

Police, camera, action...Head cameras

What was the issue to address?

Police officers have been using video cameras and other 'optical evidence gathering' equipment for a number of years, as a way of obtaining high quality primary evidence. However, the main disadvantage of a hand-held video camera was that it required two officers to be deployed with a single camera, one to operate it and the other to act as a 'minder'. Body Worn Surveillance Equipment, or 'Head Camera', was seen as a potentially innovative way of helping the police to reduce crime and make the judicial process more efficient and fair. Other benefits identified include increased confidence and reassurance in policing, an increase in brought to justice outcomes, freeing up of police officers' time spent on paperwork and bureaucracy and increased early guilty pleas resulting in cost savings across the whole justice system.

What did we do?

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) agreed to commission the purchase of the first head cameras for police use. Since 13 October 2006, officers in the city centre and surrounding areas have been going out on patrol equipped with digital Head Camera to record incidents they attend in full colour video and high quality audio. The camera, about the size of a marker pen, is worn visibly on the side of an officer's head, providing an officer's eye view of how an incident develops. This provides investigators and courts with video footage of incidents making it easier to establish who has said and done what. To date, 50 cameras have been purchased with funding from various partners including Plymouth CSP, Government Office South West, the Police Authority and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

The equipment's hard drive can record up to 400 hours of footage that can be downloaded to DVD, which is admissible for use in courts. The evidence is tamper proof, so there is no possibility of changing or editing the footage. The officer can record an entire

shift, or activate on approaching an incident. On returning to the station, the images can be immediately downloaded to DVD and made available in police custody for interviewing officers and defence solicitors to view. Any such footage used for criminal prosecution is kept for 10 years as a sealed master copy and cannot be opened unless at the request of a crown court judge. They are kept and stored in just the same approved way tape records of interviews have been stored for the last 15 years. The use of the cameras does not require any special authorities. It is just like a CCTV camera, but worn by an officer.

What difference did we make?



Early indications showed that people involved in crime were far more likely to admit their guilt at an earlier stage as it was very hard to deny their involvement if there was video evidence to support a prosecution. In January 2007, an interim report written for the national pilot showed that when comparing a 10-week average (30 October to 7 Jan 2007) to the same period in 2005, the level of violent crime for the whole Plymouth Base Command Unit area had decreased by 4.9%. South, Central and Devonport sectors, where the cameras were mainly in use, showed decreases in wounding and violence, while in the North sector, where cameras had not been used, there had been an increase in wounding and violence. There have been two successful prosecutions.

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Other benefits have been that police officers experience more respect when on patrol with Head Cameras, large groups are less confrontational and it has been a good way of capturing witness details. On 12 July 2007, Plymouth launched the national 'Guidance for the Police Use of Body Worn Video Devices'. In the report were further key results since our project started. Compared to 2005/06 there has been a:

- 1.2% reduction in violent crime in South and Central sectors by end of March 2007 (wounding reduced by 12.8%)
- 26.9% increase in detections for violent crime, specifically violence in public places and domestic violence
- 7.3% increase in offences brought to justice (all violent crime)
- 22.4% reduction in officer time spent on paperwork and file preparation in incidents where headcameras had been in use
- 14.3% reduction in complaints against police, specifically for incivility and excessive use of force when headcamera in use.

A public relations evaluation undertaken as part of the pilot, by the University of Plymouth's Social Research and Regeneration Unit, concluded that Head Cameras would help prevent crime occurring and provide evidence in cases of criminal prosecution. Trading Standards are using this equipment for capturing under-age sales in licensed premise and Police Community Safety Officers and the City Centre Management Team are also using them.

What were the keys to our success?

Without the initial and ongoing support of so many of our partners this project would not have been possible and Plymouth Community Safety Partnership are particularly proud to have been able to support the pilot of this exciting equipment.

What are we doing next?

The police are extending the pilot for a further 12 months

There is potential to procure additional Headcameras, subject to a formal tendering process.



Plymouth Head camera Project Team

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You can view further information about this project at:
www.devon-cornwall.police.uk/headcamera



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