

Leeds united

The *BAPCO Journal* reports from the 2024 British APCO Autumn Event, which took place in a new venue



After multiple years of making its home in Newcastle, the 2024 British APCO Autumn Event took place in a new location, at the Armouries in Leeds. What did not change, however, was the quality of the conference presentations, which as ever reflected many of the major issues currently being discussed by the UK public safety communications technology sector.

The first presentation of the event picked up where the association's recent roundtable event left off, examining the potential benefits of artificial intelligence on emergency services control rooms. This was delivered by AWS principal solutions architect Andrew Langhorn.

Langhorn began by discussing the numerous challenges currently facing contact centres, filtered through the lens of conversations that are currently being had with clients. The first of these was the increasing number of ways through which the public might conceivably want to reach the emergency services, other than voice.

Discussing this, he said: "[Contact] doesn't just mean call; it doesn't just mean voice. It might be texting, WhatsApping, sending an Instagram DM. We need to account for contact centres [that can provide this], otherwise we're missing a large number of people who might want to communicate."

He continued: "That's all well and good, but at the same time we want to get responses to people as quickly as possible. So, they can come and talk to the contact centre in whatever form they want to. But the more avenues [of contact] that people have, the problem then becomes there's a finite amount of resources available to deal with them."

With this in mind, Langhorn went on to



discuss the automation of “non-emergency contact”, which is another key strategic area. “This is the stuff,” he said, “where people might call 101 and say, this isn’t an emergency right now. In the contact centres that we speak to, that call still takes away someone from doing something else.”

“Some [organisations] dedicate someone on shift to doing 101 non-emergency contact, while some won’t. Either way, it takes away a valuable resource, and a lot of the time, non-emergency can wait.”

Another key area being discussed by AWS’s clients, meanwhile, is officer wellbeing. In terms of strategy, he said, the emphasis is on providing “the right information at the right time”,

referring specifically to what he referred to as a “single pane of glass” approach.

At the same time, said Langhorn, it is also necessary to reduce the “mental burden” occasioned by call operators having to flip their attention between a variety of different systems. He said: “If you’re dealing with a critical issue, or with something that’s quite distressing, it can be quite the mental load for the individuals dealing with it. So, we’d like to see if we can help with that.”

Having finished his introduction, Langhorn moved on to talk about how technology – and AI in particular – can potentially be used to address the above issues. Discussing this, he said: “Examples we’ve seen are things like AI-powered thrive assessments.

“How do we evaluate the risk of the contact in the first place, and can we take the mental load off of the individual and do that assessment based on the information that we’re receiving from that caller?

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“Do the thrive assessment separately, and then the person doesn't have to make that assessment themselves, based on the information. They've got more cognitive capacity to think about something else.”

Relevant data in relation to this would include “end-to-end” contact journey history: “Has this person called in six times before about the same issue? Are they a repeat caller today? Do we know that they're a victim of crime based on something that they've already reported to us?”

The emphasis on AI continued throughout the first day, which finished with a presentation from Black Marble's Robert Hogg, who discussed 'Dynamic AI on the beat'.

He began by discussing AI itself, both as a concept and in reality. He said: “There are questions about what AI is. Everybody says that AI is the answer, but what's the question?”

“I think AI holds huge advantages for the police, and I don't think that the police will be able to go forward without it. [At the same time] I do have lots of issues with AI.”

He continued: “AI can't replace a human, it can only replace the actions of a human. I have a central view on artificial intelligence which is very straightforward. You should think of it as a 'force multiplier' on your workforce.

“Whoever they are – whether in the back office or on the frontline – to allow them to do more.

If you think it's going to fundamentally replace a lot of people, you haven't understood really what it's actually about. If you're going to try and replace [human] decision-making, you're going to have a lot of problems.

“When we're talking about AI, it relies on data. And if your data isn't good, the

follow-on will also not be good.

“My view is that there's a difference between 'data' and 'information'. Information is data which is contextual. It's about an incident that happened somewhere in time and space. We can join things together and have a larger view, and that's 'information'.”

Moving on to the specific topic of policing, he said that the force needs to embrace “responsible AI”, which he located at the “intersection between policing principles and ethics”.

He subsequently mentioned a white paper published by Black Marble in relation to just this topic, saying it drilled down into issues around ethics, reliability, transparency, accountability and privacy.

Other presentations on the first day included Apple's Tony O'Brien discussing safety features, as well as Ian Williams (Motorola Solutions) and Stephen Foreman (Noggin) discoursing on the subject of 'LAS and Noggin: elevating incident management through real-time data and decision making'.

The presentation prior to Hogg's, meanwhile, was Leonardo's Kim Seward and Chowdhury Rahman, again discussing AI for public safety. The title of this was 'The importance of assuring AI'.

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“I know there may be cynics who will say we’ve been doing that for quite some time. But the work that has been done by those on the programme to get us where we are now, and the current work that is taking place... there is a feeling of momentum and genuine desire to get after things. It is truly excellent.”

He illustrated this by saying that they are now in a position to look at the overall solution architecture, and know what is being delivered by whom, as well as how the project is ultimately coming together.

From there – as with the majority of similar ESN updates for the past couple of years – he moved on to several work areas where work has continued despite any hold-ups or difficulties previously encountered by the programme. This includes the coverage piece, as well as Air to Ground.

Discussing coverage in particular, Stokoe said: “Some 200-plus EAS [extended area service] sites are now active. We are also one site away from the overall installation and deployment of 675 total [sites], and also have work ready and prepared with our new mobile services partner. This is to be able to perform both resilience and critical operation location surveys, immediately that we are into the new contract era.”

He then moved on to mention the continued use of the Kodiak app “post the end of contract with Motorola”. This, he said, “enabled us to conduct network testing”, with further field testing also taking place. It has “allowed us to

ESN session

The second day of the conference began with the always eagerly anticipated update on Emergency Services Network progress. This was delivered by ESMCP director of delivery and deployment Niall Stokoe, transformation lead Leanne Almond and deputy director of live services Hengameh Delfaninejad.

As readers will likely know, the ESN programme is currently in a transitional phase, attempting as it is to engage new contractors for crucial elements of the project.

According to Stokoe, however, this process is very nearly at an end. By his own admission, while he couldn’t discuss this aspect in Leeds, much more information will likely be available by the time of the BAPCO Annual Event in March.

He began: “On contracts, we are working through a number of procurements at the moment, particularly on interworking and dispatch. They are progressing.

“Later this year and early next year, meanwhile, we’ll be coming out to talk to ICCS suppliers, also looking at our strategy for procurement of those downstream. They are part of the maintenance and momentum that we are undertaking while we await the onboarding of the two major procurements.”

He continued: “In terms of what’s going on in the programme, there’s a genuine feeling that we’re about to bring together all the requisite elements that we need, particularly in the core. There’s a real excitement in Clive House and in our Bristol location on a daily basis.



look at the optimisation and where we need to work further”.

Following on from Stokoe, Almond introduced the areas that she is leading on. These include delivery of the user services/mobile services procurement, and getting them to the contract award. “Equally,” she said, “I’ve been leading all the mobilisation work.”

In readiness for the signing of those contracts, she said: “What we’ve been doing since the summer is a lot of work to get ready for when those contracts go live. That’s what the mobilisation work is really about.

“There’s been a number of different activities we’ve been doing in that space for several months now. The first of these three stages of work has been ‘mobilising the mobilisation’, working out some of those key things that we’ve got to change in the programme.

“This is in terms of our ways of working, programme governance, and so on. This is because we’ve got two big partners joining us soon, to help us with this delivery from next year onwards.”

Another phase of work that she mentioned is “pre-contract award activities”. That is, “[trying to] accelerate as much as you can before your partners turn up”. This includes familiarising those in the programme with the impacts of the new contracts, as well as looking at how they are integrated into governance.

“Also, how do we streamline our onboarding process, making sure they receive the right induction? All that kind of stuff.”

Bringing things up to date, she said the programme is in “a really exciting phase”. This, she said, is due to the imminent organisation – once the contracts are signed – of the mobilisation planning and

delivery work.

“This is where we’re going to be going through all the plans and milestones,” she said. “The biggest thing we’re investing in is how we want to work with these partners.

“This is really crucial, [coming together] as one team around one core mission, which is to provide the Emergency Services Network.”

The final presentation as part of the ESN portion of the conference was delivered by Delfaninejad, who spoke about the ongoing efficacy and development of the Airwave network.

Discussing the latter, she said: “We continue to engage with our supplier and our partners to make sure that Airwave remains fit for purpose and a sustainable service until its last day.

“As we transition from Airwave to ESN, this transition [will have] no negative impact on the current services. It’s also vital that we continue to improve the Airwave services.”

Other sessions on day two included a panel looking at the evolution of control rooms, chaired by Actica’s Robin Davis. Actica’s Aaron Page, meanwhile, chaired a second panel, focusing on mobile devices. 📱