Community policing initiative

**m**ost people are not affected by major crime, such as bank robberies. Petty crime, on the other hand, is a constant source of irritation for many communities. Vandalism, graffiti, littering, drunk and disorderly behavior are all things that most of us could do without in our lives. Community policing is an initiative that is just beginning and being evaluated on a small scale in several communities in the UK.

"The community's policing needs can be better addressed. We need a new deal in the community," says former police superintendent Duncan Gerrard, now a senior consultant for APD Communications Ltd. "We need to form a task force with people from the police, the social services, public housing and health inspectors who can work together in the field."

## Data protection and personal integrity

Sharing data among field workers naturally raises a number of issues relating to data protection and personal integrity. A housing inspector making a routine call should naturally not be able to access criminal records in the Police National Computer. In the system that APD has developed, every event creates an audit trail. The system not only enforces access rights, but also monitors access attempts, to ensure that field workers only have access to the information they need to do their jobs.

"Data protection is not meant to stop departments from working together," notes Duncan Gerrard. "People who have a legislative obligation to do certain things must be auditable. There is also a legal obligation to ensure that what you are recording is accurate, whether it is reporting an abandoned vehicle or the names of people drinking in a park."

"One of the great strengths of community policing in this manner is that you are really joined up. These are partnerships addressing real issues. Where there were once islands of information, community services can now share information and respond more appropriately to the things that really bother people," concludes Duncan Gerrard. <

> ## " The police, the social services, public housing and health inspectors work together in the field "

## Keeping it simple

In a number of London boroughs and county councils across the UK, this is now starting to happen with the help of a simple, yet unique Mobitex application developed by APD Communications. Based on APD's mobile information platform, a set of applications provides peer-group messaging and access to national and local databases. The application is accessible from a PDA, such as the Grapevine from Transcomm.

"When we began looking at the issues, we realized that the information needs of many authorities are the same as the police," relates Duncan Gerrard. "Social workers, housing inspectors and drug coordinators typically need information about a person, a place, an address or a vehicle. This information is very sharable and can be presented to virtually anyone working in the field."

APD Communications therefore decided to work with the UK Mobitex operator Transcomm to develop a standard product with an application platform and a bearer that can be delivered to almost any municipal authority. The mobile applications present infor-

mation in standard forms that are easy for field workers to use.

A mobile gateway has been implemented that allows information to update a shared database.

"People should not need to go into the office to post information," emphasizes Duncan Gerrard. "Uniformed police officers, welfare officers and other social workers need to be out in the community where they can be seen and interact with people. They also need to be able to share information in the field. This is not rocket science. It's about creating a very simple database that allows field workers to enter incidents and view information using the same forms."

Duncan Gerrard cites abandoned cars as a simple yet real problem that can now be addressed in a different manner. Abandoned cars are not only an eyesore and obstruct street cleaning and other public services. They are also of interest to other parts of the community, such as the tax authorities and insurance companies. When incident data can be shared, police officers can respond more appropriately and enlist the assistance of other authorities to deal with the situation.

> ## " Data protection is not meant to stop departments from working together "