# PUBLIC SECTOR FUTURE podcast – Episode 3 – Digital Policing

Olivia Neal [host]

Darren Henstock, Assistant Divisional Officer, Western Australia Police Force’s Digital Policing Programme. [guest]

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**OLIVIA NEAL:** Hello and welcome to Public Sector Future. This is a show for anyone who cares about using digital approaches in the public sector to deliver better outcomes.

We explore stories from around the world, where public servants have been successful at driving change. And we meet the people behind them, their first-hand experiences, and lessons learned. Throughout the series we will discuss technology and trends, as well the cultural aspects of change.

Today we’re joined by Assistant Divisional Officer Darren Henstock, the Innovation and Future Lead for Western Australia Police Force’s Digital Policing Programme. Darren combines several decades of policing experience with academic research and is playing a leading role in implementing new technologies, and introducing the cultural changes needed bring the organization together on their journey.

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**OLIVIA NEAL:**  Darren, welcome to the show.

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** Hi, Olivia. Thanks for having me.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  Thanks so, much for joining us. So, we’re going to get into what you’re working on. But just before we do that, I’m going to give our listeners a little bit of context on Western Australia for those of you who might be a little bit less familiar. So, Western Australia is the largest state in Australia. You’re 2.5 million square kilometers. And Western Australia occupies one third of the entire land mass of Australia. You’ve got 2.6 million people living there, and 92% of these people live in the southwest corner, which means the rest of the state is pretty sparsely populated. And as I understand it, you are the single-largest policing jurisdiction in the whole world. Is that right?

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** That’s correct. We like to tell our American friends that Texas will fit into our state five or six times.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  Okay, so some unique challenges that you’re facing.

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** Very unique over here. Yeah.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  Okay, fantastic. So, you’re the Innovation and Future lead. Tell us a little bit about what that means. What does your role involve?

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** We started off a significant period of time ago now trying to move the agency forward in technology. And as we move through the process of being a project into more a formalized division, my role has certainly morphed into looking at where the innovation could be, and how we employ that innovation, and how we introduce it and get the feedback from the teams out on the ground, and then make it the best that it can be. And we’ve done quite a good job of it, so far, so it seems to be working very well for us.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  And so, you mentioned this has been over a period of time. When did you start getting involved in this work?

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** Technology itself took me back to the UK, when I did some initial work with body-worn video, right when it was brand new, and gaining impetus and did some research whilst I was at Cambridge University in the West Midlands Police. But here in Western Australia, three years ago now, we started looking at body-worn video for Western Australia and closely followed by a mobility solution to move us away from our in-car solution that we’ve had from for many, many years. They sort of dovetailed, became foundational parts of our digital policing strategy for the agency, and we have successfully delivered those first two parts. And now we’re formalized into a division and delivering further capability ongoing from there.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  And so, from what you were saying there, there was an impetus to really use the technology around body-worn video. And was that happening in parallel with the desire to have a wider digital transformation? Was there a wider strategy before you started going down that route?

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** There was. So, Western Australia Police was quite advanced a number of years ago and had one of the first in-car vehicle solutions for officers, so they got intelligence and could do computer-aided dispatch CAD in the vehicles and respond that way. So, but that system is comping on 15 years old. Now, it runs on 3G, and so, there was a – we looked at a mobility solution in the agency a number of times, and for various reasons that never really got – got going. And so, this was another stage in delivering that.

We had a brand-new CIO, come in at around the same time, which added greater impetus because he wanted to move the agency into cloud solutions, software as a service. And I think that the planets aligned. A new assistant commissioner, a new commissioner, who was really wholeheartedly supporting this, and we managed to get through supporting body-worn video as an agency. funding that out by ourselves, and then we got $35 million to do the mobility solution as well. So, that’s now gone forwards to – to deliver that mobility solution out to the agency.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  So, when you’re talking about a mobility solution for the benefit of people who maybe aren’t day to day involved in a justice or a policing environment, what does a mobility solution encompass for you? What types of outcomes are you looking for, from something like that?

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** It very much involves just a mobile phone is the long and short of it. It’s an iPhone 11 in the hands of a cop, and that’s as simple as it is. Realistically, our officers couldn’t – didn’t even have access to email, and calendar out in the field. So, they had to constantly come back to the station to do anything. So, that mobility solution is for us to put a device in the hands of officers, give them the same capability they would expect as a private citizen, realistically, to have information, communication at their fingertips. And then from that point on, we started to morph some of our apps and capabilities into that device so that it starts to run these processes that we want to see guys having out in the field, and we want to give them that, wherever they are, and in whatever they’re doing.

As you pointed out, we are an enormous state, and so connectivity and 4G connectivity is a significant issue for us, particularly out in the region. So, that’s a constant source of thought for us as to how we – how we achieve that for offices on the ground.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  And I think it’s really interesting to hear about, because when you put it – in one sense you say, it’s just a smartphone for people. Actually, that comes with actually a lot of – a lot of thought, a lot of planning, a lot of strategy around rolling something like that out, to move from one way of operating and expecting officers to have one set of tools and solutions, to introducing a new set of tools to them. How did you approach that rollout? I’m sure it wasn’t just as easy as buying a load of iPhones and giving it to the offices and expecting them just to embrace that straightaway. How did you approach that kind of more cultural aspect?

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** Yeah, it wasn’t. Officers are a curious group and in both – and in fact in every country I’ve been in, I’ve worked with, alongside or as an officer, they’re the same, everywhere you go. As one of my supervisors once told me, they don’t like what they’ve got, and they don’t like what they’re being given. So, we’re a bit stuck. But what was key for us and key for our commissioner was that he wanted these mobile phones to be something that they could use themselves as well. So, first and foremost, a private mobile phone with as much data and calls as they want, and no monitoring of whatever goes on, with their phone, it’s their private phone, use it as you so desire, as long as you’re not – not doing anything illegal on it, we have zero interest in what else goes on that phone.

If we want the phone, we have to go through the same process as we would have with a member of the public, to seize that device, and we wouldn’t get notified until they start using two – 300 gigabytes of data a month. And that was the message we were passing out, that they had that, and they also had business apps– on the device, as well, so they could use it for other work purposes as well. We thought that was quite powerful. We’re the only ones in Australia and New Zealand to do it that way. The more it’s in their hands, the more they’re going to want to use it, and then they’re going to want to use it at work, and that was realistically our approach. We gave them the best phone that there was, when the iPhone 11 had just been released in Australia when we released it to our guys.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  So, you took a different approach by saying this is your own device as well. It happens to have your business apps on it as well. You can use this for your job, but this is your personal one as well. Was that a controversial decision to take?

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** No, it was easy because it was driven by the commissioner and the deputy commissioner, that’s happening, and we’re comfortable with it. We realistically broke a lot of barriers down in what we did and how we did it, and we also rolled 6.5 thousand mobile phones out in less than two months across the entire state. So, from pressing the button and getting the money, it was July, we had mobile phones to the – 80% of the organization by the end of that year, so.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  That’s really interesting, that combination of both how you did it and then what you did. Are you finding that other people are starting to mirror some of your approaches and other police forces around just at least the cultural aspects of rolling something like that out?

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** Yeah, we’re starting to get a lot of interest now in how we did things quite as quickly as we have done. And, I’ll say a key part of that was the way we built the team, and the team is, for the first time, in a business information sense, with an IT department, and IT shop as some people call it. We have genuine blue shirt police officers embedded within there who are literally months out of being on the frontline, and that was key to me, the couple of iterations that I’ve done here with the team that we’d used to deliver this and get the credibility out.

Those officers that communicate with their colleagues out in the field have literally been off the frontline for a few weeks. So, they know where the pain is, they know what the issues are, and they can talk with some credibility and trust, and that was probably, going back to your previous questions, one of our biggest issues, trust and confidence in the leadership.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  So, it sounds like you benefitted from having one important piece, which was a leadership cadre who really wanted to drive this change, and you had that backing of leaders to really push this forward and to be brave enough to take some of these different decisions, and that might be traditional, and then the way that you’ve built that team really to understand what the needs of the people using these solutions are, and have that really embedded in the day-to-day work has been fundamental really to make this successful.

And one of the things I know that you did was, once you’ve rolled out these smartphones and you got these in the hands of officers and people were starting to use them, then you started to look at what were the tools and what were the applications that they had on them. And I wondered if you could tell us a little bit about the approach you took to something you developed called **OneForce Locate**, which sounds like a really interesting example of something that was genuinely very useful, both to the force as a whole and to the individual officers.

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** We only had eight weeks, I think, before those first devices were going to hit the hands of the officers, and we wanted to have a basic capability within those phones so that we wanted them to be able to have their email and calendar. We wanted them to be able to search for some people, places, objects, vehicles, that sort of things. And we also wanted them to be safe and have some ability for us to know where they were. We’ve had vehicle tracking for many, many years. So, we know where our vehicles are, but we don’t know where our officers are. So, as soon as they leave that vehicle, we have not the foggiest of where they could be. It was important for our DC to have that capability, an address capability on the phone, so that you could immediately pinpoint where somebody was in case of emergency. So, that’s what he was keen to have, and Locate became our solution for it.

So, we have a process by which we look at apps. Can we build them, should we buy one, or should we nick something from someone else who has already built it in one of our partner agencies? So, looking at this, we did some research into what was available out there and there was nothing commercially available that fitted the bill to do what we do in the environment we do it in. Within two days we sat in a room, we nut it out with some of the frontline officers, exactly what we wanted as a minimum viable product, and the timeframe that we had to deliver it in. And we just grabbed the people in from the agency that we needed on the back of my blue shirts, who knew what they wanted on the frontline, the developers who knew what they could build. And then we merged the other teams together to build that in six weeks.

So, that meant a viable product went out, with the phones, and that gave officers an ability to turn on their GPS location. We had an ability to communicate with them, send them notifications out in the field, and show if they’re on or off duty. And we very, very quickly had some high-profile wins using this, where single lone officers, like dog handlers, were out doing a track, found a prisoner, but were in the middle of nowhere, up in the Kimberley, in the Far North.

And officers managed to track their way into the officer to support them. We also had a tourist missing in one of the national parks in Pilbara District, again up in the north, and our officers managed to overlay that location and coordinate everybody because they weren’t in vehicles. They were out on foot. And coordinate people into the rescue. So, this capability that we now have, and we’ve developed it, and developed it, and developed it now, has been – has been a key feature of our device, and when asked, most officers will turn to us and say that’s the best app we’ve ever had come out. So, we’re pretty pleased with what we did.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  Yeah, I mean, it sounds like that’s a complete gamechanger in terms of from the way you’ve just described it, previously, as soon as an officer left their car, they were not trackable, you couldn’t find their location, they had no really very sufficient way of communicating back to now being able to be found, located, contacted wherever they are. That’s a really fundamental change in the way that they operate. How did people respond to that initially? I mean, you talked a little bit before about a lack of trust. Was there some skepticism around this? Or were people just very relieved to have it straight away?

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** No, absolutely huge skepticism around it, and we could have turned on right at the start of – okay, as soon as you turn your phone on, it turns the GPS locator beacon on, and off we go, and or we could have tied it happily into their shifts, and as soon as they come on shift, then it turns on. But we have to remember this was a personal device, at the same time, and we didn’t want that capability on all the time. We wanted to give the officer that ability to have control over what they were doing.

So, whilst we could have enforced it, like nearly everything we’ve done so far, it’s an officer choice. And so, we’ve learned over the last year, year and a bit, of how we do these things. We’ve got our champions out there that we seed the information with first. We develop this service, Locate, was our first foray into building apps and building in an agile way.

So, in my interpretation of what agile is, of we build an MVP in six or eight weeks, and we know, because we’re frontline cops at the end of the day, we know what we want, but we don’t know exactly how it’s going to fit with those guys. So, then we release it to them, and they have a play with it for six to eight weeks, and we put it out in a trusted area so that they can look at it, manage it, give us the feedback, and then they see that feedback taking shape in front of their eyes. So, it’s not like a traditional IT project of a year down the track and $5 million spent, and here’s an app that the frontline have gone – well, it doesn’t actually work.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  But you’re building that trust throughout because they can see the improvements, yeah.

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** Yeah, we buy their trust. It’s all feedback from the frontlines. So, now they trust that they can feed back to us, it will be listened to, and we will act on it, and that has become probably the most powerful thing that we’ve done in that method of building. And it’s been hard. I won’t deny that we’ve changed a lot of perspectives, particularly in the IT side of things, of we’re not going to get into a security risk assessment that’s going to take you the best part of 15 to 20 weeks, when I need this app out in 6 weeks.

So, I will run that risk with what might happen, and I’ll take it on my shoulders, and you just tell me at the end that it’s good or it’s no good. And if there is flaws in it, then we’ll build that capability into those flaws, but let’s not start building products for the one percent of people that are going to do the wrong thing. Because I tell you what, that one percent of people who do the wrong thing, are always going to do the wrong things, whatever security principles you put in place. And again, I’ve had massive support from the DC, the commissioner and the CIO, in doing it in that perspective, and now that’s how we do most things.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  That’s taking a lot of personal responsibility on your own shoulders to drive that forward, to be prepared to be the person who says that, actually, I’m going to push back against the length of time it takes you to do a security and risk assessment, because that isn’t how an agile development process works. I mean, that’s not something that everybody would get up there and do in order to drive a project forward. But it sounds like having the backing of the leadership was a help in that as well. But I mean, maybe also, seeing the results coming quickly as well, and getting that feedback endorses your approach too.

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** It does, yeah, and we started doing this right at the start with the first body-worn video stuff. That was Treasury and Finance department terms, and so this is going to take 18 months for the procurement of $23 million. We did that in four months, and it was again, okay, so you’re telling me that you need a month to review this paperwork. I’m telling you, you need a week, and I expect it done in a week, because I want this done. There’s no good doing an IT procurement project in 18 months, because the IT is out of date by the time we want to roll it out. So, let’s not do that, and that was picked up by – by Finance. Okay, so that’s a new way, a really good way, and again, picked up other departments within Western Australia government to say, hey, okay, look, it can be done differently.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  It’s a fine balance between I think you seeing new technology and understanding what’s out there, getting past the buzzwords, getting past the shiny brochures, and then taking that very evidence-based incremental approach to testing, rolling it out, with this really relentless focus that you brought to the work in Western Australia, of really focusing on your users, focusing on those officers, and focusing on the outcomes, and then really showing progress all the time, and not going for that kind of traditional big bang procurements, mass rollouts, six-month training periods. That’s the really transformational piece, I think, is not just the technology. It’s the other pieces that have come around, the way that you’ve been working.

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** Yeah, and that we are so totally focused on if it’s not good for that guy at the frontline, it’s not good for us, we’re not interested in it. I’d say the CIO is 100% certain that he wants police officers as product owners within all these areas, now, we proposed, right to the start, 10 minutes of timesaving for an officer, per shift, per day, but you’ve now probably got 450 new officers out in the field because of the timesaving that you’ve now got for 10 minutes of time. They’re making better, more informed decisions. They’re supporting the community in so many more – better ways. And even for the people we arrest, we have a better-informed decision-making process around them. We know their needs, and their issues, and their wants a lot better, and nothing is hidden from us, and we can make better informed decisions for them as well.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  And so, you’re responsible for thinking about what does the future of policing look like for your area? What do you see as the future? Where do you think – what’s going to be your next challenge, the next thing that you’re going to be looking at next?

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** So, what I’d really like to get to is the combined criminal justice system of the stuff that I started way back in 2013, 2012, in the UK, of that diversion of offenders a way, but giving officers that capability to have all that information at their fingertips, to make an informed decision on that person. So, particularly for our Aboriginal communities, here, that is so powerful of let’s not incarcerate people. That’s been proved so many times not to be the right way to go about things, that contact with the courts and the justice system is criminogenic, and we need to stop it, and we need to give officers that professionalism, that capability to make those decisions out in the field, and be part of a criminal justice continuum, so they know how to contact the courts.

They know how to get the best information out of the courts. They know how to report back on information and how many times– a person can have a chance, maybe, to do the right thing, and to combine all that information that is so siloed at the moment that we can’t make proper informed decisions, wherever you are, in prisons, in courts, in policing, and to make that easier, and to make that ability to go to court a little bit easier.

And it wasn’t until I went to Cambridge that I realized that a domestic violence victim relives his or her incident, so many times over the course of the criminal justice investigation, with the police, and making a statement, and then maybe making a further statement, and then going to court, and then having to – we can make that so much simpler. We can use AI. So, some of the stuff we’re introducing now with electronic pocket notebooks, and that someone can talk to that pocket, that phone, which is recording it in there, in the officer’s pocket notebook and then transform that into a statement, making an electronic signature, and combine that with your body-worn video to make – no need for someone to go to court, but we’ve got to buy all our stakeholders into it, and it’s a long-term process.

And I know this discussion is going on, around the world, in this field, but that’s where we should be. That’s what we should be aiming for and combining all this technology with our partners to understand who is key at the end of this, and that’s preventing crime and supporting our communities, not anything else. We shouldn’t be considering anything else.

And I know that’s easy for me to say, but that’s where I think we should get to, and that combined collaboration, that communication across platforms, we’re starting to introduce it with Microsoft Teams. When we were at the state pandemic center, we had 25 different government agencies, all within Teams, all rapidly upskilling and providing the information and the support to get our commissioner and premier in making decisions about COVID. And we knew we had to do it, and we knew we had to do it rapidly.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  So, it’s starting to show it can be done, and we can break down some of those silos, and we can share data, and we can combine efforts, and I think that’s an incredibly worthy ambition and goal. And as you said, I think one of the important things, in anybody, in any public sector organization who wants to move forward, it’s to learn from the experience of others, and you talked about the other countries that you’d worked with. Because these are, these are challenges and problems that no single country or no single region is alone in facing. These are things that everybody is trying to move things forward.

**DARREN HENSTOCK:**  I’m busy at the moment trying to set up a forum across Australia and New Zealand of all those people using Microsoft products to day, okay, so how are you using it, and what are the benefits of the way you use it, and we had one set up, for body-worn video, and it still runs at the moment, of how does everyone use body-worn video, and we can use that as a forum to put pressure onto Axon, because we’re all using Axon products, and this is the voice of Australia and New Zealand.

That ability for us all to talk about what we’re doing and how we’re doing it. As you say, it’s all consistent, it’s all the same, we all have the same problems. So, let’s work out how best to – or what the value parts of what we’re doing is, and accelerate ourselves as quickly as we can. There’s a good thing about going last, like it’s Western Australia. We looked at everybody else, and okay, we want to do it this way, because we think it’s some great work.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  You can leapfrog and then you set it up for somebody else to do the same.

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** Absolutely, and my commissioner, and deputy commissioner and CIO are more than happy to release our IP, release our ideas, just come and ask us. And we’re going to make note – nothing off it. We just want to help everybody else move forward.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  Thank you. Well, thank you so much, Darren. Thank you for sharing all of this with our listeners today. I think that was a wealth of information there in terms of the technology, but even more importantly, I think in terms of the approaches and the way that you’re tackling this digital transformation within Western Australia. Where can people go to find out some more about you, or your work, or if they’re interested in being part of those groups? What’s the best way to find you?

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** You cand find me on LinkedIn, Darren Henstock.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**  Fantastic. Well, thank you again, and the very best of luck with all of your next stages in your journey. Thank you for joining us, Darren.

**DARREN HENSTOCK:** Thanks for having me.

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**Olivia Neal:** Thank you to our guest, Darren Henstock and thank you to our listeners for joining me today on *Public Sector Future*. Our goal is for you to learn something new, and be inspired to think differently about your journeys. If you enjoyed today’s episode and want to help others find it, please share, rate and review the show -- it really does help people find and discover new shows like this one. Listen and Subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.

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We encourage you to reach out, send your questions and feedback. You can find me on Twitter at [**@LivNeal**] or on LinkedIn.

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