

## CCTV: Fact or Fiction

### **Introduction**

There are many views on CCTV. Some people are opposed to it and some for it. This is a good thing. It is obviously easier to do your job if you have the public's support but it is also good that there are checks and balances in place provided by people opposed to CCTV. This ensures that you do your job properly, obey the legislation and do not abuse your position.

The problem is of course as with any debate, there are some who will manipulate the facts or statistics or put out false information for their own ends. I do not claim that this is a learned paper or that it will set the world on fire with some startling revelation, it won't. However I do intend to address some of these issues from a CCTV Managers point of view based on my experience in the job.

I must stress that the views expressed in this paper are my own and in no way reflect the attitude or policies of Cambridge City Council.

#### **1. There are 4.2 million CCTV cameras in use in the UK.**

Fiction: Nobody knows how many cameras there are. Various figures have been suggested and many opposed to CCTV are not above miscalculating or massaging figures to fit their argument but the figure of 4.2 million is the one that most people use. This figure was arrived at by a Professor Norris counting the number of cameras in Putney High Street in London and then estimating the number of cameras in use in the UK. Sadly he did not even differentiate between the different types of camera in use but just lumped them all in together.

Recent surveys show that there are **327** Local Authority CCTV Control Rooms operating about **32,000** Public Space CCTV cameras. If we accept the figure of 4.2 million that means that only about **.75%** are Public Space cameras.

So what about the other **99.25%** of cameras. These are in shops, homes, transport systems, hospitals, pubs and clubs, work sites and office buildings and so on. Many of them are of poor quality and are not covered by any legislation unlike the Local Authority cameras, which are governed, by legislation, guidelines, policies, codes of practices and audits.

#### **2. I am caught on camera 300 times a day.**

Fiction: Not on Public Space cameras in Cambridge you are not. Unless of course you are determined to be caught on camera and have

nothing more interesting to do and believe me that will take not only a great deal of time but also a lot of effort.

CCTV staff do not have the time or the resources to follow or take an interest in everybody. We only look at people who are acting suspiciously or we know have committed a crime or have become distressed or unwell.

### 3. **We are becoming a Surveillance Society.**

Richard Thomas, the then Information Commissioner used the term 'Surveillance Society' in an interview with the Times newspaper in August 2004 in response to government plans to introduce ID cards. Since then its meaning has been widened to include issues around DNA, CCTV and other Data collection.

So are we becoming a surveillance society? No not really because we have always been a surveillance society to a certain degree. Historically there have always been groups who have watched members of society on behalf of others. Whether this was the church in the middle ages, Walsingham's spy net work in the Tudor period, the social reform groups in the Victorian period, anti spy campaigns during world war's one and two and the cold war period or anti terrorist operations in the 20<sup>th</sup> and start of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. All societies to a greater or lesser extent have been surveillance societies.

So what is different about today. First are the advances in technology. Prior to our current period most surveillance and the processing of information was done manually. We are now in a digital age where the collection and collation of information can be collected using sophisticated equipment (although some things are still done manually).

Prior to 1998 there were no real safe guards to protect the public from the state, public bodies and others could pretty well do as they wished. After 1998 that was no longer the case. With the introduction of the Data Protection Act 1998, The Human Rights Act 2000 and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. Safe guards were put in place to ensure that people's rights were protected and that any gathering of personal data was done lawfully and the people gathering that data had to justify why they were gathering it and are held accountable for their conduct.

### 4. **CCTV Invades My Privacy.**

First of all we need to remember that CCTV staff are only going to take an Interest in a person if they believe they have committed or are about to commit a crime.

## Zoom 5



If we look at the image on the left what does it tell us? That it's a bright sunny day and that in the images we have a white male with short grey hair, of slim build wearing black shoes, blue trousers, blue fleece and white shirt. That he is probably in his late forties and between 5 feet 9 inches and 6 feet tall. He is standing by the railing of Great St Mary's Church on the junction of St Mary's Passage and Market Hill near Barclays Bank.

So all we can tell by looking through a CCTV camera is what you look like, where you are and what you are doing and that is all the CCTV Operator knows about an individual observed on camera and we will only keep this image for 31 days and then it is destroyed and will not be retrievable.

We do not know your name, date of birth, address, occupation, nationality, religion, whether you have a partner or children or in fact anything else about you and frankly we do not want to know.

The truth is that your store loyalty card, bank, credit card company and if you belong to one your social network knows far more about you than we ever will and the information will be retained and shared with others often without your knowledge for a considerable amount of time. So the biggest threat to individuals privacy is they individual themselves and not a Public Space CCTV camera.

Whilst we are on the subject of privacy lets also deal with private space. The Public Space CCTV cameras are exactly that, they cover public spaces such as streets, parks etc. There are occasions when they are in close proximity to houses and the last thing either the occupant or the CCTV Operator wants is for the camera to be looking into bedrooms or living rooms.



To ensure that cameras cannot look into private areas they are fitted with a 'Privacy Zone' (see left). As a camera swings around towards a private area, the screen is blacked out and the computer takes control of the camera and moves the camera away from the private area. This stops the camera and the CCTV Operator from viewing private spaces. If the Privacy Zone is activated, CCTV Operators have to justify their actions.

Cambridge City Council's Public Space CCTV system does not use covert or dummy cameras. We will not target an individual unless it has been requested on a Regulation of Investigatory Power Act (RIPA) Authorisation Form. We will then check that the request is Proportionate, Legal, Appropriate and Necessary before we will allow our cameras to be used. The CCTV staff **will not** instigate a RIPA request.

5. **CCTV Displaces Crime.**

The jury is still out on this one. Most crimes are specific to certain areas. For example drugs dealers will normally go where their customers are i.e. nightclubs. People with addictions need money on a regular basis to feed their habit. The best way to get the money is to go where small attractive items are available to steal and sell on. City and town centres tend to be the places where these items are available. Drink related crimes normally occur outside pubs, clubs and late night food establishments where crowds gather and again these tend to be in city and town centres.

This is not to ignore the fact that crime happens outside these areas. Of course they do whether it's burglary, domestic violence or anti-social behaviour, we need to be aware that crimes happen everywhere but they do tend to stay within the same boundaries.

The only volume crime that does appear to show some signs of displacement are vehicle crimes i.e. the theft of or from vehicles. The introduction of better lighting, security guards and CCTV cameras has resulted in a drop in these crimes in car parks and it does appear to a certain extent to have migrated onto the streets, particularly in residential areas.

6. **CCTV Does Not Work. We Should Scrap the Cameras and Use the Money to Employ More Police Officers.**

This one is a biggy and we will need to look at different parts of it separately. If we deal with the money issues first. The police and CCTV are funded from completely different sources. The police obtain their funding from the Home Office. CCTV is funded by Local Authorities through the Council Tax and income for monitoring other organisations cameras. Apart from some assistance in the 1990's from the Home Office to set up CCTV systems no other money has been received from Central Government.

If we are realistic in the current financial climate, I think that most people will understand that the chances of seeing more 'Bobbies on the Beat' is wishful thinking and is just not going to happen. Likewise it

is highly unlikely that there will be substantial increases CCTV coverage by Local Authorities.

This is all very well but what do we get for our money? This is a fair question, does CCTV give value for money? Let us look at what CCTV does first of all:

- a. Pro-active monitoring allows CCTV Control Rooms to alert the police to incidents in progress (Bristol University claims a study shows people attacked in camera view suffer less severe injuries).
- b. CCTV is able to provide clear unbiased evidence of an incident. Clearly showing what happened and who was responsible for what (and who was not involved).
- c. Deputy Chief Constable of Cheshire has described CCTV as the third forensic science stating in ranks as high if not higher than fingerprints or DNA in successfully investigating crime.
- D. Under RIPA authorisation gathering evidence of major organised criminal activities or terrorist incidents.
- e. Savings in police and court time and money. Many caught on CCTV plead guilty.
- f. Tracing missing or vulnerable people, or the victims of serious crimes such as murder victims last known movements or last known associates.
- g. CCTV provides a 'Guardian Angel' service, looking out for people who need help, protecting emergency services and council officers on call outs at night, providing a monitoring service for lone workers and acting as the Out of Hours contact point for people who wish to report emergencies concerning their home or neighbourhood.
- h. It provides a texting service to enable people to report criminal activity and for those who feel threatened to call for assistance.
- i. CCTV is able to assist the police and the council in controlling major incidents and events by providing overall coverage of a wide area. This also helps to enhance the safety of the public and prevent and detect criminal activity.
- j. It helps to protect people and property in vulnerable areas such as car parks.
- k. Finally in the current financial climate both the Audit Commission and HM Inspector of Constabulary (see The Times

20<sup>th</sup> July 2010 and the Cambridge Evening News of the same date) state that it is likely that police resources are going to be severely stretched and that they will be unable to continue to provide the level of service on the streets and to the public that they did previously. The Home Secretary on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2010 stated that only about 14% of police time is currently on the beat. If proposed cuts are going to make this figure worse the CCTV coverage of public space will become critical to allow the police to deploy their resources more efficiently.

The annual cost of running Cambridge City Council's CCTV system is £784k much of this cost is off set by income received for monitoring other organisations cameras and providing an Out of Hours call service. The system has made savings in its running costs of £63k over the last three years and efforts to make more savings continue.

Each cameras costs just under £0:50p per hour to run. Normal incidents cost £3:40p each to deal with whilst more serious incidents can cost up to £68:00p to deal with.

A brand new police officer starts their career on just over £23,000 per year. A CCTV cameras costs 0:50p per hour to run. CCTV cameras in Cambridge operate 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year (including holidays). They do not take holidays or sick leave and operate in all weathers. There is no question that a CCTV camera can replace a police officer, they cannot. But considering all that the CCTV system and it's staff do I think 0:50p per hour per camera is pretty good value for money.

The next element is that CCTV does not work or the images are rubbish. There is an element of truth in this and many people will have see those awful quality images on television. The problem is that the vast majority of these images are old or come from the **99.25%** of cameras we were discussing earlier. Many of these cameras are old, badly maintained, operated by untrained people and are often very cheap systems which just are not up to the job.

Like everything else in life you get what you pay for. In contrast the Local Authority CCTV systems use high quality, well maintained equipment which is operated by carefully selected well trained and motivated staff and the whole system is subject to legislation, guidelines, procedures, codes of practice and audits and the equipment must be fit for purpose.

So does CCTV work? In the case of Local Authority run CCTV systems the answer is yes. I will not bore you with statistics, they are available in detail on this website. But from those statistics you can see that we deal with a substantial number of incidents (both crime and non-crime) each year and although CCTV cameras do not arrests people, we do assist the police in making a significant number of arrests each year.

One of the most time consuming and expensive elements in dealing with crime is the investigation. The police need to find out where and when it happened, what happened, who was involved and where can they be found and who exactly did what to whom. With CCTV all of this is answered in one go. All the investigating officer has to do is collect the visual evidence from the CCTV Control Room and all of those questions are normally answered, saving the police time and money.

The second part of this process is also expensive and that is the court case especially if the defendant decides to plead not guilty. The Metropolitan Police claim that **75%** of people caught on CCTV plead guilty. This obviously cuts down on the cost to the Criminal Justice System and stops the stress for witnesses who would otherwise have had to go to court.

#### 7. **CCTV is the 'Silver Bullet' to Beat Crime.**

False. Crime and the causes of crime are far too complicated and issue to have one simple solution. People much more intelligent, educated and experienced than me have wrestled with the problems around the causes of crime and solutions to it for many years and still have not come up with the answer. So all we can do is develop a 'tool box' of measures to deal with crime. This ranges from legislation, architects designing out crime, improving street lighting and furniture, education and youth activities and of course CCTV.

So CCTV is just one of the tools in the fight against crime in the anti-crime toolbox. But none the less it is a very effective tool, which is capable of producing results quickly, and ensuring the minimum of damage is done whilst helping to catch offenders and hopefully help to make people feel safer.

I stand by my earlier statement that better people than me have tried to find the causes and then the solutions to crime. But having been a CCTV Manager for a number of years I have developed three theories on these issues.

First although suggestions for the causes of crime range from social deprivation, poor education, the cycle of violence and so on. I have noticed in some criminal's actions a more basic instinct. And that is risk against reward. Will they get caught or hurt if they do this, is the risk worth it. If the reward outweighs the risk, they will commit the crime. I don't know about other people but I often see people apologising for committing an offence but often feel that they are really apologising for getting caught.

Second is the issue of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). There are without doubt a small minority of people who are responsible for a substantial proportion of ASB within areas. But the other thing, which has become clear to me over the years, is that what some people label, as ASB

especially against young people is not actually ASB but rather intolerance in the people making the complaint. Young people have always gathered together and been a bit rowdy even I suspect those people who complain when they were younger. It's just that they have forgotten what it was like to get out of the house on a boring afternoon and to meet up with your mates and have a laugh. It is a shame that the vast majority of young people who are basically good decent individuals are labelled with the same tag as the real troublemakers.

Finally it is clear to me that the police, government legislation and initiatives and all the other measures within the anti-crime tool box will not reduce crime significantly until we know what the causes are and I am sure that is a long way off.

But again based on my experience, if you want to drive out crime, ASB, the fear of crime and make areas safer, you must engage with the public. Crime affects the whole of society and I am convinced that is where the solution will be found.

If the public are recruited into the fight against the bad guys (and girls) especially in the areas where they live it will have a marked effect on crime and ASB. To do this successfully we need to encourage civic responsibility and give people a safe and reliable means of reporting criminals and criminal activity within their neighbourhood, and most importantly of all people must see results as this will encourage them into taking more responsibility for their areas.

## 8. **Comments.**

If you wish to comment on anything I have said in this paper or offer any suggestions or views of your own, you can E-mail me at [martin.beaumont@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:martin.beaumont@cambridge.gov.uk)

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