

Body Cameras Consultation – Key Findings

July 2016

In April 2016, focus groups were held with members of the Council's View West citizens panel across the borough to discuss the introduction of Body Worn Video Cameras (BWVCs) to be worn by its civil enforcement officers (CEOs). Discussions were also held in June with the officers who will be wearing the cameras. As well as the focus groups, an online survey inviting comments was made available from 29th April for eight weeks. This summary presents the key findings of the focus groups and online survey.

General opinion and reasoning for the cameras

- Overall, both residents and officers were in favour of the use of body cameras.
- Many residents recognised that officers are subjected to abuse/aggressive behaviour, and felt that the cameras may help to protect officers' safety.
- Some officers and residents felt that the presence of a camera will act as a deterrent against aggressive behaviour, whereas others thought it may further inflame a situation.
- Officers, as well as residents, felt that BWVCs would be good for evidence, as having video footage will help to prevent misrepresentation of any party involved in a situation.
- However, some residents had concerns that the camera will only show the member of the public, and not what the officer is doing behind the camera.

Turning the camera on and off

There was a lot of discussion in all groups about when officers should switch the camera on – this was seen as a key consideration by all:

- There was strong agreement that officers need clear guidelines
- There were mixed views from residents about when an officer should turn the camera on - some felt that they should be on throughout the entire shift, others said as they start to issue a ticket, and some said when approached by a member of the public.
- A lot of officers felt that they should turn the camera on when approaching a vehicle, to ensure that any initial contact with a member of the public is not missed on film.
- Most officers (and some residents) felt that there should be a degree of flexibility when deciding whether or not to turn the camera on – the decision should be dependent on the officers' professional judgement and discretion.
- Some residents felt strongly that clear guidelines should be strictly followed at all times by officers to ensure consistency.
- There was concern that officers may 'pick and choose' when to turn the camera on, which could misrepresent situations to their benefit.
- Some residents thought that officers may forget to turn the camera on in panic situations.



Informing people they are being recorded

- Both officers and residents debated if it is always necessary to inform a person that the camera is on, recognising the potential of needlessly upsetting or aggravating someone.
- When informing people they are switching the camera on, the officer's sensitivity and the wording they use was seen as vital in whether a situation is diffused or further inflamed.
- Officers felt that what they say should be short, simple and to the point, and came up with some standard phrases they felt should be used in certain situations.

Privacy and access to footage

- There were not many concerns expressed by residents about privacy, as most people felt that there is already a lot of CCTV filming, and cameras can make people feel safer.
- Residents and officers generally felt that footage should be kept for longer than 31 days.
- Some officers expressed concern that their footage may be viewed for reasons other than investigating an incident, and it should be stipulated in policy that this is not allowed.

Effect on the officer and their role

- Some residents felt that the cameras could be put to more use by officers filming other incidents whilst walking around. However, some expressed the opposite viewpoint that filming some situations and dealing with the consequences is beyond their remit.

Training

There was agreement from all groups that training is very important. Examples included:

- Conflict resolution and self-defence.
- How to operate the cameras and what to say to people who enquire about them.
- Dealing with the public in general including different groups, e.g. disabled people.

Publicity and raising awareness

Both residents and officers felt that it is very important to make the public aware of the cameras. Suggestions for how to publicise the cameras included:

- Local newspapers, Talking Together magazine, TV, radio, Social Media.
- Signs around car parks and on-street parking locations (although these can be ignored).
- Officers distributing a courtesy card (stating why filming has taken place, contact details etc.) with an issued parking ticket, or this information printed on the back of the ticket.

**A copy of the final report can be found at www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/bodycams
For further information please contact Sarah Gerrard (Research Officer) 01244 977366.
Alternatively, you can also send an email to: research@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk**

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