



Surrey County Council's Local Committee in Epsom and Ewell

The Future of CCTV

29th September, 2003

KEY ISSUE

This report considers how CCTV monitoring and use might develop in the future.

SUMMARY

CCTV development in Epsom and Ewell has reached a point where any significant expansion will need a concurrent investment in additional or alternative monitoring capacity. This report considers how the County Council might assist in achieving cost effective monitoring capacity and best use of the information it provides.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Committee agrees that the Local Director continues discussions with Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, other Boroughs and Districts and Surrey Police seeking agreement to the formation of a two or more Borough monitoring station of sufficient size to justify a permanent Police presence;
2. That the Executive be requested to support investigating the development of a two or more Borough monitoring station and provide technical and professional support as required; and
3. That the Committee receive further reports as appropriate.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 There are arguments in favour of and against the installation of CCTV equipment. CCTV has four main purposes: reassurance, deterrence, detection and intervention. The mere presence of CCTV cameras can reassure members of the public that they are safe and are being looked after. The inappropriate location of cameras can, however, have the opposite effect and alarm the public by implying that an otherwise peaceful place may suffer from crime and disorder problems. Again, the presence of CCTV cameras can deter people from committing a crime or indulging in disorder. It is also the case, however, that CCTV cameras can also displace criminal activity from within the range of cameras to locations away from their view. Cameras that record a crime can supply useful evidence to identify the perpetrator and support a prosecution although many people who take part in street crime wear hooded jackets or otherwise make identification difficult. Cameras that show a crime being committed can alert the Police or security staff and enable intervention to take place to protect the victim and, perhaps, arrest the perpetrator. This last purpose of CCTV equipment can only be reliably performed if there is constant monitoring of the images produced by the cameras and rapid communication with and intelligent direction of the Police or security staff.

1.2 The images from the CCTV installation in Epsom Town Centre and Ewell Village are monitored in the control room for the Ashley Centre. Monitoring is undertaken to a high standard during the opening hours of the Ashley Centre when the control room is fully staffed. Outside the Centre's operating hours, cameras are monitored by the security staff as much as their other duties allow. If and when the cameras pick up incidents which are seen by the security staff, they contact the police by telephone using a priority number. These arrangements which have been in place for a number of years are both innovative and cost effective. They do not, however, provide the constant monitoring that which is necessary to obtain the best value from the investment in the CCTV cameras nor do they enable two-way communication with Police Officers investigating the incident. The capacity of the Ashley centre control has been virtually reached as the current security staff cannot realistically monitor the outputs from many more cameras, if any.

1.3 In addition to these real-time cameras, there are a number of other public sector CCTV systems in use in the Borough which are not monitored. These systems only record images for later inspection if an incident has occurred. Such systems may provide limited reassurance and deterrence and certainly can help with detection. They do not provide any assistance in intervening while a crime is being committed.

1.4 The most modern CCTV monitoring or control stations make extensive use of computers to undertake most of the monitoring. Computers are programmed to show images on the monitoring screens only when the images conform to certain parameters. For example, a camera monitoring an underpass will record all of the time but display its image to control room staff only when there is movement within its field of view. Similarly, cameras in the internal corridors of a block of flats may display images only when there is rapid movement, such as

running, or shouting. Computers can be programmed to show images in almost any conceivable set of circumstances. The advantage of this is that each member of staff can monitor a much higher number of cameras. Monitoring represents the highest recurring cost of CCTV systems and one which is generally not met from grants which are, from time to time, available for cameras, wiring and control rooms.

1.5 If a large number of cameras are fed to the same control room, the unit cost of providing the latest computer monitoring equipment is reduced. Also, if the outputs of a critical number of cameras are available in the same location, Surrey Police may well be persuaded that it is worthwhile to staff the centre permanently to enable Police Officers to be directed to suspects or moving incidents via the Police radio network.

1.6 Other aspects of more modern CCTV technology include vehicle number plate recognition where cars passing within range of certain CCTV cameras have their registration numbers read and compared, virtually instantaneously, with the Police National Computer's list of suspect vehicles. Control room staff can be alerted to a suspect vehicle within 1.5 seconds. Also, it is possible for facial recognition software to be installed to pick out suspect individuals.

1.7 The number of locations within Epsom and Ewell that justify CCTV installation does not now and probably never will be high enough to reach the critical mass necessary to justify a permanent Police presence within the control room. Similarly, the cost of the latest IT could not be spread across sufficient cameras to make upgrading cost-effective. Accordingly, it is considered necessary to investigate the possibility of a cross-Borough/District control room. The distance at which monitoring takes place from the camera really makes little difference to its effectiveness although there is merit in a degree of local knowledge especially when suspects move out of range of cameras.

1.8 The possibility of moving into the next generation of CCTV monitoring has been discussed with colleagues from the Borough Council who recognise the impending need to change the existing arrangements. These colleagues support the concept of investigating cross-boundary collaboration. Similarly, informal discussions with Surrey Police locally have indicated support for any arrangements which obtain better value from the existing investment and provide more assistance to Officers on the ground.

1.9 If the proposals set out in this report are approved, the next step would be to survey arrangements in the other Boroughs and Districts beginning with those covered by the same Police Division as Epsom and Ewell. It is also suggested that the County could contribute to the development of proposals by providing limited technical and other professional support and, therefore, it is suggested that the Executive be asked to endorse the proposal to investigate further the prospect of a cross-boundary control room.

2. CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

2.1 For existing and future CCTV installations to deliver all four of the benefits that they are capable of providing, better monitoring and communication arrangements are needed. For reasons of scale, it is currently thought that these arrangements would need to be made on a cross-Borough/District basis.

Responsible Officer:	Mike Howes Local Director	020 8541 7930
Contact Officer :	Kirsty Light Local Support Officer	020 8541 7062

Background Papers: