

# Driving Interoperability in Police Procurement

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## 1. Executive Summary

techUK's Interoperability in Policing Working Group (IPWG) is working with stakeholders to provide guidance on achieving effective interoperability in policing. This document has been created by the IPWG in collaboration with the techUK Justice and Emergency Services committee - Procurement Sub-Group as a quick reference document to assist procurement departments and help achieve successful interoperability outcomes.

The rapid changes and complexity in current technology can lead to buying incompatible or inadequate technology solutions, which causes operational problems, higher costs for implementation and upgrades, and additional financial strain. There is a need for policing to ensure technology investments are compatible, cost-effective, and aligned with both current and future needs, in other words *interoperable*.

The first guiding principle of the [2024 Police Industry Charter](#) is "*Designing products, services, and systems on the principle of interoperability first*". Interoperability is also a central concept of the [NPCC Digital Strategy](#), the [Policing Vision 2025](#) and the [National Policing Cyber Security Strategy](#). However, effective interoperability-first procurement is a challenge as technology progresses at an ever-faster pace.

To take advantage of the opportunities that improved interoperability offers, IPWG recommends that three key areas in procurement need to be considered:

- **Requirements and Procurement specifications:** Having a strategic vision and being open to innovation are vital for fostering growth and collaboration between buyers and supplier community and for improving interoperability in policing. It is important to research the market, compare products and consult various suppliers to make well-informed decisions that have interoperability at the centre.
- **Knowledge** – Awareness of resources, technical and interoperability knowledge, technical capability and training, as well as compliance with relevant standards and legal requirements, are all critical factors for effective business operations and strategic decision making.
- **Relationship and expectations:** This revolves around the relationship between supplier and buyer. It is important to ensure a good collaboration between the two parties, clear communication and requirements. Strategic procurement with an outcome-oriented focus are crucial elements for successful business relationships. Additionally, having an agreed benefits measurement method in place. As well as understanding the suppliers' situation post-contract, is essential for maintaining strong partnership and ensuring mutual benefit.

To achieve success in these areas, IPWG makes five recommendations:

1. **Have a force level interoperability strategy** - consider how interoperability functions can best be procured in order to reduce direct dependencies between applications, reduce lock in and improve agility moving forward with new requirements. This should link to a broader national interoperability strategy, with coordination by a national body.
2. **Develop the necessary skills and knowledge** - by investing in training and development, and bringing in external expertise, when necessary, police forces can better manage the

complexities of technology procurement, maximize the value of their investment and improve operational effectiveness.

3. **Prioritize solutions with open APIs** - facilitate simpler integration between systems with less lock-in, promoting interoperability and data sharing. Adopting common data standards where appropriate improves consistency and compatibility.
4. **Evaluate and monitor technology performance.** By regularly reviewing performance, where possible with automated tools, forces can continuously refine their technology strategies, maximising the value of investment in interoperability.
5. **Communicate and collaborate across sectors** - we encourage forces to engage with techUK via market engagement sessions to explore their needs and allow industry to identify potential solutions in a forum designed for “art-of-the-possible” conversations, but also to use the opportunity to gain technical knowledge and to explore best practices in relation to data sharing technologies.

## 2. Introduction

The inaugural Police Industry Charter was signed in March 2024 by senior leaders from the National Police Chief's Council, Home Office, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, Blue Light Commercial, Police Chief Scientific Advisor, and the UK Security and Resilience Industry Suppliers Community. The Charter was created to "set foundational principles upon which industry partners, whatever their product or service, and UK policing collectively adhere to outcomes".

The Charter sets out **5 key principles**, the first of which is: *"Designing products, services, and systems on the principle of interoperability first."*

In this context, the discussion on the importance of understanding the characteristics of an effective interoperability-first buyer emerged during one of the IPWG monthly meetings, where both the IPWG and our partner PDS, agreed on the need to clarify the essential elements required.

The need arises where there is a lack of technical knowledge available when making purchasing decisions. Without an understanding of technological requirements and standards, some forces may end up buying solutions that are not fit for purpose, often incompatible with existing systems, leading to fragmented operations and wasted resources. This incompatibility can affect workflows, reduce efficiency and necessitate additional time and effort to manage different technologies. Consequently, front line officers may find software solutions more difficult and time consuming to use, which could include error-prone re-keying of data, logging into multiple systems and having to return to base more often.

Moreover, those solutions purchased often demand additional implementation and upgrade costs, incurring additional financial constraints. These hidden expenses can cause financial strain and diverting funds from other areas. Additionally, the complexity of integrating new solutions with legacy systems may also require specialised skills, further increasing costs and implementation time. Therefore, having knowledgeable decision-makers who can assess not only immediate needs but also anticipate future requirements is essential to avoid pricy mistakes and ensuring the successful integration of technology solutions within the force.

This document is one of a set of techUK guidance papers to support forces in developing an effective interoperability-first procurement strategy. This guidance document summarises recommendations by the techUK Interoperability in Policing Working Group to support procurement practices that adopt an interoperability first approach.

This guide aims to outline the essential components and features that an interoperability-first buyer should consider when purchasing technology which is designed to support interoperability and data sharing with other systems. In doing so the guide highlights specific knowledge and requirements which an interoperability-first buyer may wish to factor into their procurement team to improve outcomes in this area.

### 3. Key components for successful interoperability-first procurement

The Interoperability working group has identified three main areas that summarise the key components of an interoperability-first buyer in relation to interoperability.

- **Requirements and Procurement specifications:** Having a strategic vision and being open to innovation are vital for fostering growth and collaboration between buyers and supplier community. It is important to research the market, compare products and consult various suppliers to make well-informed decisions.
- **Knowledge** – Awareness of resources, standards, technical and interoperability knowledge, technical capability and training, as well as compliance with legal requirements, are all critical factors for effective business operations and strategic decision making.
- **Relationship and expectations:** This revolves around the relationship between supplier and buyer. It is important to ensure a good collaboration between the two parties, clear communication and requirements. Strategic procurement with an outcome-oriented focus are crucial elements for successful business relationships. Additionally, understanding the suppliers' situation post-contract is essential for maintaining strong partnership and ensuring mutual benefit.

The IPWG has developed a list of key attributes that can benefit interoperability-first procurement, including aspects from fostering collaborative relationships to ensuring compliance with procurement and regulatory standards.

By prioritising these characteristics, buyers can navigate procurement processes that will not only meet immediate needs but will also align with long-term interoperability goals and objectives.

#### 3.1. Requirements and procurement specifications

- **Open APIs and interoperability** – Prioritize open standards and solutions built on open standards with robust API support to ensure interoperability and integration across systems.
- **Information Exchange Standards** – ensure compliance with established information exchange standards to facilitate smooth data sharing and communication between systems.
- **Data formats** – Using standardised data formats helps achieving consistency and compatibility, enhancing interoperability and data sharing.
- **Data sharing agreement** – secure necessary data sharing agreements to support the project's scope and ensure legal compliance, enabling effective data exchange and collaboration.
- **Product Roadmap** – evaluate and understand the suppliers' product roadmap, to get a better overview of future developments and alignment with evolving needs, ensuring long-term viability and support.
- **Multimedia sharing requirements** – determine the solution's capability for multimedia sharing to meet specific requirements, ensuring portability of non-textual based material.
- **Compatibility with Data Dictionary to be adopted nationally** - Strive to ensure that there is a convergence of data definitions across products, to avoid unnecessary conversions, data ambiguities or errors. For example, standardised definitions of common POLE data.

### 3.2. Knowledge

- **Clear scope and business case** – Clearly outline the scope of the project and understand the scale of interoperability work required. Develop a robust business case to justify investments in interoperability initiatives.
- **Specialist Skills** – recognise the complexity of interoperability and ensure the procurement team includes or has access to specialists with knowledge on the topic. Consider involving external specialised skills if necessary.
- **Outcome-based requirements** – encourage innovation and frame requirements in terms of desired outcomes rather than specific solutions, enabling suppliers to demonstrate innovative approaches to interoperability.
- **Interoperability specifications** – define clear interoperability specifications for suppliers to adhere to, without assuming a specific solution.
- **Avoid data-silos** – understand the effect of data silos which can result in duplicated, ambiguous data which is difficult to join up to see the bigger picture.
- **Develop and adopt a long-term technology strategy** – formulate a long-term technology strategy that looks at interoperability goals ensuring alignment with broader organisational and national objectives. Consider whether a separate interoperability product should be procured to orchestrate integration across applications.
- **Market research for interoperability solutions** – conduct market research to identify and understand available interoperability solutions, enabling informed decision-making.
- **Compliance with legal and regulatory requirements** – familiarity with legal and regulatory requirements, ensuring there is knowledge of the relevant data standards and how to comply with them.
- **Implementation methodology** – specify the methodology to adopt, such as Agile, to be used for implementing interoperability solutions, ensuring efficient and effective delivery.
- **Review outcomes** – Completed procurements should be subject to review, to compare what was specified in the requirements, versus what was actually delivered, versus what is running in live so that lessons can be learned for future procurements. This requires an up-front agreement on the benefits to be measured, the method for measuring and the definition of success.

### 3.3. Relationships and expectations

- **Collaboration with suppliers** – Establish transparent and inclusive communication channels with suppliers (existing and new) to ensure alignment with client needs and challenges. An open conversation at the design and specification stages will avoid nugatory work later.
- **Collaboration within policing** – Collaborate to understand the challenges of implementing interoperable solutions and to prioritize interoperability internally and across forces, preventing data silos and enhancing operational efficiency.
- **Clear scope** – Understand requirements clearly. Invest time to understand project requirements, including standards and protocols, to ensure meaningful information exchange and structured data.
- **Defining responsibilities** – allocate ownership clearly. Define responsibilities between buyer and supplier to ensure accountability. This is especially important where data has to be updated prior to it being exported, i.e. is it the client's responsibility to update the data before export or is it the expectation that the supplier software should be able to take the data as it is and translate it?



- **Pragmatic approach** – set realistic expectations. Adopt a pragmatic approach when setting up project goals, being aware of constraints and prioritising initiatives that offer the most value within the project environment.

#### 4. Five recommendations

techUK recognises that interoperability is not just an end goal but rather an enabler of the ideal scenario where systems, services and processes work seamlessly together.

To achieve this, it is crucial for police forces to purchase tools that meet their needs and easily connect with their existing and future systems.

It is understood that having an informed buyer is crucial for ensuring the adoption of effective technology tools in policing. They need to have a good understanding of technology benefits to avoid opting for convenience over effectiveness.

To purchase the right tools, they must understand the problem, the resources available internally, budget constraints and have a clear long-term vision.

To achieve that, techUK Interoperability in policing working group recommends that forces:

1. **Have an interoperability strategy** - consider how the interoperability function can best be procured in order to reduce direct dependencies between individual applications, reduce lock in and improve agility moving forward with new requirements. This strategy should link to a broader national interoperability strategy.
2. **Develop the necessary skills and knowledge** - ensure informed decision-making during technology procurement processes. By investing in training and development initiatives that enhance these skills, police forces can effectively navigate and have a better understanding of the complexities of technology procurement, maximise the value of their investment and improve operational effectiveness.
3. **Prioritise solutions with open APIs** - facilitate simpler integration between systems with less lock-in, promoting interoperability and data sharing. Adopting common data standards where appropriate to improve consistency and compatibility.
4. **Communicate and collaborate across sectors** - we encourage forces to work with techUK via market engagement sessions to explore their needs and allow industry to identify potential solutions in a forum designed for “art-of-the-possible” conversations, but also to use the opportunity to gain technical knowledge and to explore best practices in relation to interoperability and data sharing technologies.
5. **Evaluate and monitor technology performance.** By regularly reviewing performance, where possible with automated tools, forces can continuously refine their technology strategies, maximising the value of investment.

## 5. About techUK

[techUK](#) is a membership organisation launched in 2013 to champion the technology sector and prepare and empower the UK for what comes next, delivering a better future for people, society, the economy and the planet.

It is the UK's leading technology membership organisation, with more than 1,000 members spread across the UK. We are a network that enables our members to learn from each other and grow in a way which contributes to the country both socially and economically.

By working collaboratively with government and others, we provide expert guidance and insight for our members and stakeholders about how to prepare for the future, anticipate change and realise the positive potential of technology in a fast-moving world.

### 5.1. Justice and Emergency Services Programme (JES)

The [JES programme](#) provides a forum for Justice and public safety stakeholders from national policing bodies, local forces, fire and rescue and Justice partners, to collaborate with members.

The programme creates a platform to understand the latest innovations, problem-solve and develop networks, championing the role technology plays in supporting the delivery of public safety services. The programme has a number of established workings groups, enabling the public and private sector to come together regularly.

Groups include Digital Justice, Driving Interoperability in Policing, Public Safety and Security SME Forum, Fire Innovation Forum, VAWG and RASSO Tech Working Group.

The strategic direction of the programme is set by a Management Committee consisting of 28 elected members from the JES community, which drives the agenda and priorities of the programme's activities. The committee has identified three key focus areas: Demystifying AI, Digital Skills, and Procurement, each led by a dedicated sub-group. The Procurement sub-group aims to simplify procurement processes and frameworks. Its objectives include encouraging larger companies to improve SME collaboration, with a focus on making SMEs more accessible, demystifying frameworks, and enhancing engagement with the commercial community. The sub-group is working closely with Police Digital Service and Blue Light Commercial to demystify procurement for policing and suppliers.

### 5.2. Interoperability in Policing Working Group (IPWG)

The [Interoperability in Policing Working Group](#) is an industry led initiative, formed in 2018 by techUK, in order for industry and policing stakeholders to come together to accelerate the interoperability of police IT systems.

There is a strong consensus within the IPWG that further engagement between industry and senior policing stakeholders could ensure the benefits of interoperability are realised.

This could increase the scope of the group beyond technical standards to include wider force engagement, skills and awareness and procurement, and working closely with policing stakeholders such as PDS, NPCC and Home Office, to establish a process by which industry and policing can work together to enhance interoperability.