

# CAPITA

## Achieving superb evidence recording of appeal hearings at London's Parking and Traffic Appeals Service

At its hearing centre at the Angel in Islington, the Parking and Traffic Appeals Service (PATAS) is an independent service hearing appeals against Penalty Charge Notices issued by London's local authorities and Transport for London.

Capita Secure Information solutions (Capita) has upgraded the system used to make audio recordings of the 150 or so hearings held each day. The new system is based on Capita's Digital Interview Recording solution, with bespoke features to meet the specific needs of PATAS.



The recordings are now crystal clear and provide an accurate record of hearings

### Drivers for the relationship

The previous system recorded conversations between adjudicators and appellants with recordings triggered by sound. This meant that there were pauses in recordings and often the first word or so after each pause wasn't recorded.

There was also a problem with overall recording quality. This was largely due to the microphones that were being used, which picked up too much extraneous sound such as the building's air conditioning.

### Capita's solution

The implemented solution is based on the same technology that Capita has installed for numerous police forces across the UK, where it is used to record interviews with witnesses and suspects.

As would be expected, to meet the demands of police forces the technology has been developed with reliability as a priority. The system has its own operating system and database that has proved to be robust in the recording of many thousands of hours of interviews.

This reliability was important to PATAS and was one of the reasons that the Capita solution was chosen. Another factor was Capita's flexibility in modifying its solution to meet the particular needs of PATAS.

## Improving recording quality

The first requirement for PATAS was that recording quality should be improved by the new solution. Capita therefore installed professional-grade microphones in each of the hearing rooms and this has greatly improved recording quality.

"The difference between the previous recordings and the current ones is huge," says Garry Hoy, PATAS Contract Manager. "The recordings are now crystal clear and provide an accurate record of hearings."



## Delivering 'always on' recording

Next, a number of crucial modifications to the standard solution were needed. The main one was that recordings should be made on an 'always on' basis throughout the day. This was in contrast to the requirements of police stations, where recordings are manually started and stopped for each interview.

Garry Hoy explains: "Police stations hold a relatively small number of interviews every day, so recordings are not made on a continuous basis. But for us, up to 150 hearings each day are held from 8.00am to 7.00pm, with just short breaks between each one."

"As a result, it made sense that the recordings should be made continuously, rather than being started and stopped for each hearing. This would make it easier for the adjudicators - as they wouldn't have to manually stop and start recordings - and would ensure no loss of evidence."

The implemented solution therefore sees recording start automatically when an adjudicator logs on to each of the PCs used during hearings. It then stops only when an adjudicator logs off at lunchtime and at the end of the day. In fact, Capita has completely removed the ability to manually stop recordings as an extra level of protection.

As an additional measure to ensure reliability, the old and new systems were run in tandem for one month. This gave sufficient time to address any issues, although these proved to be minor and the new system was fully functional almost from the outset.

## Extra measures for failsafe recording

Another requirement that PATAS specified was that there should be failsafe measures in place to ensure as close to 100% reliability as possible. Capita have achieved this with a number of features:

### Dual microphones

Each of the 13 hearing rooms has two microphones installed in case a microphone or cable should fail.

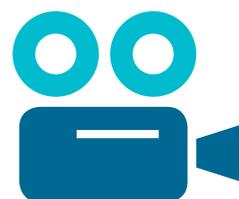
### Twin hard drives

Each room has its own PC running Capita's recording software, and recordings are simultaneously made to two hard drives on each PC.

### Separate server backup

At the end of each day, the voice data on each PC is automatically uploaded to an onsite server for long term storage. In some cases, clients using this technology will prefer to upload to an external server in a secure data centre. However, PATAS has a particularly secure server environment that meets its requirements.

As an additional measure to ensure reliability, the old and new systems were run in tandem for one month. This gave sufficient time to address any issues, although these proved to be minor and the new system was fully functional almost from the outset.



## Summary: A reliable system for evidence recording

"Capita have done an excellent job of tailoring their solution to our requirements," says Garry Hoy. "The delivery of continuous recording sessions was especially important to us, as was the improvement in recording quality and the failsafe measures."

"We actually rarely need to listen back to a recording, but we must have a record of every hearing in case a decision is disputed or the adjudicator needs to refer to a recording for other reasons. Capita's solution now means we have total confidence in our ability to access this crucial evidence should it be called upon."