel, The Marketing Edge, E-mail: robert@market-it.co.uk

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