

Minutes

Economic Scrutiny Panel

27th November, 2007, Newton Hall Community Centre

Present: Councillor Hopgood (in the Chair)
and Councillors Bartle, Colledge, Kelly, Lightley, Marsden, Simpson and Stoddart

Also Present: Chief Inspector Ivan Wood
Inspector Dick Dodds,
Inspector Ian Proud
Mr Keith Davis – Community Safety Officer
Councillor Kellett and Portfolio Holder for Communities,
Councillor Thomson

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Plews, Simmons and Wilkes

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30th October, 2007 were agreed as a true record, subject to the record of Councillor Thomson's attendance being included.

3. Scrutiny of CCTV

Members had attended a tour of the control room and had signed a declaration of secrecy, they had witnessed the cameras at work, the storage of discs and how the photographic evidence is used.

The Community Safety Manager informed the Panel that separate deployable cameras are used in areas identified as hot spots. These cameras are funded by the Partnership, it costs £5000 to update the camera system onto the 3G network. While the images are good they are not of the same quality as those used by the control room.

Covert cameras require different lenses and two cameras are required, this type of camera is excellent for acquiring evidence of fly tipping or anti social behaviour.

How valuable is the CCTV service to the Police?

CCTV is an excellent preventative tool, but how can this be proved. Some towns in the County do not have CCTV systems and there were increases in retail crime and other crimes. The Police use the evidence to prove offences have been committed.

The Police Officers in attendance were asked about funding issues.

The Police will use CCTV but will not fund it, the Police do not fund any CCTV. Partnership funding is obtained through Government Office for mobile CCTV.

Are Police happy with where the cameras?

There are communications could be better, there are also training issues of control staff concerning what resources should be used. The Police are appreciative of CCTV but in some cases this costs the Police in terms of personnel deployed to an incident.

Inspector Proud informed the Panel that a draft report had been sent to the Executive Director for comments and that there were various recommendations. Once the report has been finalised a copy will be sent to the Panel.

Councillors suggested that there was an emphasis on the City rather than the villages. The Community Safety Officer informed the Panel that every Councillor wanted to use the cameras but the fairest system was based on the numbers of calls received, this is intelligence lead. A village has the use of the camera for twelve weeks, but this is not set in stone and should the camera be needed elsewhere it would be moved.

Members asked about the problems at the Bus Station, the Police Officers advised the Panel that the dispersal order had worked but as it had now elapsed problems were returning. The Police advised that the County Council had been proactive but if no progress were made another dispersal order would be made.

The police advised that it is impossible to have 100% coverage that there would always be some blind spots.

The Police Officers explained that covert cameras are the way forward as using the overt cameras just moves the problem somewhere else.

The Chair and Members thanked the Police Officers, Community Safety Officer and Portfolio Holder for Communities for their attendance.

4. Any Other Business

There was no other business to discuss.

The Meeting terminated at 6.15 p.m.

REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC SCRUTINY PANEL

Report for Information – Visit to City of Durham CCTV Control Room – 20 November 2007

Present: Councillors Bartle, Colledge, Guy, Kelly, Lightley and Simpson.

Also Present: Mrs J. Dwyer – Senior City Care Manager
Mrs J. Harvey – Assistant City Care Manager
Mrs J. Everett – CCTV Information & Training Officer

Apologies: Councillors Hopgood, Marsden, Plews, Simmons, Stoddart and Wilkes.

1. BACKGROUND

The Economic Scrutiny Panel had been tasked with looking at the provision of CCTV within the City of Durham area. Members were keen to see the CCTV facilities first hand and to be given an overview of the role of staff within the section.

2. FACILITIES

It was explained to Members that Staff had access to kitchen and washroom facilities, so that staff would be able to remain within the secure environment of the CCTV control room. Staff are multi-skilled and can operate across the three main job areas. Staff rotate roles to help keep staff alert and prevent “screen blindness”. The Staff generally work on a three shift system, with the greater provision being during the day, a lesser amount being required at night.

The Staff who operate the CCTV equipment are well trained and have a wealth of experience. CCTV operators have been awarded the CCTV public space surveillance operators licence through the SIA (security industry association). It was noted that the requisite qualifications must be renewed every three years.

The Control Room has links with the Durham Constabulary via the Airwaves system and also with the Shop Watch and Pub Watch within Durham. Accordingly, incidents monitored by Staff can be fed back to the Police, or the shops and pubs. Also incidents reported by these organisations can be tracked and potential incidents can be either “nipped in the bud” or recorded so that evidence is available if required.

3. TECHNOLOGY

Members were informed, as previously stated at the last meeting of the Economic Scrutiny Panel, that the quality of the CCTV images available was far superior to that which the public may believe is obtainable, i.e. grainy and “crimestoppers-esque”.

Investment in newer digital equipment had been seen to give a great benefit not only in the terms of quality and a reduced volume required for storage of the recorded footage, but also in the time taken to access footage from archive when requested by relevant organisations, i.e. the Police. VHS tapes require to be manually spooled to the relevant timeframe required and this can be a time consuming process.

It was noted that whilst the coverage of the City Centre was very good, there were a few “blind-spots” that remained. One area was brought to the attention to Members, but Members were pleased to note that this particular area was being addressed, as there was a possibility of a camera being installed and to funded by Durham County Council and linked to the City of Durham’s system.

4. SECURITY

Members were impressed by professional manner in which the security of the footage was taken, with clear procedures for the storage, handling and disposal of the information. A testament to this was an example where Barristers in a case where CCTV footage was being used as evidence, were looking for procedural “loopholes” in order to render the evidence inadmissible. However, no such “loopholes” were found. Members were given information relating to the requisite steps required by relevant organisations to view footage, and the disposal techniques. Members were pleased to note that copies viewed by authorised persons were disposed of by both electronic methods i.e. the tapes are “de-gaussed” – subjected to a magnetic field to erase the data contained on the VHS tape and also physically shredded. It was noted at the time of destruction, the copies to not leave the sight of appropriate Staff and they are only taken away once fully destroyed.

5. STAFF ATTITUDE

Members witnessed an incident unfold and were able to see the Staff “doing their job”. It was noted by all Members that the attitude of the Staff was commendable and it was heartening to know that whilst on the streets of Durham, professional, experienced and most importantly, caring Staff are monitoring the streets for the benefit of the Public’s safety.

6. FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

Members were impressed with the service provided but were keen to ask staff whether there were any issues that they would like to raise with Members, or if there was anything that Members could do to help. Whilst staff would be pleased with additional cameras to cover any blind-spots, they were conscious of the large costs involved, mainly those in connection and installation of fibre optic cabling. Accordingly, Staff felt that a more realistic and practical option would be to continue to migrate from the older VHS technology to the fully digital systems (which as explained previously to Members was of both benefit in quality and functionality) in the first instance, and any additional cameras would be welcomed should funding become available. Members thanked the Staff for an excellent and informative tour, and were delighted with the professionalism displayed by the Staff within the Section.

The visit terminated at 5.40 p.m.