

Embedding Microsoft 365 (M365) to support cross-force collaboration

A joint collaboration between Kent Police and Essex Police to deliver the Microsoft 365 (M365) rollout to support digital upskilling, improve cross-force communication and operational capabilities.

First published

21 May 2026

Key details

Stage of practice	Evaluated locally
Purpose	Organisational
Topic	Digital, data and analytics Productivity Training and professional development
Organisation	Kent Police
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Region	South East
Partners	Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services)
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	November 2024

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Communities General public Offenders

Aim

The aim of the initiative is to:

- deliver M365 training to the whole workforce to enhance digital literacy and operational efficiency
- establish a weekly M365 programme update meeting to ensure alignment, transparency, and forward planning
- create a business champions support channel to encourage peer-to-peer support and foster a culture of digital advocacy
- develop and maintain an M365 solutions catalogue to demonstrate practical use cases and benefits across departments

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the initiative are to:

- increase the workforce's productivity by reducing the time spent on administrative, drafting and analysis tasks
- improve the quality and consistency of written outputs while reducing errors and rework
- reduce the levels of stress and burnout by enabling the workforce to complete complex workloads more efficiently
- reduce the reliance on overtime, temporary staffing and future growth bids by converting time savings into sustained capacity gains
- improve the effectiveness and inclusion of the workforce by providing consistent cognitive and drafting support

- reduce the digital and evidential risk by embedding Copilot use within governance structures, auditability and mandatory human oversight

Description

The M365 project was implemented in response to the increasing workload and demand pressures across Kent Police and Essex Police. Both forces identified a strategic need to assess whether Copilot could deliver measurable efficiency, quality and wellbeing benefits to the workforce.

Planning process

The planning process involved:

- identifying representative user groups
- deciding on qualitative and quantitative evaluation criteria
- governance support
- data protection and ethical safeguards prior to deployment

Roles and teams

The user group included:

- frontline officers
- investigators
- call handlers
- analysts
- continuous improvement teams
- corporate and support functions
- senior leaders
- M365 and IT teams
- information management teams
- data protection team
- digital transformation leads from both force

Implementation

To support the implementation of M365 across both forces, a mandatory training package was developed and delivered by the digital transformation and M365/IT teams. The training is supported by the information management teams and data protection teams, with additional materials provided through Microsoft and Microsoft-funded partners. The training is delivered online and covers:

- how to use Copilot
- acceptable use of M365
- data protection
- information security
- responsible artificial intelligence (AI) principles
- limitations of AI outputs
- prompt writing skills

The training has been promoted via M365 training channels, force intranets and the integration within existing digital learning frameworks. Additionally, the training has been promoted within both forces by Copilot champions and early adopters of M365.

A weekly M365 programme update meeting has been established to ensure there is alignment, transparency, and shared decision-making across both forces. The meetings are attended by:

- chief officers
- senior operational leaders (chief inspectors and superintendents)
- digital and IT leadership
- information management and records management leads
- data protection specialists
- information security specialists
- finance and commercial representation
- automation and AI leads
- programme and reporting owners

The purpose of the meetings are to provide an oversight of the M365 rollout. The contents of the meeting include:

- Copilot deployment and governance

- platform risk and assurance
- licensing and finance
- storage and records management
- national developments
- training readiness
- benefits realisation

The forces also implemented a:

- business champions support channel – where the workforce from both forces can raise queries and receive support from other users, also hosting guidance to support the workforce with the adoption of M365
- solution catalogue – a guidance document developed by the M365 and IT teams which contains information on frequently asked questions and how to maximise individual use of M365

Cost and senior management approval

The rollout was delivered at no cost by utilising trials and existing licences, with subsequent recommended expansion requiring revenue funding from both forces ICT and digital budgets for full Copilot licences. Essex Police obtained 500 licences at a cost of £119,000 per annum.

Senior management approval was required to authorise the rollout, approve governance arrangements, and consider recommendations for expanded investment based on evidenced outcomes.

Evaluation

An evaluation has been conducted and was led by both forces digital business change and M365 programme leads. The evaluation measured:

- efficiency (time saved)
- quality of outputs
- wellbeing impact and usability
- value for money and limitations

The evaluation used a mixed-method approach, including:

- user surveys capturing the frequency of use and perceived quality improvements
- interviews and case studies conducted with frontline, specialist and corporate roles
- review and assurance through formal governance boards, capturing risks, benefits and lessons learned

Overall impact

The rollout of M365 has demonstrated cross-functional working by integrating efforts across various departments. The initiative has fostered a culture of knowledge sharing and innovation, enabling departments to leverage M365 tools effectively.

The user group's planning and teamwork has been evident with the consistent delivery of the M365 weekly programme update meetings. These have ensured all stakeholders are aligned and informed to ease implementation. The initiative's ability to adapt and respond to challenges is highlighted by the proactive approach to training and support. The training package has equipped the workforce from both forces with the necessary skills to use M365 products efficiently, ensuring compliance with force policies and enhancing overall productivity.

Examples of workforce impact

- Community safety engagement: the mandatory M365 training has been instrumental in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of community safety engagement officers. For example, Thurrock community safety unit confirmed the training had provided practical skills that have been directly applied in their team, improving their ability to serve the community.
- Business champions support: the creation of the Teams channel has enabled the M365 business champions to provide timely and effective support to colleagues across Essex and Kent. This initiative has ensured that staff have access to the best advice and guidance.

Learning

- A challenge has been the premature commitment to milestones, before a project lead was appointed and the scoping of resources. Early assumptions about technical feasibility, especially regarding analytics capabilities within M365, proved to be overly optimistic and led to a temporary loss of stakeholder confidence.

- The M365 training also emerged as a persistent challenge, with feedback indicating the need for more structured, role-specific content.
- The absence of a defined governance structure early in the project hindered decision-making and strategic alignment.
- Kent Police and Essex Police have been recognised as leaders for the implementation of M365 in the workforce, and have been involved at a national level through workshops and the Workshop 365 working group.

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