

Knowing where your assets are



osing keys in a custodial environment is a worst-case scenario! Re-keying an establishment isn't the only problem, as keys can also get into the wrong hands. Finding out who was responsible for the loss and when it took place can be difficult. Of course, all this is worse when an incident has taken place. Newbury Police Station recently solved the problem of re-keying by using electronic locks. Now they have also solved the problem of ascertaining who has held the keys, with a system that affords many other benefits into the bargain.

The Newbury custody suite was designed to meet the new 'Safer Custody Programme' requirements. Judy Blake, the Project Manager explained that the cells, corridors and common areas were monitored by CCTV cameras and all custody doors were fitted with new electronic locks, however, keeping track of who had the keys for these locks remained an issue. A system for monitoring the allocation of custody keys was therefore required. This would complete 'the circle of accountability'.

This new solution involved intelligent key management cabinets, which hold micro-chipped key-fobs to which the keys are securely attached. Keys can only be accessed after a member of staff swipes an ID card or enters a pin number. Details are then checked against a database and only, if an officer is authorised, can they open the polycarbonate door and remove a specific key. To aid the user, the appropriate key is illuminated, and it is physically impossible to remove the wrong one. At the end of a shift, the key must be

returned by the same process and the system is sufficiently intelligent to ensure that the key can only be returned to the correct location. Not only does this system help trace what has happened to an item, it encourages staff to take better care of keys in their possession. It's common knowledge that people take more care of something for which they are held personally responsible.

In addition, Managers can instantly find out who has a particular item and when it was allocated. They can restrict the issue of particular items to certain people, and, if it is not returned by a specific time, this can be logged, alarmed and even generate emails or text messages to a line manager or supervisor. A simple interface to a building's access control system can even prevent staff leaving the premises if their key has not been returned. In the case of the Newbury custody suite, the person locked up is the most important 'item'. The Custody Officer who holds the key is therefore responsible for their care. It's now possible to know which key opened the door and who had hold of it. All of this information is held in the database and a full audit of all historical key transactions can easily be checked using the integrated report function.

Should a key be damaged or faulty whilst in use, then an error code can be logged in by the user when it is returned to the cabinet. The system flags this to the Maintenance Engineers and can prevent its reissue until the defect is corrected.

Newbury's chosen solution is a monitoring system that uses technology already common

to the Police & Prison Service. It's made by the UK based award-winning company Traka at its HQ in Olney, Buckinghamshire. 400 similar asset monitoring systems are already in use by 26 Police Forces and installed extensively throughout the Scottish Prison Service.

The company's related product, intelligent lockers, can also be used for managing other important assets, which need to be controlled and their usage monitored - items such as Airwave Handsets, Breathalysers, PAVA Spray, Firearms and Taser Guns. The system can enforce recalibration dates such that 'out of limit' assets can't be used and can even check and prevent user access if a user's licence has expired. When fitted to radios or other high value, maintenance intensive equipment, the system enables accurate reporting of use. With these systems maintenance can be planned, utilisation monitored and breakdowns reduced.

The system was originally created to manage keys and monitor who was using high net-worth assets such as Police fleet cars. Now extended to include intelligent lockers, it is widely used for managing covert operation equipment (Thames Valley Police) and even Evidence & Retained Property management (Hertfordshire Police). It is planned to roll the cell key system out to all the Force Custody Units as budgets allow, as this installation is part of the ongoing development of the Force's Custody estate.

If you would like more information on the Traka system can you please contact the company directly on 01234 712345 or visit www.traka.com.