

Swale Public Space CCTV Strategy

Policy Development and Review Committee (PDRC) Briefing Note

Introduction

This paper discusses the background of the current Public Space CCTV Service and considerations for priorities for the CCTV Strategy that is being compiled, for discussion by PDRC.

A CCTV Strategy is to be developed following a comprehensive review of the existing CCTV service. This review has assessed options for monitoring and technology requirements and highlighted a number of difficulties. The main conclusion that there is a need to drastically change the way in which the service operates and a need to clarify its current and future objectives.

History of the Public Space CCTV Service

Public Space CCTV was installed in Swale in 1994/1995, following the receipt of funding from the Home Office to 'prevent and detect crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB)'. This was part of a wider, national, roll out of CCTV in public spaces for crime prevention purposes as technology had advanced to enable more than one camera to be monitored/record at once, in colour. Cameras were remotely monitored to detect and prevent crime, with their footage being used by the Police as evidence in criminal proceedings.

Funding was also provided over the following years by Parish Councils and other groups of private individuals and businesses (e.g. Neighbourhood Watch and South Eastern Trains) to install systems to meet their needs, monitored by the Council as part of the wider public space CCTV service. This led to a large completely random system, covering various parts of the borough – both town centres and residential areas.

The CCTV Control Room has been linked closely through radio systems to Kent Police and the local Business Crime Reduction Partnership, Swale Safe. This increased the detection of incidents from both the Police and local retailers, whilst enabling the sharing of information.

During the period within which public space CCTV has been operated by councils, there has been a large increase in the technology available to the public – with a large number of residential properties and businesses hosting their own CCTV system; along with almost every member of the community owning their own mobile device with increasingly sophisticated recording capabilities. This has increased the amount of evidence available to Police forces for their investigations, along with all officers being equipped with Body Worn Cameras.

This increase in private systems has in part led to some Councils switching off their public space CCTV. With many councils facing increasing funding pressures and limited national research to fully justify its effectiveness some have moved to no system or reduced monitoring hours/recording only.

CCTV technology has continued to advance since the Swale system was originally installed. Technology will now allow for a fully digitised system, with better recorded images and the increasing use of analytics (such as facial recognition), working towards more automated systems with limited to no operators.

The Current Public Space CCTV System

The Swale Public Space CCTV Service was moved to Medway Council in 2010, to increase its effectiveness following failures with the private contract in place for its monitoring from the Swale House Control Room. This new Partnership was to provide a more cost effective service from its control room in Strood.

In 2012, this Partnership was widened to include Maidstone and Gravesham Councils. In 2015, Medway Council sub contracted its responsibilities for this Partnership to Medway Commercial Group (MCG), which is still responsible currently for the monitoring of Swale's 49 CCTV Cameras, 24/7/365.

The Partnership Agreement has been extended until March 2020 by SBCs Cabinet, to allow time for the completion and implementation of a CCTV Strategy. However, Maidstone Council are also reviewing their monitoring options and it is likely they may withdraw from the Partnership. The financial implications are not fully understood and are being explored by the respective legal departments.

The current public space CCTV service also encompasses delivery of the out of hours emergency planning and housing responses for the Authority.

Legislation

There is no Statutory Duty to deliver CCTV. However Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places an obligation on local authorities to consider the crime, disorder and environmental issues affecting the local area and ensure their activities do all they reasonably can to prevent them. The implementation and monitoring of CCTV is one activity delivered by Swale Borough Council that contributes towards this obligation.

Increases in public space surveillance nationally, along with wider technological advances, led to pressure groups campaigning to protect civil liberties, privacy and freedom. This in part led to the introduction of the Surveillance Code of Practice in 2013. The purpose of the code was to ensure that individuals and wider communities have confidence that surveillance cameras are deployed to protect and support them, rather than spy on them. The code introduced operational principles to ensure all public space CCTV is in pursuit of a legitimate aim. The most important of these principles include that CCTV must be necessary to meet a pressing need; proportionate; effective, and compliant with any relevant legal obligations.

The delivery and management of the CCTV system must also have consideration for:

- Data Protection Act 2018
- General Data Protection Regulations
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers (RIPA) 2000
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012

CCTV Review Findings

To support and validate the CCTV review, technology experts Global MSC were commissioned to provide advice regarding the current system and possible future delivery options. Their findings highlighted that the current system is very outdated (being an aged analogue system), with many cameras and equipment having reached or nearing the end of their life with parts becoming harder to source.

The CCTV review has also highlighted other difficulties:

- The quality of the footage recorded is rarely of evidential standard in low lighting areas or when the recording has been retrospectively interrogated i.e. zooming required as part of investigation on a recording.
- The data/footage from the cameras is fed back to the control room through BT Fibre Lines. These are expensive and inflexible to move.
- The operating model used for monitoring by MCG means the operator does not always have the local knowledge of the borough to effectively detect incidents;
- Lack of ability to prove the deterrent effect of the system, from either the statistics collated by MCG, Kent Police or from national research;
- Lack of evidence to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of the existing system;
- Any upgrade programme could take a minimum of 9 months to implement

Current Service Performance

The number of incidents logged by operators has been declining. During 2016/17, operators logged 1735 incidents which is an average of 4.8 per day. During 2017/18, operators only logged 728 incidents, averaging at only 2 per day. For April-August 2018, there have been 185 incidents logged.

This reduction may in part be linked to the diversification of the operating model used by MCG following Medway Council subcontracting the Partnership service to the newly formed company in 2016. However the reduction may also be linked to a reduction in Police resource based within the town centres to raise issues to CCTV Operators. It could also be linked to the increase in availability of CCTV evidence from private systems (members of the public and businesses) along with the introduction of Body Worn Cameras to Kent Police.

For September 17 – end August 18, there were 56 arrests which is an average of less than one per day.

It is hard to demonstrate the preventative element of CCTV monitoring – research has shown that CCTV is at its most effective when it is not used in isolation – experience shows operating in town centres in conjunction with schemes such as Swale Safe and local Police is likely to yield the most effective results.

The CCTV system is also utilised by the Police for retrospective reviews of incidents that have occurred and where it has been detected, the provision of that evidence. The number of footage reviews completed between September 17 and end August 2018, there were 373 footage reviews of which 349 were for the Police (an average of 0.97 per day). 130 of these resulted in the footage being downloaded and made available to the Police (but 17% were not collected and later destroyed).

Future Objectives

The current objective of the Public Space CCTV Service is to Prevent and Detect Crime and ASB.

However, it does deliver against a number of other objectives that need to be formalised if they are to continue, which are:

- Support vulnerable members of the community (e.g. missing people, welfare concern)
- Provision of evidence to support Police Investigations
- Increase the public perception of safety
- Support responses to the management of emergencies
- Assist in town centre and event management
- Delivery of Council out of hours support (housing and emergency planning)

There are also a number of further objectives that could be considered -

- Delivery of town centre wi-fi – if an upgrade to the field cameras was completed and the transmission changed to wireless, a town centre wi-fi network could be introduced. This could provide community to access free internet access. It could also aid the delivery of cash-less parking machines and access for the markets to card machines as examples.
- Commercial objectives such as alarm monitoring; assist in traffic management; and monitoring of private CCTV if under an agreement. These are not current objectives but are offered by other monitoring centres and bring in revenue to those organisations.

Monitoring Options

Depending on the objectives agreed for the CCTV service, there are various monitoring options that could be explored for the service:

- Continue in the existing Medway Partnership with a control room managed by Medway Commercial Group;
- Create a wholly SBC managed control room, within the new Multi-Storey Car park
- Create a new local authority CCTV Partnership, either at another local authority control room or within an SBC managed one;
- Tender for monitoring service;
- Tender for an automated monitoring service;
- To not monitor at all.

Monitoring Hours

Consideration needs to be given to the monitoring hours of the service as this is the largest ongoing expense and the service needs to be cost effective. The monitoring hour options are:

- Continue with live monitoring 24 hours a day, 365 days a week;
- Reduce the monitoring hours to be inline with peak crime/ASB times – this as an example could be 08:00 – 17:00 Mon-Thurs and 08:00 – 01:00 Friday and Saturday.
- No active monitoring – the system records only and is reviewed retrospectively as required.
- No active monitoring, apart from special events or emergency incidents.
- Automated monitoring (artificial intelligence led)

Technology Options – Equipment

The existing system is aged and is presenting a number of difficulties as already highlighted. If the service is to continue in the long term, an upgrade of equipment is essential.

The current individual cameras could be upgraded as required, rather than a full system upgrade, however this would not be onto a digital platform and would end up with a piece meal system much as it is currently.

A Digital Upgrade to High Definition cameras would see a number of benefits including:

- Better standard of recorded images – these would be of evidential quality, even in lower lighting, and would not require the images to have been ‘zoomed in’ at the time of recording;
- Increased ease of access to recordings;
- Increasing analytical capability, depending on the model of cameras selected. These would allow for programming to identify concerns and with technology and software continually improving this will change the role of traditional CCTV monitoring.

Technology Options – Transmission

For the existing system, the data from each camera is fed back to the control room via BT Fibre Lines. These are expensive and inflexible. If the system was upgraded to Digital, these Fibre Lines would also need upgrading.

An alternative option would be to upgrade the system to wireless transmission. Each town centre would have its cameras linked together wirelessly, however due to the distances, Sheerness and Faversham would need to have a method of bringing the data back to Sittingbourne so two primary fibre lines would still be required.

The benefits of a wireless system would be:

- Future opportunity to deliver town centre wi-fi
- A more flexible system and ability to move cameras
- Cheaper annual costs

Service Costs

The current service costs for 2018/19 are:

- CCTV Partnership - £221,967 (of which approx. £112,000 relate to operator costs; £56,500 relates to management costs; £25,000 relates to maintenance costs; and £15,000 Capital relates to repairs and renewals).
- Fibre Line Transmission Costs - £41,500
- Mobile Camera deployment and download costs - £10,000
- Electricity and Insurance - £4,000

The service is funded solely by Swale Borough Council. A conversation was held with the Police and Crime Commissioner regarding whether he or the Police would make a contribution towards the service. However it was advised that this would not be forthcoming. The Community Safety Partnership receives a small grant from the PCC which could be utilised towards CCTV, however its allocation is a Partnership decision based upon CSP priorities and there is no requirement to allocate to CCTV.

Indicative future service costs, depending on objectives and monitoring/equipment options are:

- Upgraded cameras and recorders purchase and installation - £150k (with ongoing replacement fund required)
- Control room equipment purchase and installation - £11k
- Wireless system hardware purchase and installation - £90k
- Ongoing revenue costs would vary depending on monitoring options chosen

Next Steps

There needs to be agreement of future objectives for the service and priorities to move forward.

A draft Strategy and Action Plan will be compiled and presented again to PDRC. There will need to be consultation with key groups including Kent Police and Swale Safe as a minimum.

It is aimed that the final Strategy will be in place for Spring 2019.