Notes of the Data Ethics Committee (DEC) meeting 20th November 2025 via Teams

Attendees

Presenters
Fiona Henderson (Assistant Chief Officer, Essex Police)
Simon Wilson (Chief Officer, Kent Police)
Stephen Jennings (Detective Superintendent, Essex Police)
Clayton Ford (Detective Chief Inspector, Essex Police)

ecda members
Wysh Kanesalingam *(Data Partnerships Officer, ecda)*

DEC members
Katerina D Hadjimatheou (Chair)
Yani Tyskerud
Sally Messenger
Anton Beer
Andrew Knott
Lucia Hawkes

Apologies
Karthik Durgaprasad

Project overview
During this committee meeting Essex Police presented two projects, their Live Facial Recognition (LFR) project and Transcription Project. It was noted that whilst the Transcription project was in the early stages of development the LFR project had been ongoing.

Live Facial Recognition Project
This project uses real-time facial recognition technology to identify individuals on pre-defined watchlists, such as suspects wanted for serious crimes or high-risk missing persons. Through deployed CCTV vans at events and high-footfall areas, the system scans faces against the watchlist and discards non-matches within milliseconds, ensuring privacy and compliance. Although this project had previously been reviewed by the DEC, Essex Police sought further feedback at this stage regarding potential bias identified in the algorithm used to match suspects on the watchlist. To address this, Essex Police had engaged Cambridge University and the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) for expert advice on determining the most appropriate threshold settings to minimise bias.

Transcription Project

This project aims to utilise Rapid Video Response (RVR) technology within the control room to automatically generate and populate Domestic Abuse Risk Assessments (DARA) and assess officer performance using real-time transcribed data. Currently RVR is offered on a voluntary basis, where victims can choose a virtual consultation with the RVR team instead of an officer attending in person. DARA assessments, combined with other information sources (such as PNC), are then used to determine risk levels - typically ranging from Standard to High.

Since introducing AI-assisted DARA, Essex Police has been trialling this capability and is currently working with external academics to compare the AI-generated assessments and those completed by officers, including analysis of risk level alignment.

Essex Police has partnered with GoodSAM to develop this tool, confirming it operates as a standalone system and does not use machine learning AI. The RVR response process has to date received positive feedback from victims and the piloting conducted by Essex Police suggest potential benefits to using the AI transcription software in the process of completing the DARA in terms of increased efficiency and reduced time spent on administration, and better engagement with victims during the interview itself due to the reduced need for manual note taking.

Conclusions from Committee discussion

Live Facial Recognition Project

Keep local community at the forefront of the project, bias can work differently for different areas so keep that in mind when looking at work/research done by forces in other areas as the demographic differences may mean different results.

Essex Police recognise the critical balance between protecting human rights and ensuring public safety. Ongoing consultation with the Data Ethics Committee (DEC) and further research will help ensure the technology operates effectively and responsibly for the benefit of the public.

Additionally, understanding control variables in image testing is vital, as this algorithm will inform future policing decisions. Careful design and testing will help avoid bias that disproportionately favours or disadvantages specific groups, reducing the risk of complaints and ensuring fairness.

Transcription Project

The next steps of the project are the evaluation stage. This will be looking at how you integrate this tool into the decision-making process.

Essex Police to look to learn from other forces on how they have improved on error rates in transcription, etc.

Committee observations raised and responses provided:

Live Facial Recognition Project

- The committee raised questions about how Essex Police ensures there is no disparity in interventions. Essex Police clarified that they do not retain facial recognition data post-event; any image not matched to the watchlist is deleted within 0.4 seconds, and CCTV footage is retained for 28 days in compliance with GDPR before being deleted.
  While it is not possible to determine who may have been missed by the algorithm, analysis is underway to review intervention outcomes and identify any potential bias. Research has also focused on refining threshold settings to reduce false positives and improve accuracy.
- In response to concerns that bias could distort crime statistics, Essex Police acknowledging that technology cannot be entirely free from bias, their objective is to

reduce it as much as possible and the research conducted by the University of Cambridge and the National Physical Laboratory (NPL), together with efforts from technology service providers, is helping to uncover the underlying causes of this bias and inform strategies to address it.

- Further analysis has been commissioned to examine whether detection bias translates into bias in subsequent actions, such as interventions or arrests.
- In response to a question on how individuals are selected for inclusion on the watchlist, Essex Police confirmed that the watchlist is compiled using crime statistics, intelligence, and information provided by local policing teams.
  Essex Police also clarified that interventions are proportionate to the severity of the offence. For example, if an individual is flagged for a serious crime, officers in uniform will approach, confirm identity, and conduct checks before proceeding with an arrest. In contrast, for missing persons, the approach is more discreet to minimise attention and impact on the individual. All responses are tailored to the nature and level of the recorded offence.
- Essex Police advised areas for deployment are selected based on a detailed application submitted by Essex Police, which must demonstrate necessity and proportionality, ensuring there is a clear and legitimate policing requirement. They then work closely with local venues and prioritise safeguarding when selecting locations for LFR deployment. This involves liaising with venue management to establish a collaborative partnership. Research has been conducted on the potential impact on businesses and individuals, and findings to date have been positive.

<u>Transcription Project</u>

- Essex Police clarified that officers are generally positive and receptive to using the technology, as they see it as a tool to assist victims. They emphasised that the AI supports officers in their work but does not replace their thought process or professional judgment.
- Essex Police advised that consultation times vary depending on the complexity of the situation. However, based on the limited trial, the use of DARA AI has saved approximately 15 minutes per case. This is primarily due to the AI reducing the need for officers to write risk assessments simultaneously while speaking to or returning to the victim.
- The police clarified that in preliminary assessments the AI's performance is generally better than the manual process, so the impact of errors should not be significantly worse than human-led assessments: AI typically appears to recall more details than officers do during manual processes. An evaluation framework is now in place to monitor and – if needed - improve error rates. The intention is that the AI-generated transcript will only be used in parallel with the officer's own judgment, to ensure both accuracy and accountability.
- Essex Police outlined the performance testing that it has conducted, currently linguistic and AI experts from the University of Essex are involved in reviewing the technology to ensure robust linguistic performance. Additionally, data from other police forces across the country is being used to capture a wide range of accents, dialects, and speech patterns. This approach helps ensure inclusivity and accuracy in the system's performance.
- Essex Police confirmed that victims are informed AI technology will be used at the beginning of the interview. Following this, explicit permission is requested so that

victims can confirm that they are comfortable that the interview is being recorded, and that the information that they provide as part of the process is being transcribed and summarised using AI could be used to help further develop the technology.
- Essex Police confirmed that they are ahead in implementing DARA and AI technology compared to other forces, having invested early in development. While the system is closed, Essex Police provides manual feedback avoiding any personal data, to GoodSAM on any errors identified during trials. GoodSAM then uses this feedback to improve system performance to respond more accurately to recurring issues.

Project recommendations

Live Facial Recognition

- The Committee recommended that the police develop a set of FAQs addressing common public concerns to reassure local communities that their safety and privacy are being actively safeguarded.
- Committee recommended the police seek a simple yet informative way of explaining the LFR technology when communicating to the public to avoid misunderstanding or overcomplications caused by complex language.

Transcription Project

- Committee welcomed the fact that this project is being piloted and evaluated in collaboration with external academics.
- Committee recommended providing a clear explanation to people being interviewed about what the use of AI technology means in this context and how it will be used for the specific purpose of the interview. This should take into account the fact that different victims may have very different levels of exposure to, and understanding of, how AI transcription technology works and it is necessary to ensure transparency and that people have full information for the consent process .It is important not to assume that victims have necessarily used this type of technology before or understand how it would work in practice. In addition, Essex Policy could consider providing accessible follow-up material (e.g., a leaflet, webpage, or digital resource) that victims can review at their own convenience for a more detailed understanding.
- Committee recommended that Essex Police take into consideration whether the accuracy of the transcription software and summaries might differ for people who do not speak English as a first language or have different accents/dialects.
- Committee recommended that if AI was being used in the process of generating a risk level or for decision-making, further piloting, testing, and risk mitigation safeguards would be necessary.

General recommendations

Committee recommended that the LFR project should continue to be discussed at a future DEC meeting.

Essex Police agreed that the Transcription project should be brought back to the DEC once the evaluation process has been completed.