



# Engage:

## Digital and Social Media Engagement for the Police Service



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# Purpose

**The purpose of this document is to assist police officers and police staff using technology when engaging with their communities.**

It has been written to assist the Police Service with new engagement technology and has case studies from United Kingdom forces who are working in this area.

It does not replace force policies and strategies and officers and staff should ensure that they are complying with relevant force policies around engagement, communications and use of technology.

This is a fast changing field and this document represents the current thinking and practice at the start of 2010. This will no doubt change in the future.

“Effective engagement is at the heart of policing. The revolution in digital technology means that people are engaging with services at their own convenience and in the manner, medium and at a time which suits them. The police service is starting to engage and be engaged in ways that are unprecedented in the history of UK policing. Engage reflects these vital changes.”

Nick Keane

Local Policing and Confidence Unit



## Introduction – Gordon Scobbie, Assistant Chief Constable



Gordon Scobbie

**I would like to encourage you, as police officers and staff, to become involved in the world of digital engagement. My role as Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) lead for Digital and Social Media Engagement has come about in recognition of the need to widen the way police forces communicate with members of the public, in particular via social media such as networking sites, blogs, Twitter and YouTube.**

Many forces are now realising that traditional methods of getting messages out, which we have relied on in the past, are having less impact and are reaching fewer people.

Over the last 12 months there have been radical changes in the way the public interact with each other. Social networking has exploded globally. For example Facebook has 150 million users worldwide, half of whom use the service on a daily basis – and Twitter has grown overall by around

800 per cent in the past year alone.

Easy access to technology, inexpensive ‘always on’ broadband connections and the growing use of mobile internet means that an online presence is part of our everyday lives.

We need to embrace this new form of communication because if we don’t engage with people via social media they will move on without us and we will miss the opportunity to influence them,

making it much more difficult to re-engage with them later.

We also need to communicate more effectively with members of the public to let them know what we’re doing. After all, nobody is going to be confident in an organisation who they don’t hear from and who they can’t engage with.

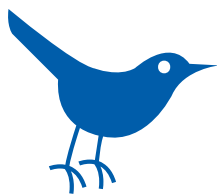
**Gordon Scobbie**  
**Assistant Chief Constable**  
**(West Midlands Police)**  
**ACPO Lead for Digital and Social Media Engagement**

## The digital engagement landscape



**Facebook** – a social networking website. Users can join networks of friends, family and colleagues and can update personal profiles about themselves.

Facebook is important in establishing the police corporate identity, whether at a national, force or at a neighbourhood level.



**Twitter** – a communication tool. Users can send and read messages known as 'Tweets'. Twitter restricts users to 140 characters per post which

makes them easy to read and write. The messages can be read by anyone. However, people who subscribe to the author's page are known as 'followers'. Messages can be sent and received through a number of mechanisms, including personal computers, mobiles and websites.

Twitter is particularly important in sharing breaking news and frequently posts stories before they are reported in more traditional media forms, for example via television news or newspapers.

### Twitter tips – to increase your followership on Twitter:



- Don't just use Twitter to broadcast – think about engaging



- Start looking for opportunities to engage – if people are posting on Twitter on a relevant subject they are looking for people to engage with them – look to join in where relevant



- Ensure that your tweets are adding value



- A great way to raise your profile is hashtags. Use the right hashtags (#police is always relevant) as this will enable people who search for that tag to find and follow you



- Who else is using Twitter in your area? Look for local websites who use Twitter





- Use RT (stands for 'retweet') for interesting and relevant tweets. That means if someone says something useful you can pass it on to your followers, e.g. "RT @mypolice holding webinar on engagement, please join in <http://www.mypolice.org>"



- If you have mobile access use Twitter when you're out on the streets doing something in/with the local community: "I'm speaking with the boys and girls at St Peter's School about being safer in their neighbourhood #police"



- Start sharing your Twitter contact name when engaging – word of mouth is great



- Think about twitpics, links to photos. People like them



- Finally start following people. If you get spam followers block them

**YouTube** – a video sharing website. Users can upload and share videos of up to 10 minutes duration. Unregistered users can watch the videos. Registered users are permitted to upload an unlimited number of videos.

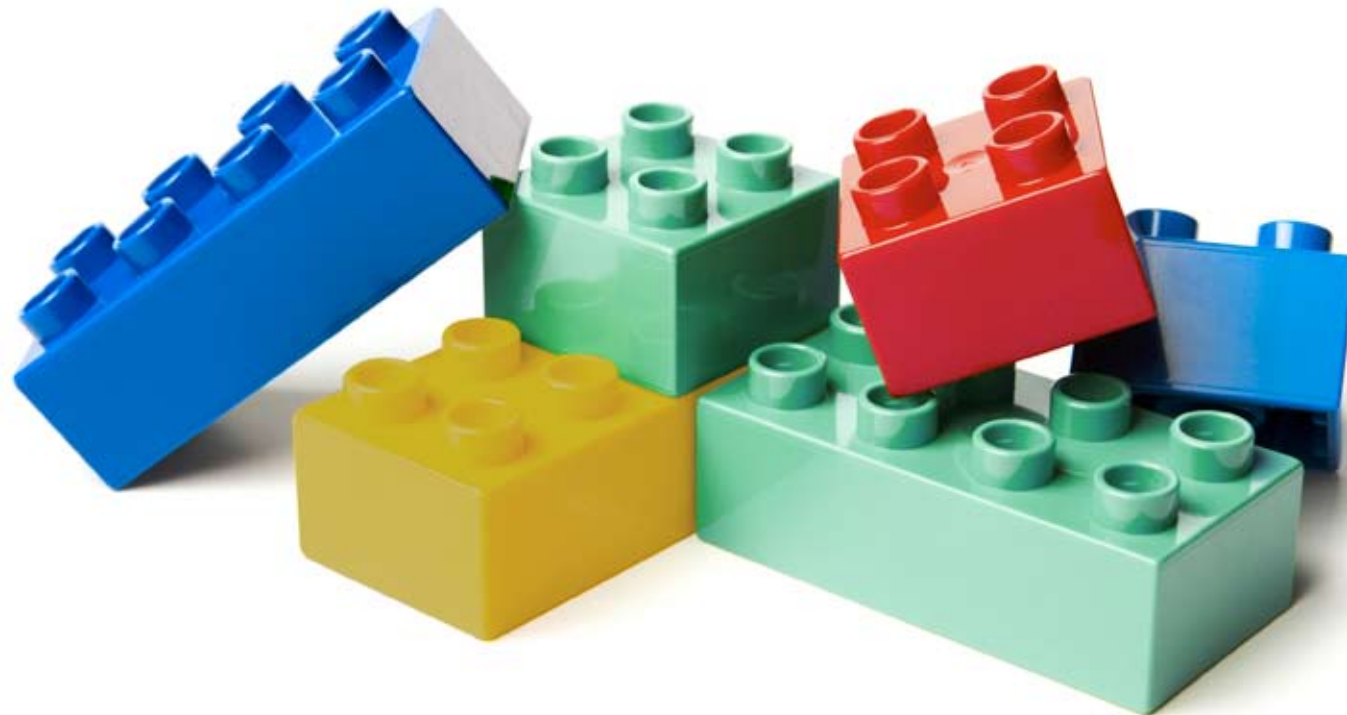
YouTube has proved important for police forces to deliver videos broadcasting road safety messages and updates around public order situations. In addition YouTube can be used as a platform for messages which are critical of policing issues.



**Blogs** – is short for 'web logs' and represents a type of personal website. Users make regular entries of commentary, often describing events with links to video or photos.

Blogging is less common amongst the police than the use of Twitter but some police websites include the use of individual officer blogs.

## Principles



There are some basic principles you should follow when using digital technology as part of community engagement. Remember to be:

**Credible** – Communities like engaging with police officers and staff, especially those working at the frontline. Be accurate, open, fair, honest and transparent in what you write.

**Consistent** – Encourage constructive feedback and discussion. Be professional and honest – friendly but not familiar.

**Responsive** – Wherever possible respond to content posted by others, whether positive or negative. This is your chance to reflect the real situation and communities will value honest feedback.

**An ambassador** – Remember that you are an ambassador for your force and the police service as a whole. As such you are expected to exercise sound judgment and common sense.

**Inclusive** – Remember that not everyone has access to the internet. Digital engagement is an additional tool to use but make sure you have a range of ways to engage with communities. Make sure you continue to highlight key messages to communities through more conventional channels such as newsletters, public meetings and street briefings as well.

**Ethical** – Information posted online should not:

- Contain protectively marked or otherwise sensitive information
- Discriminate on any grounds, or appear to support discriminatory attitudes
- Be libellous
- Breach copyright
- Undermine operational activities
- Damage the reputation of the police service

Generally you should not post any information or messages on the internet that you would be unwilling to release to the press or say at a public meeting.

**Personable** – Officers should ensure their sites are engaging and interesting for the audience using the site.

Neighbourhood Policing is delivered by people working in communities and the online personality should reflect officer/staff members whilst working within the individual forces values.





## Myths: why the police don't engage

**“Officers might say something which may embarrass the force”**

Yes they might but they could also do this in a number of forums. With proper support and guidance this risk can be reduced

**“Officers might spend all their time online chatting to their mates”**

They might, but this is an issue for supervisors and line managers. Most media users understand the difference between the media they use for contacting friends and the media they use for work

**“It costs too much money and we don't have the skills”**

Overall it is a very low cost. There are people in every force who use this media day in, day out



**“Our security may be breached”**

Downing Street, President Obama, UK Armed Forces and CIA use it extensively. The Norwegian Counter Terrorism Unit has their own Twitter site

**“Somebody might say something derogatory about us”**

They might, but they’ll say it anyway – here we have an opportunity to respond, engage and inform

**“Social media is for friends and family – not for police work”**

Most if not all police forces in the United Kingdom now use Facebook, Twitter or YouTube as part of their engagement with the wider community they serve



## Social media engagement



Forces are using social media sites as a method of widening their access to communities and engaging with people through their preferred method of communication. While forces are establishing a presence on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, the following case studies demonstrate how individual officers are establishing links with the communities they police.



### North Yorkshire – Twitter for community engagement

As the Safer Neighbourhood Officer for Starbeck, Harrogate, I'm always looking for ways to engage with my community.

In 2008 I had success using Facebook and YouTube and now I'm using [www.Twitter.com/hotelalpha9](http://www.Twitter.com/hotelalpha9) to send quick updates about the day to day work I'm doing. My intention is to keep my residents informed about my daily commitments so

that they know I'm trying to resolve the issues which are important to them. I hope this reassures the public and sends a warning to any criminals who may be tempted to offend on my beat.

I use Twitter to increase my visibility without necessarily being seen in person – by sending a short update I can instantly inform hundreds of people what I'm doing. I've also found it to be an excellent way to communicate. I can get instant feedback from



my community as other users can send me messages and questions in a risk-free way. Twitter only allows users to post updates on their own profile pages so I know there's no chance of abuse or inappropriate content being placed on my page for others to see.

Twitter is fast, free and simple to use. I still send out letters, post leaflets, put up posters, go to public meetings, etc, but Twitter is something extra I'm doing to communicate with different people in a different way. It's a powerful tool which offers wonderful community engagement benefits for very little time or effort.

**PC9 Ed Rogerson**  
(@hotelalpha9 on Twitter)  
Neighbourhood Officer  
North Yorkshire Police

### West Midlands Police – Blogging for engagement

I am the neighbourhood policing Inspector for the Solihull sector of West Midlands Police. Engagement with our communities is vital and we have to explore different methods to reach and communicate with our community.

I write a weekly police blog that can found at <http://philradbourne.wordpress.com>. The blog provides an update as to the activity of my neighbourhood teams and myself over that 7 day period. I provide the community with updates on their local policing priorities and use it to circulate good news stories that will aid in building confidence with our residents, community and transient community.

Recently I used YouTube footage on my blog to try and identify an offender breaking into vehicles in my policing area.

**Inspector Phil Radbourne**  
Neighbourhood Policing Inspector  
West Midlands Police  
<http://philradbourne.wordpress.com>



## Website interaction



David Bailey

One of the impacts of increased use of the internet is that in many neighbourhoods new media is becoming as popular as and even replacing traditional media. An example of this is where locality based websites are taking up the community needs of local newspapers. The following example shows how Staffordshire used a range of media tools, including working in partnership with a local website, when policing a public order situation.

### Staffordshire Police – Working with local websites

As the divisional communications manager in Stoke-on-Trent I use numerous communication channels to engage and inform local communities. It is important to use the most appropriate selection of channels for each issue. Over the past 12 months we have been working with [www.pitsnpots.co.uk](http://www.pitsnpots.co.uk) which is a local blog/news website. This site is not linked to traditional

media organisations. The site is generally treated as ‘normal media’ giving them access to all press releases, regular updates on police action on community issues and interviews arranged.

In January 2010, Staffordshire Police launched Operation Chime to police an English Defence League (EDL) protest and counter protest. The wide-ranging communications strategy recognised that many of those involved in both



protests regularly use Twitter and Facebook. This included during protests to give commentary to supporters and to encourage support.

In the run-up to the day of protest we increased our visibility on the appropriate social media sites, using a separate hashtag #policingstoke for the event. This was heavily promoted in the leafleting, Bluetooth and media coverage also within the communications strategy to both visitors and local residents.

On the day of the protest volunteers from

www.pitsnpots.co.uk were given similar access to the operation as TV and print media. They were invited to one of the officer briefings and were given access to a press officer for regular updates. During the operation two media staff were responsible for monitoring social media and websites. PitsnPots hosted a 'live' Twitter feed which was closely monitored.

Key messages were published to Twitter and Facebook about the policing of the protest throughout the operation and due to the detailed monitoring police responded to questions from members of the public

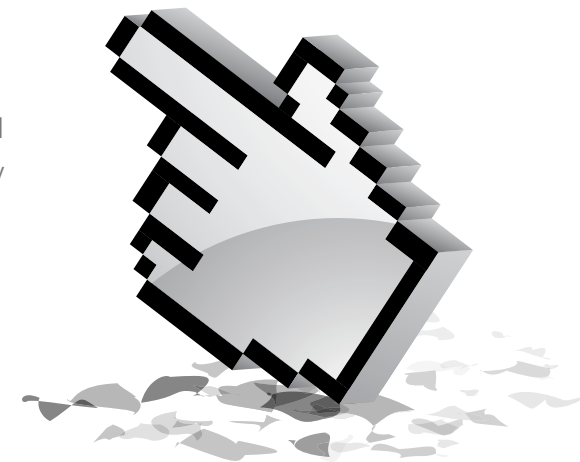
and dispelled rumours about disorder occurring in residential communities.

The use of this particular Facebook channel was a key part of the communications strategy for Operation Chime.

At one stage a user asked if it was ok to use a local railway station. Within minutes Staffordshire Police responded with information and reassurance. This was re-tweeted numerous times. Dozens of comments about the policing operation were also made using Twitter and the media unit ensured they were quickly responded to.

Towards the end of the operation YouTube was used to publish a video showing police action and information about the policing operation. This was promoted to those interested in the event using Twitter, Facebook and PitsnPots sites.

**David Bailey**  
Divisional Communications  
Manager  
Staffordshire Police





## Digitally enabled meetings



Dave Barf

Digital engagement includes using technology in a wider context than social media sites. New technology creates the opportunities to extend the reach of the traditional meeting so that people who could not ordinarily access meetings, because of commitments, disabilities or locality, have the opportunity to participate and follow proceedings. The key to this process is that one form of engagement does not replace another but that wider opportunities to participate are integrated within engagement processes.

### North Yorkshire Police – Virtual meetings on-line

As Safer Neighbourhoods Commander for Whitby District, I had recently written in my monthly column for the Whitby Gazette that I'd been to two public meetings to address a total of 13 people. To me this was not a representative sample of the people living in my area. I was really keen to engage with the communities of Whitby and the surrounding rural areas.

Some people don't like the formal setting of a public

meeting or may not, because of time constraints or other reasons be able to make it out to them. The Virtual Community and Police Meeting (VCAP) gives an opportunity to those people to interact with their local police staff and raise issues which are affecting their neighbourhoods. I wanted it to reflect the workings of the face to face meetings so the agenda was an open one and people were free to ask anything they wished. If I couldn't answer a question I undertook to respond to the individual's email address.



At the time I'd have been really pleased if we got anywhere near 20 or 30 people "logged in" at the first event. This was the first time that anything like this had been attempted in the UK and it was my acknowledgement that the geography of my area and busy lifestyles made attending meetings in the evenings difficult for some people. In the event the first 'virtual' meeting went well with 75 people viewing the page and 32 of those

contributing with comments and questions. The news story on the meeting the following day had attracted around 500 hits and many more since.

The event was supported throughout by Ben Nolan of Yorkshire Regional Newspapers and Damian Clarke, the editor of the Whitby Gazette. The software package we used was called "Cover It Live". It offers a chat room style experience but allows for pre-moderation. We all thought that moderation was important as it meant that if anyone logged in intent on disrupting the experience they could be barred, and abusive or slanderous comments could be prevented from "going live". In the event this facility was not required as all those who contributed

did so in an intelligent and constructive manner.

There have now been several meetings and I'm pleased that whilst I've moved on to a new role in the force control room, my successor has continued with the concept.

**David Barf**  
Force Control  
Room Inspector  
North Yorkshire Police

### East Sussex – Webcasting police meetings

East Sussex Police's Virtual Police Question Time event took place at County Hall, Lewes, in January 2010, where a panel of police officers and Sussex Police Authority members answered questions and talked to the public about community issues,

live across the web.

Based on President Obama's 'Virtual Town Hall', the panel opened discussions on public concerns that were emailed prior to the event, or that were asked on the night. The pilot show was broadcast on the East Sussex County Council website, and watched by over 100 people across East Sussex.

Questions posed to the panel included 'Why do we only ever see PCSOs on the beat, and not Police Officers?', 'Whose job is it to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in East Sussex?' and 'Why can't we get the police to spend more time catching criminals instead of filling out paperwork?'

Positive feedback was given by attendees and viewers

alike, confirming the public's enthusiasm for new media and securing a rolling series of virtual police events to take place throughout 2010.

Chief Superintendent Robin Smith, East Sussex Divisional Commander, said: "It's important to try new initiatives in response to public demand for better community

engagement. I'm really pleased with the outcome – I think we're onto a good thing, and we're now planning to develop this into a regular format for communication."

Sussex Police Authority panel member, Carole Shaves, said: "The way in which Sussex Police and Sussex Police Authority interact

with the people of Sussex is vitally important. This event marks the beginning of a new and alternative way of communicating directly with residents; hearing their concerns and answering their questions without expending huge effort or having to travel on their part. I was immensely interested to receive and

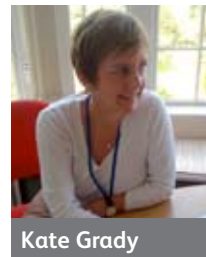
answer a wide variety of questions which clearly articulated the issues concerning people in East Sussex. I hope this will be the first of a number of similar interactive events."

The Virtual Police Question Time is available to view at <http://www.eastsussex.ukcouncil.net/site/webcasts.php>.



## Collaboration between Police Forces

New Media Manager of the NPJA Kate Grady introduces the Police Online Knowledge Area



Kate Grady



**The Police Online Knowledge Area (POLKA) is provided by the National Policing Improvement Agency to support the wider policing family. This is for collaboration within the secure restricted Police National Network (PNN) environment and is recommended for inter police community collaboration. POLKA provides blogs, wiki's and discussion forums to simplify the sharing of knowledge and best practice.**

POLKA allows stakeholders to collaborate online within the PNN restricted network.

One of the first communities to join POLKA was the NPJA Police National Computer team and their colleagues around the forces. They didn't have a web presence where PNC Operators, trainers and other users could share and discuss work matters. As an early adopter, they have 120+ members. Documents are shared that were previously sent out via email. Liaison officer letters, rolling schedules and even updates to the PNC manual are now all online. Regional co-ordinators are now able to manage their communications locally, uploading regional minutes and using the events calendar

to organise meetings, greatly reducing the amount of email traffic and administration previously involved.

The Forensics community are holding debate and discussion about project plans for their next phase of development.

POLKA provides an ideal platform for NPJA and the teams within forces to hold online discussion and share their ideas and thoughts.

Visit <https://polka.pnn.police.uk/> to join POLKA or email [polka@npia.pnn.police.uk](mailto:polka@npia.pnn.police.uk) for more information.

## Social media monitoring



**In addition to engaging with communities through digital technology, some police forces are now using online monitoring to track and follow web based conversations.**



Kevin Hoy

### **Greater Manchester Police – Social Media monitoring**

The growth in social media has seen a massive shift in how

police forces communicate and engage with the public.

Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire Police have been working together to understand and respond to the needs of their evolving communities, utilising social media monitoring.

In support of this we collectively began to look at the monitoring tools currently available on the market. These tools have been designed to track online conversations, identify emerging issues and monitor the online

communities most influential to the police.

These tools continue to help us to understand the policing issues that people are talking about online and how we can best engage with these communities to impact upon confidence in the police.

I spoke to a number of different social media agencies about their solutions and would be happy to share my research and knowledge.





Consequently, Greater Manchester Police joined forces with Merseyside and Cheshire to initiate the project, taking advantage of shared set-up costs and a significantly reduced price for the ongoing work.

At Greater Manchester Police, we are already making great progress with this project. Each month, we receive a dedicated report, detailing the highs and lows of the previous months conversations. Highlighting hot topics and emerging issues, the reports also enable us to identify which sites are generating the most positive comments about us – and which generate the most negative.

Even at this early stage, the reports help us spot where the most active communities

discussing Greater Manchester Police are, and the level of sentiment surrounding such discussions.

We can also understand more clearly how people are talking about us and this will help inform our approach as we develop our social media strategy. Communicating through social media channels will require a different approach and tone from us, and by understanding more about how our communities are talking to each other, it will help us to find the right voice.

The system also allows us to take a more pro-active approach to conversation tracking. We can flag up planned events or activities in the system which has the

potential to alert us to emerging issues before an event takes place.

Enhancing this aspect further, we will soon be able to access a ‘live’ monitoring dashboard, which will identify emerging topics and trends as they are happening. This gives us greater opportunities to respond to what is emerging through blogs or Twitter or even news comments, and react and respond where appropriate.

All of this activity will be feeding directly into our developing social media strategy, which will see us move from simply publishing into social media spaces, to fully engaging with our online communities.



## Risk management and mitigation



**The ease of access to social media tools and websites should not cloud the issue that there are many risks associated with working with online tools. These risks can be managed and mitigated through safe usage policies. These should cover:**

**Safe passwords** – Good passwords use a mix of numbers and letters, substituting zeros for o's and fives for s's. In particular keep your passwords private.

**Phishing** – Relates to fake emails which attempt to gain personal details from unsuspecting users. Often they take the form of banks, credit card agencies or online shops. They include a link to a website (which often looks official) which then requests the receiver's personal details, including account details and/or passwords. Never disclose your details on an email.

**Secure websites** – It is important to understand that the website you are dealing with is secure. One way in which this can be demonstrated is with the website having http// with

the 's' added to show that it is secure. Also somewhere on the web browser will be a padlock sign – if a user clicks on the sign it will link to the certificate which means that a third party has verified the identity of the website.

If in doubt speak to your Force IT department.

For further details about being safe online, whether at work or at home go to [www.getsafeonline.org](http://www.getsafeonline.org). This is a website run by the UK Government which provides user-friendly advice for being safe whilst online.

## Ongoing support

### National Policing Improvement Agency

**POLKA** – the Police Online Knowledge Area provided by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) for its staff and the wider policing family. Collaboration online using blogs, wiki's, discussion forums to simplify the sharing of knowledge and best practice. For further information contact [polka@npia.pnn.police.uk](mailto:polka@npia.pnn.police.uk)

### Local Policing and Confidence Team

Digital Engagement Business Area lead is **Nick Keane**.  
[nick.keane@npia.pnn.police.uk](mailto:nick.keane@npia.pnn.police.uk)  
<http://Twitter.com/nickkeane>

### Practitioner support –

a number of practitioners have agreed to give support where possible in your area of work. Please remember that these are force resources and that they will have to honour their own work commitments as well.

### Police Social Media users

**Mark Payne**  
Chief Inspector,  
West Midlands Police  
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### Ed Rogerson

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North Yorkshire Police  
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### Dave Barf

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North Yorkshire Police  
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### Robin Smith

Chief Superintendent,  
Sussex Police  
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### Kate Buckland

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### David Bailey

Divisional Communications Manager,  
Staffordshire Police  
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### Technical support

#### Stuart Davis

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### Scott Fulton

e services Manager, Avon and Somerset Constabulary  
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