

The Critical Importance of Effective Communication in Coordinating a Police Response



The coronavirus pandemic hit the United Kingdom especially hard, resulting in widespread civil unrest. Even now, as the country gradually lifts its lockdown restrictions, law enforcement must deal with multiple raves, violent crime, and countless assaults. As it often is, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) is on the frontlines in responding to such incidents.

As one of the largest police forces in the UK, GMP safeguards one of the country's most diverse regions. Now more than ever, the force understands the importance of safeguarding both the general public and its own workers through better processes and technology. To that end, departmental leadership is constantly on the lookout for potential improvements.

GMP

Vertical:

Law Enforcement

Employees:

11,000

Location:

United Kingdom

Product:

BlackBerry® AtHoc®,
BBM® Enterprise

Website:

<https://www.gmp.police.uk/>



Modernising the Lines of Contact

Recently, GMP sought to improve coordination and security amongst its officers, both during crisis scenarios and in the day-to-day.

“During any police response, it’s imperative to match reaction time to the rapid, ever-changing situations that develop,” explains Inspector Darren Spurgeon Business Change Manager, Mobile Technology for Greater Manchester Police. “We knew starting out that a system that does this automatically rather than manually would move us towards a more user-friendly, efficient way of working.”

“In addition to improved crisis management, we also needed a message solution that would offer the critical security required for the sensitive information that is communicated,” he adds.

Connected in Protecting the Public

For more streamlined personnel deployment and better emergency response, GMP chose BlackBerry® AtHoc®, a crisis response platform designed to facilitate two-way emergency communication and account for personnel. Designed for ease of use, BBM® Enterprise is a best-in-class messaging and conferencing solution built with end-to-end encryption and privacy at its core.

GMP tested BlackBerry AtHoc against its existing analog system as part of an initial evaluation, reaching out to key task commanders through both platforms. The exercise showed considerable improvement in response time over the old system. In light of this, GMP began making plans for AtHoc’s deployment.

Then the coronavirus pandemic struck, and everything changed.

A Lightning-Quick COVID Response

As a result of the pandemic, operations at GMP had to be remodeled nearly overnight. The vast majority of its support staff now had to work remotely, back-office staff in particular. Given both the mental stress of this disruption coupled with the very real risks to employee health represented by COVID-19, GMP realised it needed to adapt – and fast.

“We needed something to help us keep connected with our staff, especially for the purpose of wellness checks,” says Inspector Spurgeon. “All branch leads across the force wanted to have an understanding of how personnel were feeling on a day-to-day basis, and to see if any staff were showing signs of COVID-19. We purchased 11,000 BlackBerry AtHoc licenses and deployed the solution immediately.”

GMP’s wellness team used AtHoc to send well-being alerts to personnel which included several predefined response options. This allowed the force to focus its efforts on those who needed help the most. GMP also used the solution to send out a daily summary of the pandemic for all staff and to coordinate mortuary teams.

“If you’ve ever worked in police or in crisis management, you’re aware of the need for prompt and efficient communication. You need to be able to reach out to personnel at a moment’s notice and keep everyone in constant contact with one another. BlackBerry has enabled us to achieve this, and to better protect the public in the process.”

– Inspector Darren Spurgeon,
Business Change Manager
(Mobile Technology),
Greater Manchester Police

More Than Just Crisis Communication

GMP is currently dividing staff into distribution lists within AtHoc based on their team and skill set, making the coordination of resourcing significantly simpler. In addition to general scheduling, the force has created distribution lists for special operations teams such as firearms, traffic units, and armed vehicular response units. In the case of the former, the force tested BlackBerry AtHoc by sending out an urgent resourcing alert to all firearms officers.

Nearly half of all off-duty officers responded in 10 minutes and were on standby to be recalled.

GMP also plans to use BlackBerry AtHoc to manage weather events such as floods, which occur frequently in the area, and to manage internal corporate communications.

Finally, the force is using BBM Enterprise to improve coordination in the field. Recently, a report of a high-risk Missing Person dropped into the queue. GMP was able to upload a photo of the missing person and share it securely to every on-duty officer in the area. They were able to locate the missing person shortly afterwards.

The Foundation of a Better Police Response

“With BlackBerry AtHoc, there’s no longer any need to pick up the phone – it’s just one person managing communication across multiple channels,” he continues. “And with BBM Enterprise, we’re able to keep officers securely connected in the field. From emergency notifications to incident activation to general wellness and communication, it’s improved our coordinated response.”

In the future, Inspector Spurgeon hopes to unify other emergency responders and key organisations in the Greater Manchester Area via AtHoc® Connect, creating an inter-organisational communication network for even more effective mobilisation and greater public safety.

“Crisis management, both internal and external, is an absolutely critical component of any police response. And you cannot have effective crisis management without effective communication. We must be able to, at any given moment, connect with any of our 11,000 staff. BlackBerry AtHoc enables us to do that, and securely – it helps us keep our officers and employees both safer and more coordinated, and ultimately makes us more effective as a police force.”

– Chris Sykes,
Assistant Chief Constable,
Greater Manchester Police

About BlackBerry

BlackBerry (NYSE: BB; TSX: BB) provides intelligent security software and services to enterprises and governments around the world. The company secures more than 500M endpoints including 150M cars on the road today. Based in Waterloo, Ontario, the company leverages AI and machine learning to deliver innovative solutions in the areas of cybersecurity, safety and data privacy solutions, and is a leader in the areas of endpoint security management, encryption, and embedded systems. BlackBerry’s vision is clear – to secure a connected future you can trust.

For more information, visit BlackBerry.com and follow [@BlackBerry](https://twitter.com/BlackBerry).


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