

## **Evidence storage app is improving outcomes, increasing trust and cutting investigation times for Herts Police**

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**The use of an evidence storage and sharing app rolled out across Hertfordshire Constabulary has seen positive outcomes more than double compared to the force average, with investigation times reduced and demand on digital forensic unit and data storage also cut; now more forces across England and Wales are looking at adopting the technology, as Policing Insight's Sarah Gibbons reports.**

Valuable time and resources can be saved with new technology that helps officers to link crime patterns and allows anyone in a force to become an investigator – an approach which enables the force-wide “investigative mindset” called for by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in its recent evaluation of volume crime handling.

*“This app empowers victims and witnesses of any offence to share with us immediately usable, authenticated and verifiable digital forensic evidence; it is a real step-up from the other evidence gathering methods that many forces will be using.”*  
DI Derek Gray, Hertfordshire Constabulary

The app-based technology means authenticated evidence can be shared in a legally compliant format in near real time and put to suspects even at initial interview, providing investigative leads and opportunities to achieve more positive outcomes with speedy conclusions and less likelihood of victim attrition.

Hertfordshire is the only force that has currently embedded the system force-wide, but at least a quarter of all UK forces are believed to be in discussions about rolling it out after initial results showed that a positive outcome from an investigation was three times more likely when the tech was deployed – significant when an estimated 90% of all investigations now include a digital element.

The app, developed by Kulpa, is an evidence storage system freely available to download onto a phone or laptop, allowing individuals to store any digital material, including photos, video, audio files, WhatsApp messages, Facebook profiles, and footage from dashcams, CCTV or doorbells.

The police add-on enables anyone in a force to connect with the user and upload material to be reviewed and acted upon immediately. As the technology captures all the metadata associated with a digital file – including device used, time, date, and location – the material is all verified as authentic and formally admissible as legal evidence.

It creates a digitally forensic evidence file in a format which is fully compliant with the Criminal Procedure Rules, complete with a signed MG11 Statement saving hours of time downloading a victim's phone, gathering evidence at later stages of an inquiry –

when perhaps it has been destroyed – and reducing storage capacity and associated costs, with only required files are captured instead of complete device memories.

Detective Inspector Derek Gray from Hertfordshire Constabulary told Policing Insight: “This app empowers victims and witnesses of any offence to share with us immediately usable, authenticated and verifiable digital forensic evidence; it is a real step-up from the other evidence gathering methods that many forces will be using.

“We have seen it increase public trust and confidence, speed up investigations, reduce the need for phone downloads (also reducing digital forensic unit demand and data storage), reduce outcomes 15 and 18, and increase referral rates to the Crown Prosecution Service and successful prosecutions. The positive outcome rate when it is used is significantly higher than the force average of 12.58%.”

Indeed evidence submitted by the force to the College of Policing Knowledge Bank, outlining the benefits of the technology, indicated that initial data showed a 33% positive outcome in cases where Kulpa evidence was secured.

### **Verifiable digital forensic evidence**

*“I was able to approach the victim and get her to send all evidence on WhatsApp – pictures and recordings – to me, which assisted with us being able to successfully remand a very dangerous individual. It was so quick and easy to use for both the victim and me.”* DI Derek Gray, Hertfordshire Constabulary

“Most crime contains a digital element; the app gives anyone the ability to document and share verifiable digital forensic evidence, which is then suitable for use in the criminal justice process,” continued DI Gray.

“For example, previously those reporting possible stalking or harassment have been encouraged to keep a diary of events, but this collates that evidence and the victim then chooses when they want to share that evidence with police.

“The app is free and available for anyone to download from the app stores, or it can be used on a computer by going to [kulpacloud.com](http://kulpacloud.com). We would encourage anyone who feels they are being stalked or harassed or a victim of crime to download and use it to record and securely store the evidence of each incident.

“Whenever they are ready, they can share the evidence, by clicking the in-app option ‘Share with police’. Officers can then review, investigate and safeguard.”

The app can be used to store evidence of any kind of offending and has helped secure convictions for a range of criminal behaviour; DI Gray explained how it was used in a high-risk domestic abuse case of rape and controlling and coercive behaviour.

“I attempted to download the suspect’s phone because we were going for a remand, but due to the new software on the phone, he had face ID meaning we couldn’t do an emergency download. The app helped as I was able to approach the victim and get her to send all evidence on WhatsApp – pictures and recordings – to me, which

assisted with us being able to successfully remand a very dangerous individual. It was so quick and easy to use for both the victim and me.”

“All evidence received from the victim was in an evidential format, saving me having to do a statement and ensuring had more time to complete the remand paperwork!”

### **Achieving positive outcomes**

Anyone can download the app or be signposted to it by any member of the force, healthcare or support organisation. Within the force, anyone from the control room member of staff handling the initial complaint to colleagues across the force can access the app platform and review the evidence to see if it should be filed or actioned.

In its recently published *Crime investigations: An inspection into how effectively the police investigate crime*, the HMICFRS said the effective investigation of crime requires the police officers and staff involved – “all of whom are acting as investigators” – to adopt an investigative mindset, adding: “They should adopt it from the moment the force receives a report of a crime.”

*“Repeated usage, with the victim able to provide authenticated, immediately usable evidence for each incident, has been exceptionally helpful. It has enabled us to identify the patterns required for example in stalking and harassment cases.”* DI Derek Gray, Hertfordshire Constabulary

Simon Franc, Kulpa CEO told Policing Insight: “This enables that, as anyone can deploy it from the control room through to all officers.”

DI Gray continued: “We have distinctly observed that when this is offered to some victims, they then repeatedly use it. This repeated usage, with the victim able to provide authenticated, immediately usable evidence for each incident, has been exceptionally helpful. It has enabled us to identify the patterns required for example in stalking and harassment cases.

“The evidence they have supplied us with via the app has enabled us to achieve a positive outcome for them, with successful arrests and charges for crimes such as stalking and harassment.

“Those ‘repeat users’ are no longer repeat users, as we have actually been able to resolve their cases and successfully safeguard them. Initial anecdotal evidence suggests significant savings in terms of police office time and also in other costs, for example data storage costs.”

### **‘front-end’ evidence**

Early access to verifiable data also means officers can link offending earlier than previously possible when separate incidents are investigated as standalone offences, often by different officers.

Mr Franc said: “Often in policing a report comes into a control room where it is crimed or not, and then as it goes through the investigation process there is a point quite far down the chain when people ask for evidence.

“The problem is that by this stage we’ve wasted a lot of resources and time. If we can ‘front-end’ the evidence capture when an incident is reported and ask for it straight away, it can be immediately reviewed to see if it’s suitable.

*“The quicker you can present meaningful evidence to a suspect in the first interview, the more likely it is to be an effective interview. They have the chance to respond immediately, and officers can take it forward in the most efficient way, providing other leads quicker.”* Simon Franc, Kulpa CEO

“This way, no one wastes resources and the public are happy that the police have at least looked [at the report] even if no action can be taken.

“In addition, the quicker you can present meaningful evidence to a suspect in the first interview, the more likely it is to be an effective interview. They have the chance to respond immediately, and officers can take it forward in the most efficient way, providing other leads quicker.”

Mr Franc added that the majority of cases where phones are downloaded by digital forensic units result in no further action, describing it as “a huge waste of resources and data storage”.

He told Policing Insight: “If you can obtain just the files you need with meta data then you are just storing about 200MB of data instead of an entire 64GB phone.

“There is a disparate use of technology in different forces, but the app has low IT requirements. It covers any kind of evidence according to whatever the force priorities are, and it shows lines of inquiry and saves evidence being destroyed.

“There is a lot of time spent on repeat offending because police haven’t dealt with it effectively; now we are. We realised we need to be dealing with crime – particularly more minor incidents – far earlier, to stop more serious offending developing, and this enables that to happen.”

DI Gray said: “Hundreds of victims have shared thousands of items of digital evidence with us. Long-term victims of domestic abuse have been empowered to share evidence with Kulpa, as well as victims of other violence against women and girls offences who had previously chosen not to engage.”