

Termination of the SIREN ICT project: Q&A

What is this Public Interest Report about?

The report provides the findings of an audit carried out in the public interest under statutory requirements to consider the decision taken by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Surrey, Kevin Hurley, to terminate the SIREN ICT project.

The report considers whether the decision taken by the PCC to terminate the project was reasonable and reviews the SIREN project from its inception to termination, considering the arrangements in place in respect of project and programme governance.

What was SIREN?

SIREN (**S**urrey **I**ntegrated **R**eporting **E**nterprise **N**etwork) was a key element of the Enterprise Programme which, following a formal decision in 2005, sought to replace Surrey Police's existing crime, intelligence and custody suite (CIS).

Why was SIREN needed?

CIS was a key system which was becoming obsolete and was no longer fit for purpose. The Force had also identified that the system was subject to increased risk of failure and would no longer be supported by the supplier. Following a procurement and evaluation process, SIREN was identified as the most appropriate replacement.

What went wrong?

The audit report acknowledges that the initial decision to replace CIS with SIREN was reasonable and that it matched the ambitions of the Force at the time. However, the auditors have identified a number of issues that arose during the delivery of the project that ultimately lead to its failure. The main findings of the audit are that from the outset:

- The project management approach adopted was not properly understood by the Force and the methodology ultimately proved ineffective.
- There was a failure to recruit, retain and allocate appropriately skilled and experienced resource to the programme, with substantial changes in key roles.
- Scope and cost were poorly controlled.
- There was a failure to understand the controls, checks and balances needed to deliver effective governance
- Benefits of the project were overstated and never delivered
- Progress reporting was rose tinted, overly-optimistic and not always representative of actual progress made by the project – attributed by some to a cultural aversion to giving the boss bad news
- Project reporting was not subject to sufficient scrutiny and there was not sufficient or significant intervention from any of the scrutiny functions in response to the long-term red-rated status held by the project.

Why has this report taken so long to come out?

Upon formally terminating the SIREN IT project on 9 April 2013 the decision was referred to the Surrey Police and PCC's appointed auditors Grant Thornton due to the significant impact on the accounts. Grant Thornton then exercised their statutory powers to issue a report in the public interest, independent of both bodies. The report has involved reviewing the documentation produced

over the life of the project and conducting interviews with the key individuals involved, including those who no longer work for either the Office of the PCC (formally the Police Authority) or the Force.

These comprehensive investigations, combined with strict rules surrounding the publication of audit reports, have meant that it was not possible to share the findings until now. The auditors interviewed over 25 people and consulted with over 40 people across a number of organisations and ensured that all interested parties were given time to respond to consultation.

Under statutory requirements and in the interests of transparency the Commissioner is committed to ensuring that the audit is published in full and has, with Surrey Police, arranged a public meeting at which residents and members of the press will be able to question both himself and the Chief Constable on the findings.

How much did SIREN cost?

Taking all known costs into account, it is believed that the total cost of the project was at least £14.86m.

What impact will this have on operational policing in Surrey?

The PCC is extremely disappointed that at a time of austerity a significant amount of public money has been wasted on an IT project that has delivered none of the benefits envisaged. Police finances are already under and the Force can ill afford further financial losses. As such, the Commissioner will be sending a copy of the audit report to every PCC in England and Wales to help prevent similar failings being repeated elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the Commissioner remains committed to protecting frontline policing and Surrey is the only police force in the country to have increased officer numbers over the past year. By collaborating with neighbouring forces, replacing some PCSO posts with Police Constable posts and by using assets seized from criminals, Surrey has been able to buck the national trend and deliver more visible policing. This will continue to be the PCCs ambition. This year has seen excellent police performance in Surrey with arrests up, crime down and detection rates for burglary and violence improving.

Why was the project not stopped sooner?

The audit report notes that there was no agreed gateway review process in place and, as a result, opportunities to consider earlier termination may have been missed. Equally rose tinted reporting meant that the true extent of the problems were not fully realised until a late stage. The auditors also note that terminating the project sooner may have carried greater risk and uncertainty.

In the summer of 2012 the Chief Constable Lynne Owens brought her concerns about SIREN to the attention of the Police Authority but was precluded due to the period of 'Purdah' in relation to the pending PCC elections.

On the first day of office, the Chief Constable briefed the PCC on her concerns and the PCC took prompt action which led to the termination of the contract. The PCC also negotiated with the developer to secure release from the contractual liability to pay any further support costs, preventing further financial loss.

Who was to blame and is anyone going to be held to account?

The former Chief Constable of Surrey Police, Mark Rowley, committed to an ambitious and high risk project but failed to put the necessary skills and processes in place to support delivery. The PCC sees this as akin to a captain of a ship taking a high-risk course without ensuring that his crew and vessel are capable of navigating the treacherous waters and leading to the ship drifting onto the rocks.

Had the former Chief Constable, Mark Rowley, still been in post the PCC would be looking to hold him to account and reflecting on how best to do that. However, as it stands, the PCC intends to write to the former Chief Constable's new employer to highlight his concerns.

How are you going to make sure that this doesn't happen again?

The audit report sets out a number of recommendations that have been duly noted and will be carefully considered by the Force and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The PCC and Chief Constable will also be responding to the recommendations made at the statutory public meeting to be held on the 27th June 2014 and outlining what actions they will be taking. The auditors also note that the Niche replacement solution was implemented in line with planned timescales, suggesting that the Force has already learned some of the key lessons from the failure of the SIREN project.

What is Niche?

On 7th June 2013, following the termination of the SIREN contract, PCC, advised by the current Chief Constable Lynne Owens, decided to procure an alternative solution to SIREN, known as Niche. Niche has subsequently been implemented in line with planned timescales and Surrey Police now have a robust crime, intelligence and custody suite in place. This new system is "off-the-shelf" rather than bespoke and has the benefits of being the same as the systems in place in Sussex, Hampshire, Thames Valley Police and 10 other police forces. Already the benefits of shared intelligence with Sussex have been seen, with an arrest taking place on the first day of Niche being in place where a wanted burglar from Sussex had travelled into the Surrey area.

Are you required to hold a public meeting?

Yes, as the report has been issued by Grant Thornton, the Auditors, as a public interest report. We are holding the meeting on Friday 27th June 2014 at 7pm at HG Wells Conference and Events Centre in Woking. Any members of the public wishing to attend are requested to register by e-mailing CorporateCommunications@surrey.pnn.police.uk or call 01483 571212 with their details.