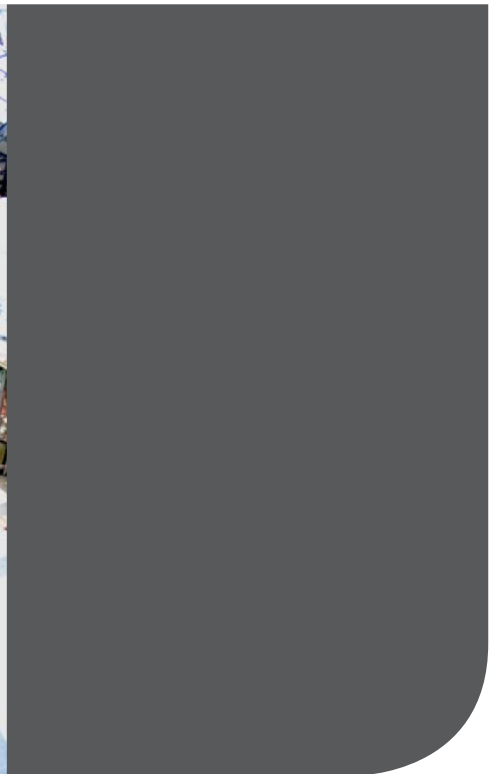


CCTV in the UK

What We Can Learn from Public Attitudes Towards Surveillance



Introduction

Public space surveillance has become part of our global infrastructure – a widely used resource for crime detection, prevention, and public protection. Despite this, the use of CCTV surveillance systems often remains a topic that courts controversy and diverse opinions.

Nowhere is this more true than in the UK, widely considered the home of public space surveillance.

Here, the use of CCTV surveillance systems in public space settings has been a topic of great debate ever since the nineties, when around £40 million worth of government funding was made available to local authorities for implementing surveillance systems as part of their public protection and safety armoury. In fact, during the 1990s, 78% of the Home Office crime prevention budget was dedicated to the implementation of public space surveillance systems.

Fast forward to the present day and the picture is very different. At least one in five UK councils¹ has been forced to reduce the number of surveillance cameras on the streets due to budget cuts. The UK is not alone.

At a time when authorities throughout the developed world are being forced to scrutinize services and know exactly “what matters”, being able to

understand public perceptions and expectations of surveillance is an invaluable resource relevant to us all.

That’s why, in March 2014, Synectics commissioned independent research with ICM² to gain a clear understanding of beliefs about, and attitudes towards, public space surveillance. Unless otherwise stated, statistics quoted in this White Paper are taken from this research.

Does the public support and want surveillance? If so, why? Is there anything authorities can do to improve the way they use surveillance in line with public demands and importantly, how can this be achieved?

This White Paper provides a breakdown of the research results and looks at what the findings mean for authorities. While the data is based on feedback from the British public, the information can help provide the global surveillance industry with practical advice and is a useful statistical resource to draw upon.

¹ March 2013 FOI requests

² Leading consumer research specialist ICM surveyed over 2000 members of the UK public in March 2014.

Does the Public Support CCTV?

An overwhelming majority (86%) of those surveyed said they supported its use. The main reason cited being “because it helps prevent crime” (74%). Almost the same amount (70%) support the use of CCTV “because it helps prevent anti-social behavior”.

When discussed at the annual UK CCTV User Group Conference in May 2014, these findings prompted a familiar debate – “but how do you prove something that hasn’t happened”.

Two key points were made in reply.

- While it may be difficult to prove a crime hasn’t taken place because of surveillance cameras, i.e. that it has been prevented, monitoring patterns in crime/anti-social behavior levels and marrying this information with known surveillance initiatives can prove insightful. Across the UK, councils and police forces are doing just this:
 - The first year CCTV was introduced in Wrexham, North Wales Police reported a 52% reduction in crime.
 - Liverpool Council examined data to find that 825 fewer people reported being victims of crime – a fact it largely attributes to its CCTV system.
 - Dudley has experienced a 10% reduction in crime figures with West Midlands Police citing CCTV as a “major factor”.
 - In Mansfield, the introduction of just one surveillance camera has seen a major reduction in anti-social behavior incidents.
- Value should also be placed on the power of public perception, i.e. the fact that 74% believe CCTV prevents crime, and therefore feel safer, is a positive outcome of public space surveillance in its own right and a benefit for the communities it serves.

CCTV at a Glance



86% of people support the use of CCTV in public spaces

People support public space CCTV because...



It helps prevent crime



It's crucial for criminal investigations



It makes the public feel safer



It helps prevent anti-social behavior

Communication is Key

“It’s clear from the results that the public overwhelmingly supports CCTV but that this support could be enhanced by giving them more information about how CCTV is used.”

Tom Reeve
Security News Desk

While the public is supportive of public space surveillance, there is a proviso – greater levels of communication.

80% of people in the UK feel they do not receive enough information on CCTV and over a third think their support for public space surveillance would increase if they knew more about the impact it was having locally, for example how it helps with arrests and convictions.

For 27%, simply being able to see more evidence of the council and local police working more collaboratively on use of CCTV surveillance initiatives would increase their support.

Interestingly, greater communication could also be the route to winning round those currently opposed to public space surveillance. Although only 4% of those surveyed in 2014 said that they were against public space surveillance, the main reason given by this group was that too little information is shared with the public about how CCTV is used.

Support for public space CCTV would increase if...

43%

Cameras were monitored more closely

36%

More information on local impact was shared

37%

Data on convictions achieved through CCTV was more readily available

27%

Police and local authorities were seen to work more closely together

What Information Should Local Authorities Share?

But what information should authorities share and how should they go about it?

There is no hard and fast rule regarding communications best practice but there are several areas that councils and police forces may want to consider.

Firstly, greater transparency regarding the use of surveillance in public areas should already be on the agenda. With the introduction of the Surveillance Camera Code of Practice, the Government has called on those operating public space surveillance systems to be clearer on policy and purpose, making relevant reports available to the public.

However, only 10% of the general public actually know what the Code is. This suggests that the information that the public is seeking, while partly covered by reporting procedures in line with the Code, is likely to be more simplistic in nature – a straightforward account (much in keeping with the council communications highlighted earlier) of how public space surveillance is helping to improve public safety and security in their community.

But having to accommodate different reporting needs does not require the

implementation of multiple analytical procedures and additional resource. Most modern surveillance systems will have extensive reporting functionality built in, enabling different scenarios, incidents, and outcomes to be monitored, recorded, and reported according to specific needs.

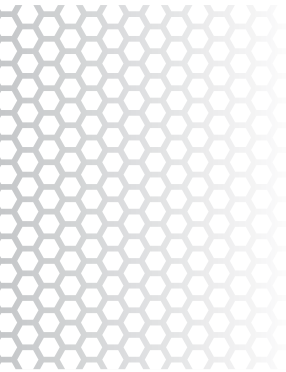
Many local authorities are already seizing on such technology as a way to generate monthly reports that highlight incident levels, types, and locations, to justify budget spent but also to communicate with external stakeholders i.e. the public.

Developing closer links with the media to raise awareness of such statistics can prove invaluable. In Tower Hamlets, London, this is precisely the approach that has been taken. In February 2014 alone, the CCTV team there handled 269 incidents, and assisted the police with 152 incidents that resulted in 50 arrests. These are simple statistics that deliver a strong message when shared externally.

If the public doesn't know what's being achieved, how can they value the service?



Two-way Conversation



Effective communication is not a one-way process, it works best as a two-way conversation.

At the CCTV User Group Event, Slough CCTV Manager Peter Webster highlighted the importance of obtaining feedback from the public on the use of CCTV surveillance systems and wider public safety/security initiatives.

Slough Borough Council regularly polls opinions of residents – for example via surveys being implemented by neighbourhood safety teams – to assess attitudes and public requirements. West Lancashire Borough Council is also proactive in its approach to communication on surveillance, working directly with the public to assess potential locations for cameras.

In Barnet, the Safer Communities Partnership actively involves residents in the public space CCTV strategy and recently held a detailed consultation regarding camera usage and locations. A key finding was that 51% of residents felt that cameras were not signposted well enough and that improving this would help as a deterrent (for anti-social behavior and criminal activity). This is therefore being addressed by the council.

These are just three examples of the many authorities now working more collaboratively with local communities to develop public space surveillance provision in a way that meets local needs.

The Chance to Influence Opinion

Enhancing communications about public space surveillance use also has another important benefit – the chance to influence perceptions and expectations of public space surveillance. Just 3% of people say their understanding of public space CCTV comes from information supplied by their local authority.

Instead, people are turning to TV for details. This may sound trivial but in fact it does have two significant implications.

Fueling negative perception

The number one influence on the general public's perception of public space CCTV are TV crime appeals e.g. Crimewatch (27%). Not surprising, but potentially problematic.

Footage used in such shows is often from private CCTV systems that deliver poor image quality, and therefore is not reflective of the increasingly high-quality footage now achievable by many public surveillance systems. Is this perhaps why over a third of people opposed to its use say their main reason is "that image quality is too poor to be helpful"?

Fueling false expectations

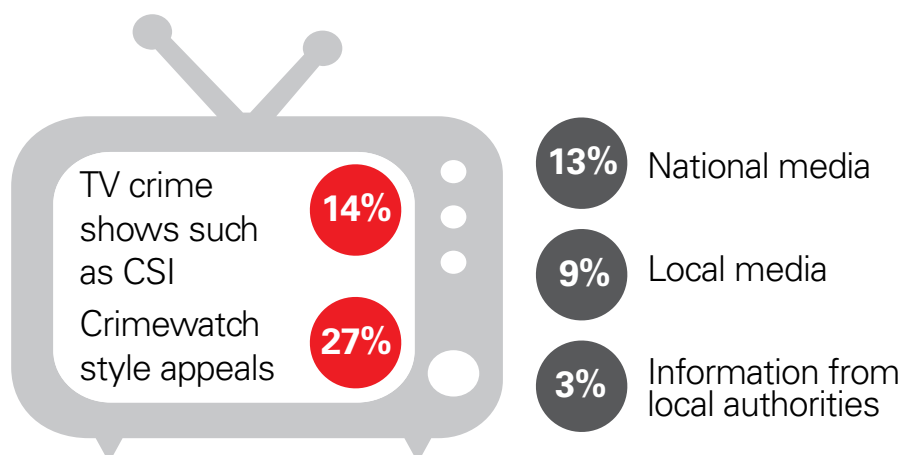
One in seven people say that fictional TV shows such as CSI have the biggest influence on their perceptions. Conversely, this may serve to give the general public false expectations of the actual capabilities of surveillance systems. Creating additional pixels where there aren't any, or being able to identify a criminal by zooming in on a reflection in someone's eye might be an entertaining portrayal of surveillance but is not reflective of true analytical usage.

Public space surveillance is sophisticated and is increasingly used as a forensic tool, but in its current evolution has some limitations.

"The research suggests that the public doesn't really understand CCTV – as witness the 3% who get their information about CCTV from local authorities as compared to the vast majority who rely on the media to misinform them."

Tom Reeve
Security News Desk

Public perceptions of CCTV are most influenced by...



What Do People Think CCTV Should Do?

What is the primary purpose of public space CCTV and what do you think it should be? This question was asked in the poll and the results revealed interesting insights that may reflect the future direction of public space surveillance.

Overwhelmingly, the public sees the main purpose of CCTV as preventative and believes this is as it should be (76%) – a tool to deter would-be criminals and reduce incidents of anti-social behavior.

But people want more from public space surveillance than crime prevention.

Forensic Surveillance

Almost two thirds of people in Britain (65%) think public space surveillance should be used more forensically i.e. as an active detection tool rather than simply a mechanism for supporting visual evidence.

One of the strongest industry advocates of this approach is DCI Mick Neville of the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS) Central Forensic Imaging Team. As well as being instrumental in the creation of the MPS' Circulation Unit – which pioneered the forensic use of CCTV footage to identify suspects in criminal cases – he was also one of the key figures involved with 'Operation Withern', which saw CCTV come to the fore following the London Riots in 2011.

With a public call for forensic surveillance use, local authorities may want to consider some practical recommendations offered historically on the subject by Neville. One example is camera placement.

Rather than being 'at height', does it make more sense for a percentage of public space cameras to be positioned at eye level if they are to be used more forensically, in particular if councils/police forces are to benefit from technological advances in facial recognition technology in crime detection?

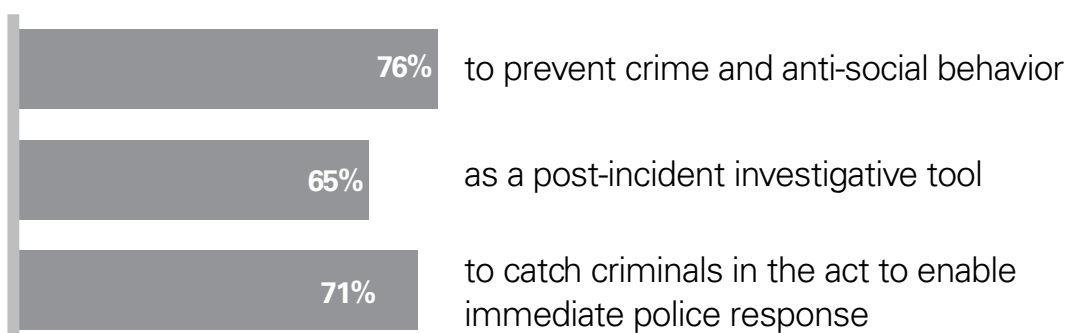
Clothing and logo recognition technology is also emerging as an asset to be integrated into public space surveillance systems, enabling color, shape, and patterns to be detected and tracked – for example in the wake of minimal suspect descriptions where clothing is a key distinguishing factor.

But a forensic approach is as much about the operator as it is about the technology.

Modern, intelligently integrated surveillance solutions can collate and correlate data to sift through information and identify 'meaningful' incidents, but this is worth little without a knowledgeable operator trained in maximizing this potential and applying their own experience to scenarios.

The importance of the person 'behind the camera' can never be underestimated.

Public space CCTV should be used...



Closer, proactive surveillance monitoring

71% of those surveyed felt that public space CCTV should be used to catch criminals “in the act” to enable immediate police response.

This does already take place in many cases, with authorities adopting a proactive approach to monitoring rather than the more traditional reactive one associated with many public space surveillance programmes.

In Thanet last year, a number of cases were reported in the media where ‘time of incident’ monitoring not only caught perpetrators but also prevented further issue. For example, through proactive monitoring, the CCTV team identified an altercation where one man was brandishing a claw hammer. The team were able to inform the police in real time and prevent what could potentially have been a fatal assault.

The desire to see CCTV used to “catch criminals in the act” chimes with another statistic from the research, which revealed that 43% of people would be more supportive of CCTV if cameras were monitored more closely. This also reinforces the very distinct need for an effective partnership of ‘man and machine’.

“Implementing our networked, integrated surveillance solution has had an incredible impact on campus security. Our incident rates are down significantly thanks to being able to proactively monitor the site in such an efficient way, and our average response time for any incident on site is now just four minutes.”

Alan Cain

Head of Security Services, University of Leeds

But how does this sit with the fact that most authorities are facing the tightest budget restrictions in recent history; closer monitoring = additional resource = additional budget.

Thankfully, this equation is no longer the ‘absolute’ it once was, largely thanks to the adoption of IP-based surveillance solutions that enable higher levels of integration than previously possible. A prime example of this is the University of Leeds. Every day, the security team there is tasked with keeping over 30,000 students and 7,000 staff safe, on a campus spanning almost 100 acres – effectively a town.

Previously, only post-event review of separate surveillance and third-party security systems was possible. There was just too much data, from too many sources, for the team to monitor in any other way.

This situation has now changed through the integration of legacy analog and newer digital high-definition cameras. Images are now encoded and transmitted securely via the university data network to the purpose-built control room where footage is monitored, controlled, and reviewed in real time via a Synergy command and control platform from Synectics.

Streamlining monitoring and control in this way with an IP-based solution, together with enhanced third-party integration capabilities, allows the university to make its ‘proactive security’ aspirations a reality, a fact that has seen incident rates drop and the university move up 15 places in national university safety rankings in just two years.

How Should Public Space Surveillance Be Funded?

While evolved surveillance solutions are able to offer authorities a more streamlined and efficient way to monitor more for less, debates over public space surveillance funding will inevitably continue.

But what does the public think? One thing that is clear is that people don't want budget cuts to affect what they see as a valuable public service. Almost two thirds of people say they would be worried if their local council announced it was axing part or all of its surveillance system to save money.

So where should the money come from? One of the most common debates is over police use of surveillance systems operated, and funded, by councils - the suggestion being the police should help fund a service they use so much.

A recent example of this occurred in Newquay, where in July 2014 the Mayor called on the police to help pay for the town's surveillance system following the news that Cornwall Council would be removing funding. His argument was that the system is integral to local police operation and in fact contributed to the detection of more than 60% of crimes in just two months. The debate continues but it is reflective of scenarios up and down the county.

There is no definitive answer but when it comes to public opinion the majority (58%) think that funding should be split between local authorities and police forces – 55% would be surprised if the police made no contribution at all.

Evidence, evidence, evidence

Wherever funding responsibility does lie, securing budgets for public space surveillance will inevitably be partly - in some cases entirely - down to performance. Councils therefore not only need to focus on the evidence they gather but also the evidence they can present about how they, and their systems, operate.

This is a further area where surveillance system capability can offer a helping hand. In-built, fully customisable reporting mechanisms mean that generating in-depth analysis of incident numbers, processes, and outcomes can be done automatically rather than having to implement separate work streams to investigate performance.

The data, with full audit trails, is quite literally at controller finger tips.

Public Thoughts on CCTV Funding

64%

Were concerned about a reduction in funding

55%

Would be surprised if the police made no contribution

58%

Thought funding should be split between local authorities and police forces

Conclusion

The overwhelming message from the research is that public space surveillance systems do have a significant role to play in ensuring the safety and security of our towns and cities, and, perhaps more importantly, the public supports and respects that role.

What's also clear though is that the public has expectations of how that role can develop to deliver the best results. "Proactive monitoring," "visual data forensics," and "surveillance communications" – these are not theoretical concepts but realities the public expects. With surveillance system technology evolving so significantly, the opportunity to meet these expectations has never been greater.

For more information about Synectics technology solutions, visit our website: synecticsglobal.com.





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