



Police Reform: The Introduction of Police.AI

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On the 10th June, the government announced the launch of Police.AI¹ with the aim of reducing the number of hours police officers will spend doing paperwork, reviewing CCTV evidence, and identifying links across numerous calls to the police. This reduction in desk-based work has the aim of freeing up those officers to spend more time being visible in local communities, with a report from Police Professional suggesting early time savings might equate to 6 million officer hours per year². While this move towards the use of AI to vastly improve productivity should be seen as a wholly positive contribution to police reform plans in the UK, when considering the issues surrounding rural crime and policing, how will these developments improve the situation in rural spaces across England and Wales?

The huge £75million investment in the launch and development of the new national centre will bring noticeable benefits in investigatory processes and case development, allowing officers to be more visible on the streets of England and Wales. I would not wish to suggest that the police do not progress with this ambitious move towards the integration of AI into policing, as we as a society need to accept that AI is now a part of our lives and can provide significant benefits. I simply feel that there are a few considerations to be undertaken to ensure that all parts of society can benefit from this move forward.

The issue of trust is raised in the government press release. However, this is solely from the position of ensuring public trust in AI and responsible use by the police. But it is arguable that there is a need to build general trust in the police among communities across England and Wales to underpin this aim of public trust in AI use. It is recognised that community trust in the police is waning across both urban and rural areas³. Recent research has shown that rural communities feel that the police do not take rural crime seriously, do not have the resources to be visible and enhance communications, and reporting crime is often difficult with no or delayed visit after the report⁴. It is arguable that until this second class response to rural crime is improved, and there is a wholesale change in the approach to rural crime and policing, it is likely that rural community confidence towards the police per se will not improve, let alone a confidence that AI will be used responsibly by the police. Of course, this is not to diminish the pockets of good practice that one can see in some force areas such as Cheshire, Lincolnshire, Thames Valley, and others. Rather it is a call for such good practice to be replicated across all forces in England and Wales to address this issue.

The report discusses the use of AI in transcribing 999/101 calls and to develop crime pattern analytics. While this suggestion makes sense in relation to releasing staff time, it raises the question of whether AI will be able to adequately recognise technical language and properly understand that when a farmer calls to report a stolen drill, they are not talking about a Black & Decker or a Makita! Further, will the use of AI have any impact on the THRIVE assessment of crime reports? Will it provide an improvement

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/policeai-to-speed-up-investigations-and-fight-crime>

² <https://policeprofessional.com/news/government-says-policeai-could-save-6-million-officer-hours-a-year/>

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/perceptionandexperienceofpoliceandcriminaljusticesystemenglandandwales>

⁴ <https://cdn.harper-adams.ac.uk/document/project/260305-Factors-Affecting-Rural-Community-Confidence-in-th179149.pdf>



or simply miss the nuances of rural crimes that may not seem to score highly the THRIVE assessment, but actually pose a significant threat, risk, and harm to the reporting party; for example hare coursing in progress by a large group of people on a farmers' land. Finally, will AI be able to truly see rural crime patterns over time given the low likelihood of these showing hotspots or high volume crime? What kind of patterns would such AI be trained to look for, and would these patterns be based on urban algorithms?

Linked to this point, is the extent to which AI can help identify truly hidden rural crime such as rural violence against women, girls, and children (VAWG/C). It has been recognised that rural VAWG/C can often continue for significantly longer in the rural space than the urban space⁵. This is due to a range of factors including status of offenders in rural communities, control of transport, lack of access to service, all enhanced by geographic and social isolation that victims/survivors experience both during and after their abuse. Other hidden/less obvious crimes in rural areas include modern slavery/human trafficking and hate crime. All of which require community groups/organisations/members to understand what they are seeing, and provide that information to the police. What AI will do to interrogate this information once received to develop intelligence that police can act upon is currently unclear.

The final point, and one that feels very timely, is the location of the data centres that will be needed to handle the increased amount of data that this plan will inevitably develop. There are currently 560 data centres in the UK⁶, with many located in London and the southeast. Such an approach has allowed some of these data centres to have already been located in rural areas, taking up potential agricultural land. One example of a planned – albeit currently postponed – data centre, is that by Xlinks in Great Torrington, Devon⁷. This proposal has been heavily opposed by local residents on environmental and biodiversity grounds, as well as concerns about the loss of 850 acres of agricultural land located within the UNESCO North Devon Biosphere⁸.

While the government has designated data centres as national critical infrastructure, enabling fast-track planning permission, the issue of food security and agriculture still does not have the same status. Despite the recent release of the Farming Roadmap 2050⁹, the government missed the opportunity to make clear that farming is key critical national infrastructure despite calls from quarters including RUSI in January 2026¹⁰. This oversight in the Farming Roadmap 2050 suggests that the concept of food resilience is short-sighted as it is discussed in this document.

In all, it is clear that the police do need to move forward with their plans to develop improved data analytics and better use of AI to enhance what they do, and free up staff hours to be out on patrol. However, it is argued that these plans need to consider the role of rural crime, rural policing, and rural space within these developments to ensure that the policy is truly rural proofed, and rural is not seen as an afterthought.

⁵ <https://www.northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Domestic-Abuse-in-Rural-Areas-National-Rural-Crime-Network.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.datacentermap.com/united-kingdom/>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c39ywnvn234o>; https://www.farminguk.com/news/-13bn-devon-data-centre-plan-delayed-amid-farmland-concerns_68796.html

⁸ <https://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farming-roadmap-2050/farming-roadmap-2050-growing-englands-future-accessible-version>

¹⁰ <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/farming-critical-uk-national-security>