

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - CCTV AND COMMUNITY SAFETY THURSDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2006

Councillors: *Davies (Chair), Dobbie, Mughal and *Portess

* Member present

Also in attendance: Ms. A. Cunningham and Mr T. Chapman (Environment Service)

16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mughal.

17. URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no such declarations.

19. MINUTES

AGREED;

That agreement of the minutes of the meeting of 2 October 2006 (tabled) be deferred until the next meeting.

20. CCTV AND COMMUNITY SAFETY - EVIDENCE FROM STAKEHOLDERS

The Panel received evidence from Tony Chapman, from the Council's Environmental Crime Group. It was noted that CCTV was a small part of the work that the service undertook to address environmental crime. In 2003/4, Members had agreed to invest in surveillance equipment to be used in combating dumping hotspots across the borough. The equipment was to act as a visible deterrent to continuous dumping of waste at known problem areas.

Prior to 2006/07 cameras were deployed at a number of known dumping hotspots. Reductions in the quantity and frequency of dumping were recorded although regular instances of dumping still continued. However, there had not been enough follow up after surveillance to sufficiently deter people from dumping to make a more significant impact.

Camera systems were not cheap to buy and required regular maintenance and updating. They required frequent input from field officers to check if they needed maintenance, contained evidence and were still deployed in a suitable location. Sentry Scope and Sherpa systems were not capable of sending information to a central location therefore requiring officer time to visit the deployment site to retrieve evidence. Briefcase systems relied on line of site communication between the camera and operator to be effective, therefore requiring officers to be present at the deployment site while the camera was in operation.

Following the launch of the Street Enforcement Team in September 2005 and a planned recall of the camera systems for necessary maintenance between February and March 2006, the camera systems available had been used in conjunction with a series of proactive projects focussed on reducing hotspots identified by key partners in Haringey

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Accord and Waste Management. The equipment had now proven to be a more useful tool when used in conjunction with proactive work rather than a stand along deterrent.

Before September 2005, no formal action had yet been taken using evidence gathered from these camera systems. Since the launch of the newly configured Street Enforcement Teams, in excess of 50 reported dumping hot spots had been removed from the hot spot list following intensive surveillance, waste removal and education of the local community. Intelligence gathered from some of these locations had contributed to seven formal investigations concerning alleged fly tipping offences, five of which were being prepared for prosecution and two which had resulted in the offenders receiving written formal cautions.

The system had cost to buy £412,000 to purchase which had been funded by NRF monies. This included capital and revenue costs. General maintenance of the equipment cost approximately £6,500 per annum. All systems were now outdated and would benefit from upgrade to current technology available. Systems did not necessarily require replacing to do this but an upgrade to the current systems would still cost in excess of £30,000.

Officers from the Street Enforcement Team generally installed the equipment with the assistance of a Council electrician when necessary. Officers received training on the use of the equipment and regulations regarding the use of CCTV.

Images captured during an investigation were subject to the usual rules of evidence and generally depicted a specific alleged act or offence which would be dealt with by the service. However, any images caught while filming that might be of interest to partner enforcement agencies were made available at the time they were captured. Environmental Services were represented at the Council's CCTV Steering Group and the Tasking Group meetings. Information regarding forthcoming operations were discussed at these meetings including joint working operations and sharing of resources.

It was the intention of Environmental Services to seek ASBO's against offenders found guilty of more serious environmental crimes such as large scale fly posting, fly tipping and graffiti vandals. Images captured through surveillance would be made available to the Council's Anti Social Behaviour Team who were keen to support this approach.

Recent discussions with colleagues from the Police Safer Neighbourhood Teams had shown an opportunity for further joint working in areas where cameras were to be deployed. If a camera had been deployed to detect fly tipping for instance, it might also cover an area affected by anti social behaviour in which the police have an interest, therefore providing support to both agencies with one camera.

Surveillance was resource intensive and could often be unfruitful. The use of cameras in certain circumstances reduced the need to have officer time used for surveillance, freeing their time to carry out other duties whilst the cameras recorded incidents for later investigation. Cameras could be used to detect "trends" at a given location to either show no investigation was required or resources should be used to pursue an investigation in this area. The equipment could be used to provide a deterrent similar to having a uniformed street enforcement officer patrolling an area.

In some areas of the Borough, there was a very high level of reporting of dumping. It was not unknown for the same incidents to be reported several times by different people and

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this could impact adversely on statistics. In addition, reports were not always substantiated and hot spots were not necessarily those identified by residents.

The type of equipment that the service used allowed officers to be out of sight a potential offender while still being able to watch and film as the offence was committed. This allowed officers to be able potentially to apprehend an offender (with police assistance) at the time of the offence. The equipment allowed officers to be in close proximity of the offender without being seen, therefore increasing the chances of them being caught and successfully convicted.

Cameras were moved regularly in order to ensure their optimum effectiveness. However, residents and Councillors were sometimes upset when this happened so this needed to be handled sensitively.

New opportunities for deploying cameras were currently being investigated for enforcement against fly posters, graffiti vandals, dog fouling and littering. Combating instances of age restricted sales of goods to young people could also be helped with the use of covert surveillance equipment. The service was currently looking at the possibility of investing in this equipment with a view to carrying out "test purchasing" of goods such as spray paint, solvents, tobacco and alcohol to reduce the number of outlets for these items available to potential young offenders.

In addition, he felt that the Council's fixed CCTV system could be further developed by expanding current detection parameters and being as inclusive as possible when tasking operators. Crime and incidents of anti social behaviour also needed to continue to be reported to the Police. The system could contribute to the detection and early resolution of "broken window" issues that may otherwise escalate. In general, users of CCTV equipment needed to be proactive in referring on relevant incidents so the maximum benefit could be gained from their use.

He felt that CCTV cameras could be made available to Council officers, if agreed, for special projects. For example, Street Enforcement recently arranged for a traffic camera to monitor an area that has been repeatedly fly posted over night and this trial surveillance demonstrated how useful street cameras could be in detecting and apprehending offenders.

CCTV operators could be made aware of the work that other agencies undertake that may be witnessed by the operators and conversely, field officers should be aware of the limitations and code of practice CCTV operators work within. Long term investment in fibre optic technology in partnership with cable providers such as BT, NTL could be explored to ensure growth and sustainable resources are available as the current CCTV systems reaches the end of their shelf life.

Continued investment in the training and competency of the systems operators to ensure the equipment and intelligence gathered was put to best possible use was essential.

Anne Cunningham reported on the use of CCTV within the Parking Service. She had overall responsibility for both the Community Safety and the parking CCTV cameras. In respect of the parking cameras, these had originally been funded as part of the London bus initiative by Transport for London. From this point onwards, the Council had provided funding. The cameras had originally focussed only on bus lanes but the Council had now taken on responsibility for enforcing box junctions.

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The outcomes of these initiatives had been very successful. There were now very few people who drove or parked in bus lanes. A high number of tickets had been issued at the start of the initiative but this had now levelled out. It had not been universally popular and there was opposition from some traders. The cameras had proven to be very useful in areas of the Borough where there had been a high level of abuse against parking attendants. The cameras were very efficient and could capture detailed images of a moving car. The evidence that they produced was indisputable. Members of the public were free to come and view the evidence if they disputed its accuracy.

The additional income that came from enforcing these regulations was approximately £3 million. It was not possible to disaggregate the contribution made to this by the cameras. The recovery rate was good with around 60% of fines currently being collected, an increase of 12% on the amount collected two years ago.

There were currently 20 cameras that were used for parking issues. The cameras cost £23,000 per year plus maintenance of £20,000. The operators that covered parking issues were directly employed. A decision could have been made to outsource the service but they were felt to be doing a very good job. They were all fully trained up to BTEC standard. The team had a dedicated supervisor.

The Police could take tapes for evidence if required. High quality images were essential in order to facilitate action. Parking staff could access community safety cameras and tapes but had to obtain permission first. Sometimes the Police used parking cameras for direct surveillance.

The CCTV cameras undoubtedly provided value for money for the service. They were interested in introducing more cameras and had recently bid for more resources. She felt that it was an easier way of dealing with parking offences than using attendants. In addition, it would be helpful if all CCTV cameras could be used out of hours. This would be particularly useful in dealing with crime and anti social behaviour. The service already worked closely with the Police Service as people guilty of parking offences were sometimes known to them.

She felt that the use of CCTV cameras should be tied in more closely to the crime reduction strategy. In addition, the work of operators would be helped by the provision of regular briefings from the Police Service. This would give them something specific to look which would be better than leaving them to wait for something to happen. The cameras currently operating in Crouch End and Muswell Hill worked but were not conventional in their set up as only one camera could be focussed upon at any one time.

The new control room would facilitate joint working as the Control Room would be fully integrated. In particular, it would facilitate the better use of parking cameras for community safety use.

She felt that the suggestion that the new digital system be networked into the video sentry system was worth pursuing provided there was no technical reason why it could not be done.

The current set up, where there were different teams for parking and community safety, had been the way that the service had always operated. The community safety part of the operation had always been outsourced. Bringing it "in house" would have cost implications

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for the Council and there were no plans to reconsider this position. The two roles were separate disciplines and staff undertook different training.

21. PROGRESS WITH REVIEW

The Panel noted that representatives of residents associations and traders would be attending the next meeting. It was agreed that the CCTV Coordinator would be asked to attend as well in case any technical issues were raised.

22. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

There were no such items.

Cllr Matt Davies

Chair