

Annual CCTV Report

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Sevenoaks District Council's Annual CCTV Report

1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Introduction

Sevenoaks District Council continues to demonstrate their commitment to the Surveillance Camera Commissioners guidance and legal framework to ensure full lawful compliance.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, requires local authorities to consider the community safety implications of all their activities and functions. Section 17 says: "it shall be the duty of each authority to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area".

The Crime & Disorder Act 1998 provided the framework for the establishment of statutory Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs). It gave the lead responsibility for crime and disorder reduction to the police and local authorities, as well as a duty to consider crime and disorder in all their activities.

The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 introduced the regulation of public space surveillance cameras in England and Wales. As a result, the Surveillance Camera Code of Practice was issued by the Secretary of State under Section 30 of the Act to ensure that the use of cameras in public places is regulated and they are only used in pursuit of a specified purpose.

The Code aims to balance the need for cameras in public places with individual's right to privacy. The Code applies to the use of surveillance camera systems that operate in public places in England and Wales, regardless of whether or not there is any live viewing or recording of images or information or associated data.

This regulation compliments existing legislation, such as the Data Protection Act 1998, the Human Rights Act 1998, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the General Data Protection Regulations 2018. Government would like to see all relevant authorities publish and show transparency regarding their CCTV system.

The Code ensures Council-owned Public Space CCTV Control Rooms Code of Practice and procedures follow the same recommendations and guiding principles.

Sevenoaks District Council's CCTV Control Room continues to successfully achieve the full certification from the Commissioner aimed at those organisations that are compliant with the Surveillance Camera Code of Practice.

This certification is valid for five years, subject to an annual review and a full audit of our system, cameras and procedures working with a checklist against the 12 CCTV guiding principles in the Code.

Working within these 12 CCTV guiding principles assists and supports a system operator in achieving the most appropriate balance between public protection and individual human rights to adopt a single set of guiding principles that are applicable to all surveillance camera systems in public places. Following these guiding principles allows a system operator to establish a clear rationale for any overt surveillance camera deployment in public places and to run any such system effectively, which helps ensure compliance with other legal duties

1 The purpose of the Annual Report

Sevenoaks District Council is dedicated to demonstrating its compliance, effectiveness and proportionality by publicising this Annual CCTV Report along with the Annual CCTV Review, CCTV Code of Practice and an Annual CCTV Impact Assessment.

Antony Porter the Surveillance Camera Commissioner, invited all 433 Local Authorities to complete an online self-assessment tool. This tool helps local authorities assess public space CCTV systems against the twelve guiding principles defined within PoFA.

The twelve CCTV guiding principles are:

1. Use of a surveillance camera system must always be for a specified purpose, which is in pursuit of a legitimate aim and necessary to meet an identified pressing need.
2. The use of a surveillance camera system must take into account its effect on individuals and their privacy, with regular reviews to ensure its use remains justified.
3. There must be as much transparency in the use of a surveillance camera system as possible, including a published contact point for access to information and complaints.
4. There must be clear responsibility and accountability for all surveillance camera system activities including images and information collected, held and used.
5. Clear rules, policies and procedures must be in place before a surveillance camera system is used, and these must be communicated to all who need to comply with them.
6. No more images and information should be stored than that which is strictly required for the stated purpose of a surveillance camera system, and such images and information should be deleted once their purposes have been discharged.

7. Access to retained images and information should be restricted and there must be clearly defined rules on who can gain access and for what purpose such access is granted; the disclosure of images and information should only take place when it is necessary for such a purpose or for law enforcement purposes.
8. Surveillance camera system operators should consider any approved operational, technical and competency standards relevant to a system its purpose and work to meet and maintain those standards.
9. Surveillance camera system images and information should be subject to appropriate security measures to safeguard against unauthorised access and use.
10. There should be effective review and audit mechanisms to ensure legal requirements, policies and standards are complied with in practice, and regular reports should be published.
11. When the use of a surveillance camera system is in pursuit of a legitimate aim and a pressing need, it should then be used in the most effective way to support public safety and law enforcement with the aim of processing images and information of evidential value.
12. Any information used to support a surveillance camera system, which compares against a reference database for matching purposes, should be accurate and kept up to date.

Sevenoaks District Council is committed to show openness and transparency and to highlight efficiency and effectiveness of its public open space CCTV system.

The London riots showed how Local Authority town centre CCTV can be instrumental in identifying those committing crime and public disorder offences to the police. Recordings made of the London riots demonstrated the full potential of CCTV, with thousands of arrests made after the incidents, many based upon CCTV evidence. In future, the expectation of similar CCTV coverage may act as a positive deterrent to similar occurrences in towns and city centres.

The UK has experienced major terrorist attacks resulting in loss of life and serious injury. The CCTV systems local to these events captured images that contributed significantly to the investigations of these indiscriminate crimes.

Significant incidents can happen anywhere even in a quiet area like Sevenoaks. Sevenoaks District Council's CCTV control room has played vital roles in incidents. Our CCTV operators worked alongside emergency services, including the Police, the Army and Kent Fire and Rescue, monitoring and relaying live images straight to police headquarters in Maidstone to assist with immediate responses. Our team reviewed hours of CCTV footage and were able to identify suspects quickly, ensuring a rapid and effective result in incidents.

Our outstanding work has resulted in the Sevenoaks District Councils CCTV Control Room awarded two National CCTV Awards in recognition of excellent work delivered by an effective team and for innovative partnership working.

Coronavirus lockdowns demonstrated the resilience and flexibility of the CCTV service. The system was used to monitor social distancing, crime and public safety while supporting the police and partners, without personal contact or putting anyone in danger. CCTV staff were considered essential workers during the pandemic.

2 The purpose of the Sevenoaks District Council CCTV System

- 2.1 The primary purpose of the CCTV system is to support the Community Safety strategy of the Council and its partners to reduce both the level of crime and fear of crime.
- 2.3 To create a safer community, improving the quality of life for all in keeping with Sevenoaks District Council's Community Plan.
- 2.4 To assist the Police and others in the apprehension and prosecution of those committing crime and public disorder.
- 2.5 To gather evidence by a fair and accountable method.
- 2.6 To improve confidence in law and order.

3 Sevenoaks District Council's CCTV Control Room

- 3.1 Sevenoaks District Council officers' staff the CCTV control room, working shifts to provide cover seven days a week, 365 days a year. We have 146 Cameras, covering Sevenoaks, Swanley, Westerham, Edenbridge and New Ash Green. The majority of cameras can pan, tilt and zoom (PTZ) allowing the operators full control of the cameras.
- 3.2 The CCTV control room makes use of digital recording equipment and flat Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) screens to provide good quality secure images.
- 3.3 Digital images permit live viewing, recording and the facility to play back immediately. All digital recordings have an authentication, which cannot be altered. Important recordings can be protected to ensure they are not erased or overwritten. Storage of images is quick, easy and cost effective. The Digital Video Recorders come with built in hard drives, which store all data for 31 days.

- 3.4 Access to retained images and information within the CCTV control room is restricted, controlled and monitored. Defined rules and responsibilities can be found in the CCTV Code of Practice, on Sevenoaks District Council's website.
- 3.5 The Sevenoaks CCTV control room covers part of the West Kent Police area. We work very closely with the Community Partnership initiatives in Sevenoaks, Swanley and Edenbridge where 'Shopsafe' and 'Pubwatch' schemes operate. All these have a radio link direct into the control room. Last year the control room assisted with over 442 calls.
- 3.6 Public car park surveillance is another important role for the Council's CCTV system. This helps the council achieve the 'ParkSafe' accreditation from the British Parking Association. Cameras monitor the majority of public car parks as well as the Council office car parks. Civil Enforcement officers can access help via the radio network system. Parking problems identified by CCTV Operators can be reported to the Civil Enforcement officers for prompt action.
- 3.7 Our CCTV Operators are responsible for the Council's out-of-hours emergency telephone service. Our Operators deal with various emergencies across the District including quality of life issues such as noise complaints, lost and stray dogs, clean and waste water issues, dead animals, dangerous structures and debris, flooding, fly-tipping and much more. Last year our operators dealt with 2415calls, including 91 quality of life issues.
- 3.8. For the security of staff, buildings and visitors, a number of council buildings are equipped with cameras and alarm systems, which are monitored by our CCTV Operators.
- 3.9 Partnership working with other Council teams and external agencies is an important element of CCTV service provision. The control room collaborates closely with partners to support internal and external teams gathering information relating to Licensing, the Nighttime Economy Tasking group, Environmental Health, Planning, Kent Police as well as others.
- 3.10 This partnership working includes sharing a CCTV Manager who is responsible for both the Sevenoaks CCTV Control Room and for the Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council's CCTV Control Room. This has proved to be cost effective and has demonstrated great benefits of developing and improving the efficiencies within the two systems. Information sharing of intelligence and local knowledge across all the areas has proved to be very valuable in securing the arrests of known criminals who frequent neighbouring towns. This has also assisted with locating missing and vulnerable persons across district boundaries.

4 CCTV Operators

- 4.1 Our Operators are very experienced and well trained in the use of CCTV cameras and relevant legislation, which governs data handling and protection. All CCTV Operators are fully licensed by the Security Industry Authority (SIA). Operators must be licensed by the Security Industry Authority to practice the role of a Public Space CCTV Surveillance operator. Council employees have to pass a BTEC exam, as well as a practical assessment within the CCTV control room in order to achieve the SIA qualification
- 4.2 All CCTV Operator personnel are routinely vetted by Kent Police.
- 4.3 Refresher training is provided to Operators to keep them updated on relevant legislation, CCTV Surveillance, First Aid, Data Protection, GDPR, Health and Safety, Cyber Security, Safeguarding etc. Operators are encouraged to identify training they feel could benefit the service.

5 Improvements to the CCTV system

- 5.1 System equipment is well maintained and replaced at the end of its operational life to ensure system integrity.



- 5.2 The new Control Room has been designed to make more room for possible future partnership developments. We installed a steel wall-mounted frame with 10 large format monitors, all video images are displayed in split screen format. The control room has undergone a complex rewire for all the control and recording equipment. The project required building works, decorating and painting, replacement ceiling tiles, carpets and desks.
- 5.3 Sevenoaks Police Station operates within Sevenoaks District Council's Offices. This has enhanced our police partnership working to help reduce both the level of crime and the fear of crime across our District.

6 Directed Surveillance

- 6.1 The law and our Code of Practice permits the use of the CCTV system to monitor or observe individuals covertly via CCTV (i.e. 'directed surveillance') at the request of 'Public Authorities' (i.e. law enforcement bodies).
- 6.2 Targeted operations employing directed surveillance will only be carried out where other methods of investigation are inappropriate, or not likely to be effective, and where they are considered 'proportionate' to the suspected criminal activity or problem posed. The law and rules relating to covert surveillance are contained in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. Failure to obtain the necessary authorisations under this Act could invalidate any subsequent evidence obtained by virtue of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.
- 6.3 Local authorities are required to obtain judicial approval prior to using covert techniques. Local Authority authorisations and notices under the Regulations of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) will only be given effect once an order has been granted by a Justice of the Peace in England and Wales.
- 6.4 A Superintendent or officer of similar standing must make the request in writing on behalf of the Police or other law enforcement body. As a Public Authority, Sevenoaks District Council can also instigate targeted operations, requiring directed surveillance by CCTV, in compliance with the law. There were no directed surveillance operations during this period.

7 Annual CCTV Review

- 7.1 A CCTV review to assess our compliance with the Council's CCTV Code of Practice and working procedures is undertaken annually. The review evaluates the CCTV system to see whether it has met key objectives. The CCTV control room is required to have a detailed policy covering every aspect of the use of the Public Space CCTV and the data collected within its control room and must have procedures in place including CCTV Impact Assessments to ensure compliance.
- 7.2 The CCTV Review also monitors and inspects compliance relating to the Surveillance Camera Code of Practice and standards. A Home Office self-assessment tool is available to all public space surveillance organisations to ensure that systems adhere to the twelve guiding principles and to help identify any areas for improvement.
- 7.3 Sevenoaks District Council has completed the self-assessment tool, along with implementing a monitoring system to ensure compliance. A copy is available on our website.

- 7.4 The CCTV Code of Practice is reviewed regularly and updated when necessary. It is authorised and accepted by Kent Police and by the Chief Executive of Sevenoaks District Council. Copies are accessible on the Sevenoaks District Council's website.

8 CCTV Performance Evaluation

- 8.1 Many aspects of control room performance are measured on a monthly basis against agreed targets. This helps us to identify trends and opportunities for improvement.
- 8.2 The CCTV control room regularly carries out privacy and performance checks on equipment and monitoring procedures to ensure a high standard of service and compliance against our CCTV Code of Practice.
- 8.3 The CCTV control room instigated, assisted or monitored 108 arrests across the District between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025.

9 The Future

- 9.1 Sevenoaks District Council will continue to investigate ways to reduce operating costs or earn external income and, where possible to improve and develop the system to ensure it remains operationally and economically effective. Nationally, CCTV systems have been extremely effective in combating crime and terrorism in public areas and increasing the public's feeling of safety and security in going about their daily lives in towns and cities. Many high-profile cases have demonstrated how public space CCTV systems are effective in identifying the perpetrators of crime and enabled conviction of those who might otherwise have evaded justice. CCTV has also been instrumental in helping the police identify and bring to justice those involved in all aspects of criminality, not just serious crime and terrorist incidents.
- 9.2 During the Coronavirus lockdowns, CCTV demonstrated how vital this key service is. Monitoring social distancing, crime and public safety while supporting the police and partners, without personal contact or putting anyone in danger. Monitoring the town centre during lockdown revealed the resilience and flexibility of the CCTV service. CCTV staff considered essential workers during this pandemic.
- 9.3 Sevenoaks District Council remains committed to the use of public space CCTV in helping to make our communities safer places to live, work and visit. The CCTV service continues to demonstrate its valuable contribution to public safety by preventing crime through early intervention, helping to save life and protecting vulnerable people.