

Sustainability in Alarm Response – Exploring the impact of sustainability initiatives and carbon-reduction requirements on keyholding and alarm response operations

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Balancing operational efficiencies and customer satisfaction with costs, resources, and legislative obligations is a challenge faced by every security services provider offering keyholding and alarm response.

While mobile security operations must adhere to strict compliance, with BS 7984 standard and SIA licensing for guards at the very core of the operations, security providers are increasingly contending with a wider range of regulations. Among the most pressing are sustainability requirements that are prompting a re-evaluation of long-established operational models.

From the increased sustainability emphasis within the Procurement Act 2023, which may influence major contract allocations, to incoming frameworks such as the UK Sustainability Reporting Standards (UK SRS) or the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) for the EU operations, sustainable practices have shifted decisively from optional to essential. Yet change is rarely quick or easy, and mobile security operations are no exception.

Operational challenges and compliance: a system under pressure

In-house mobile patrol operations follow strict protocols: keys are numbered, sealed, and stored in designated, secure facilities, with quarterly audits in place. For patrols, substantial quantities of keys are transported in reinforced vehicles, significantly heavier than a standard transit van.

For many established security providers, these processes have been refined over years of practice. But increasing pressure to reduce carbon emissions is pushing companies to reassess their approach.

At first glance, the answer may seem simple: transition to electric fleet. In reality, the challenge is far more nuanced. Specialised patrol vans require higher load-bearing capacity to accommodate reinforced structures and heavy key lockers, capabilities not yet widely matched by available electric models. And where suitable options do exist, cost may become a limiting factor. The upfront capital cost of electric vans (even before specialist fit-out) remains significantly higher than for diesel equivalents. Although lower running costs over time can help balance the investment, the initial outlay can still place substantial financial pressure on organisations managing large mobile fleets.

An alternative approach is to use lighter vehicles and remove key storage from vans. But this introduces new complexities. Patrol guards may need to collect keys from a central point for every callout, slowing response times, or providers may need to adopt a dual-response model in which a keyless patrol attends first and waits for keys to arrive.

Offsetting emissions: a short-term fix, not a long-term strategy

A seemingly simple option is to offset emissions and pursue Net Zero compliance. Although better than taking no action, offsetting schemes remain controversial and are often criticised as “greenwashing.”

The core issue is that offsetting does not reduce emissions generated by day-to-day operations. Instead, it can function as a temporary workaround, supporting programmes with uncertain long-term outcomes. While offsetting may still play a useful role, it is rarely sufficient on its own.

Is outsourcing the answer? The high cost of letting go

Given these challenges and operational complexities, it is unsurprising that some large security and facilities management organisations turn to outsourcing. On paper, outsourcing keyholding and alarm response can eliminate the need to transport and safeguard keys internally. No keys, no problems!

Yet, this keyholding pass-the-parcel comes with its own risks, particularly the loss of operational control. Providers become dependent on contractors’ processes and performance while remaining accountable to their clients. With limited oversight, they cannot directly influence response times, procedural compliance, or key-management integrity. Although contractors can face penalties for breaches, strained client relationships and jeopardised renewals pose significant commercial risks.

Technology to the rescue

There is, however, room for optimism. Security technology is advancing rapidly, enabling sophisticated remote site monitoring and intrusion detection through AI-driven systems and IoT devices. Modern SOC’s are increasingly data-led, with enhanced capability to identify false alarms and reduce unnecessary site visits.

As these technologies evolve, companies must adapt, though transformation inevitably comes with costs. In the longer term, keyless access may become the norm, reducing reliance on physical keyholding. But that future is not yet fully realised, and the operational challenges, along with associated emissions, remain very much in place.

Alternative methods gain momentum

It's no surprise that security providers are increasingly exploring alternative keyholding approaches that maintain strong physical security while improving efficiency and reducing emissions.

As an example, one of the largest global security companies is adopting SentiGuard, a smart key management solution across its European mobile operations. SentiGuard stores keys at the point of entry in a certified key vault (LPS 1175, SR2 - C1 & C3) and is managed remotely via a cloud-based platform that also offers full access audit.

By shifting to this model, the organisation is streamlining keyholding processes, reducing audit complexity, and maintaining robust protection for commercial customers. Crucially, it also supports more sustainable fleet management by allowing lighter electric vehicles to be used, as keys no longer need to be transported during patrols.

Compliance considerations: scrutiny remains essential

Any new solution must be accompanied by rigorous due diligence. Both the physical and digital security of systems like SentiGuard and their alternatives require thorough evaluation before deployment.

The scope of assessment will depend on risk and minimum security requirements. This may include reviewing loss prevention or security certifications, performance ratings, ISO compliance, hardware origin, and digital security auditing.

Usability also plays a key role, particularly the ability to revoke access for individuals or groups remotely and run audit reports on the visits that have already taken place. SentiGuard, for example, is managed via a dedicated platform that enables these controls and provides additional operational alerts, including key detection in the vaults and device battery-status monitoring.

The future is bright. But only for those ready to adapt

Keyholding and mobile operations are undergoing a period of significant change, driven by environmental pressures, rising in-house operational costs, and rapid technological development. In an era where fleet emissions can represent a substantial share of a mobile security provider's carbon footprint, adapting is no longer optional.

Success will depend on embracing new technologies, rethinking long-standing processes, and investing in models that deliver both sustainability benefits and reliable service. Those who move early will set the pace for the industry, reduce long-term costs, and strengthen client confidence in a sector undergoing faster-than-expected transformation. And, perhaps, innovative systems like SentiGuard will help the sector move closer to that balance.

Learn more about SentiGuard on www.keyneticsltd.co.uk.