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HAMPSHIRE POLICE USE PANASONIC TOUGHBOOK PCS TO INTRODUCE UK'S FIRST EVIDENTIAL-STANDARD ELECTRONIC WITNESS STATEMENTS

Forecasts annual administration savings of over 3,000 hours, faster investigations and more time for police to spend with the community



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Hampshire Police has rolled-out an additional 400 semi-rugged Panasonic Toughbook PCs

Hampshire Constabulary is leading the way in using mobile data to reduce administration time, cut costs and improve its service. Covering the two counties of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, the force has approximately 4355 officers, police community support officers and specials and approximately 2175 staff and 595 volunteers to serve a population of over 1.9 million across an area of 1,600 square miles.

When Hampshire Constabulary wanted to introduce the UK's first evidential-standard Electronic Witness Statements it turned to Panasonic Toughbook for its specialist notebooks and UK company Airpoint to develop the application.

"We had a team of 6 administrators scanning and filing some 40,000 witness statements, with a total of 120,000 pages each year," explained Inspector Kevin McCarthy, Mobile Data Lead for Hampshire Constabulary. "It took an average of 5 minutes to scan each statement and cost 6p for each page of paper. We could see that with an electronic system we could make some significant improvements."

Hampshire chose to work with Airpoint, a UK-based specialist provider of policing applications, to develop the new application after reviewing what was currently available on the market. "It was important to us that the Electronic Witness Statements would be of an evidential standard, so that they could be captured once and be ready to be used in an English court of law, without further administration work," explained Inspector McCarthy.

The police force was already using 280 Panasonic Toughbook computers for its frontline police patrols to access databases, applications and communications and appreciated the benefits of the rugged notebooks, which are designed for use by mobile professionals. "The existing Toughbook devices we had were working well and we knew that they could be updated with the new application, so extending the relationship was an obvious choice," said Inspector McCarthy.

Today Hampshire Police has rolled-out an additional 400 semi-rugged Panasonic Toughbook PCs as the force becomes the first in the country to introduce evidential-standard Electronic Witness Statements - cutting administration time and speeding up investigations.

Officers use the Electronic Witness Statement application to take statements on the Toughbook devices. The statements can be immediately reviewed and electronically signed on the device by witnesses before being automatically sent back to office systems.

The statements, which are date and time stamped and can also be GPS location stamped, are the first evidential-standard Electronic Witness Statements to be used by a UK police force, which means that they can be produced in a court of law.

The 400 new Toughbook CF-53 semi-rugged notebooks are being used by neighbourhood police, crime investigation and custody teams as well as specialist units such as public protection teams, special branch and specialist analyst units. Hampshire's frontline police teams, already using the 280 Toughbook CF-19 rugged notebooks when on patrol, are also having their devices upgraded with the Electronic Witness Statement application.

By March 2013, the force is targeting 80-90% of all its statements to be taken electronically, delivering major benefits for the force and the general public. Once the process is working at full capacity, more than 3,000 hours a year in witness statement process time will be saved each year.

The new approach radically cuts the need for back-end processing and cuts the administration time for frontline officers, allowing them more time to spend working with the community.

"As well as the obvious time and cost benefits, the new system has been welcomed by witnesses and in some circumstances helped to speed up the investigation process," said Inspector Kevin McCarthy, Mobile Data Lead for Hampshire Constabulary. "Witnesses are able to sit alongside the officer when their statement is being taken and easily read through, amend and approve the statement as it is typed into the device. Once happy with all the details, the witness then electronically signs the statement on the screen of the device using the stylus pen that comes with the Toughbook."

"The witness statement can then be sent straight back to the police station where custody officers can immediately use the statements to begin interviewing suspects, if they are already being held. In some cases, when initial witness statements have been challenged by suspects under interview, officers can take supplementary or supporting statements as necessary whilst still on site - saving valuable time travelling backwards and forwards to see witnesses."

The Electronic Witness Statement application allows officers to work online or offline, automatically sending completed statements back to the police station via secure email when it has a wireless or GPS connection. Officers are also able to access their desktops remotely using the Toughbook devices via Citrix server based computing software via a Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection.

The Toughbook CF-53 is Panasonic's flagship semi-rugged notebook, designed for professional mobile workers such as police officers. Along with its desktop-like performance and a battery life of up to 11 hours, the CF-53 also has the ability to take knocks and spills that leave conventional business notebooks for dead. The CF-53 meets military standard criteria, meaning it can withstand drops of 76cm, vibration and even freezing temperature with its optional heater-equipped Hard Disk Drive. The Toughbook CF-53 easily handles the knocks and scrapes of police life due to its magnesium casing, precision steel hinges and flexible mounted Tough-cushioned key components such as display, hard disk drive and water protected keyboard.

The Toughbook CF-53 Touchscreen model, chosen by Hampshire, has been designed for those requiring a touch screen interface and working outdoors in bright sunlight; utilizing a high brightness touch screen (up to 1,000nit) with circular polarizer to minimize sunlight reflection.

"Toughbook PCs are designed to meet the very specific needs of mobile professionals such as the Hampshire Police and this UK first proves once again how Toughbook technology solutions can help cut costs and improve the productivity of an organization's mobile workforce," Jan Kaempfer, Head of European Marketing, at Panasonic Computer Product Solutions.

Moving forward, Inspector McCarthy said that Hampshire Police would be using Toughbook devices to take further steps towards paperless policing with the introduction of a Digital Case File technology trial in Portsmouth in March 2013. The trial will look to digitally process all information connected to a crime from the first reporting and witness statements through to presenting the case to the Crown Prosecution Service and ultimately taking the case to court.