

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

28 July 2010

Report of the Director of Planning Transport and Leisure

Part 1 - Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 CCTV

Summary

To present the draft annual report on the Borough Council's CCTV Operations for 2009/10 and to provide an update on how best to plan for essential upgrades to the current system in the light of other potential operational developments, possible alternative service options and the increasing pressures on budgets.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This paper consists of two sections. There is a look-back at the operation of the Council's CCTV activity over the past year in the form of our Annual Report. Then there is a look-forward to changes and options we may wish to consider for the CCTV system.

1.2 The Annual Report 2009/10

1.2.1 **Annex 1** contains a draft report of the CCTV operation during the past financial year, 2009/10. It is the latest such report and is intended to provide an open and transparent description of how we are operating the service and to consider the results in terms of crime prevention and detection. It is also an opportunity for the Board to comment on and finalise the draft so that it can be placed on the Council's website to share the information with the local community.

1.2.2 CCTV is an important tool in achieving the objectives of the Community Safety Partnership by helping deter, prevent, investigate and solve crimes. We provide our service in partnership with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC). This works broadly by this Council taking care of the physical kit while our partner looks after the staff in the Control Room located in the Council Offices at Tunbridge Wells.

1.2.3 In the 12 years since we opened the Control Room the coverage of our borough has been gradually extended and now includes the central areas of Tonbridge,

West Malling and Snodland, together with many public car parks where crime had been a problem.

1.2.4 Technological advances allow the Police to view selected images from their Force Contact and Control Centre. The installation of a help point in the Blue Bell Hill commuter car park gives members of the public the opportunity to contact the CCTV Control Room directly in the event of an emergency at any time of day. Over the dozen years that the system has been operating we have been gradually replacing ageing equipment as necessary. We have benefitted significantly in doing so because camera technology has been improving year-on-year and the costs have been decreasing.

1.3 Where do we go from here?

1.3.1 In the immediate future we are faced with some difficult challenges. Some core elements of the CCTV equipment have never been replaced. In our report to the Board last November we advised as follows:

- “Looking to the future, we recognise that recent technological advancements mean that we are approaching the point when we will need to replace the existing, old analogue equipment in the control room with digital machinery. This is not only because of image quality but also because the older equipment is now difficult to repair and source replacement parts for.”

1.3.2 This switch over from analogue to digital is one that all public service operators have had to confront in recent years and many have already made the change. In our case, provision to do so has been built into the budget for several years but we have held back from embarking on this digitisation project because of other potential factors that have militated against incurring expenditure that might prove to be abortive or unnecessary.

1.3.3 Those competing factors include TWBC’s aspirations for redevelopment of its Council office site (which would necessitate a move of the control room), the potential for extending the partnership to include other neighbouring authorities to secure efficiency savings and the possibility of a control and monitoring centre with direct police involvement covering a much larger area.

1.3.4 The challenging problem we and our partner face is that some considerable time is involved for any of these potential initiatives to crystallise into a practical proposal while the essential equipment has gradually become very difficult to maintain and replace. We are experiencing increasing operational problems as a result of the ageing VHS tape recorders and now obsolete ‘dos based’ Command and Control System. This latter system, in particular, has not been supported by the manufacturer for a number of years and is giving the maintenance contractor and my staff serious cause for concern.

- 1.3.5 Balanced against this is the need to ensure that operational decisions do not reduce our options for the future, particularly bearing in mind the intense budget pressures that will be upon us and the significant costs in providing the service. For example, it may be that in a corporate context a view is taken to provide a different level of service including changes to monitoring.
- 1.3.6 The Home Office and the Association of Police Officers (ACPO) have set up a multi-agency team to consider the recommendations of the recent 'National CCTV Strategy'. Their report is expected in the near future. The new government has also hinted about new regulations to regulate the widespread use of CCTV and Kent Police has just commenced a review of how CCTV is operated across Kent. However at this stage there is no clarity as to what may come out of this.
- 1.3.7 The difficult and conflicting pressures all point towards the need for a fundamental review of the service to clarify its aims and objectives, ways of doing things differently and better, and to assess how to achieve best value for money. We intend to do this through a cross-service officer group with the remit of considering as broad a range of options as necessary. It is essential that the views and needs of the Community Safety Partnership are clearly reflected in this work-stream and that there is full consideration of the financial implications in the current climate.
- 1.3.8 Analysis of options and estimation of costs will require expert project work beyond the skills of our in-house team. The services of a specialist independent consultant to advise and assist the officer group will be essential and we are recommending that the Council engages such services. The brief for this work would include a review of a number of technical options including the practicalities and budget cost of monitoring images from elsewhere. For example, we have been actively engaged in discussions with Sevenoaks District Council to see whether there is scope and benefit to be gained from a three way CCTV partnership. Clearly, if anything comes of this, we will be seeking to make maximum utilisation of our existing and any renewed equipment in any new system set up.
- 1.3.9 In conclusion, therefore, there needs to be a review of service levels, partnership and locational options alongside and informed by specialist technical advice on feasibility and equipment.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 The CCTV scheme operates fairly, within applicable law and proper regard for the privacy of the individual. We and our partner subscribe closely to the CCTV Code of Practice.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 The estimated cost for engaging a consultant of approximately £10k will be funded from existing capital renewals budgets.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 Without CCTV it would be difficult to achieve the Council's key priority namely to:
'Work with partners to: Reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime.'

1.7 Policy Considerations

- 1.7.1 Community – publishing the Annual Report is important to maintaining public support for the work of this service.

1.8 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 It is recommended to Cabinet that;

- 1) Subject to any amendments by the Board, the CCTV Report for 2009/10 **BE ENDORSED** for publication.
- 2) The Director, in consultation with the Cabinet Member and the Chairman and in accordance with the details of this report, **BE AUTHORISED** to appoint a specialist independent consultant to advise on options to continue with the CCTV service as described in the report.

The Director of Planning Transport and Leisure confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

Nil

contact: Mike O'Brien
Andy Edwards

Steve Humphrey
Director of Planning Transport and Leisure