

CCTV ANNUAL REPORT

2020/2021

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**Executive Summary**

This document has been produced to provide details of the Closed circuit television (CCTV) system owned and monitored by Ashford Borough Council. It also assists in demonstrating compliance with the Home Office’s “Surveillance Camera Code of Practice” (the Code).

Ashford Borough Council currently operates 79 CCTV cameras in Ashford and 13 in Tenterden; all of which are located within public open space. We also monitor 74 cameras on properties belonging to Ashford Borough Council. All of these cameras are monitored in Ashford in a dedicated control room, known as Ashford Monitoring Centre (AMC).

The scheme is fully supported by the multi-agency Community Safety Partnership.

**Introduction**

The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 introduced restrictions on the use of local authorities’ surveillance powers, particularly with regards to covert surveillance. The Act also provides for the regulation of CCTV by the Secretary of State and the provision of a code of practice. As a result, a new Code of Practice was introduced in 2013 which can be accessed via:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/surveillance-camera-code-of-practice>

Ashford Borough Council is totally committed to complying with these Codes in relation to the implementation and operation of CCTV. We were audited for accreditation in November 2017 and the certificate was issued to us in April 2018. This is due to expire in April 2023.

Under Section 33 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012; local authorities are under a duty to have regard to the code when exercising any function to which it relates.

As part of that commitment, we have our own Code of Practice which is updated annually and can be accessed via Ashford Borough Councils website <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/>

In addition to operating a CCTV system Ashford Borough Council also supports all the principles that are contained within:

* The Data Protection Act 1998 (GDPR);
* The Human Rights Act 1998;
* The Regulatory and Investigatory Powers Act 2000; and
* The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

CCTV remains a powerful weapon in the continuing fight against crime, particularly when integrated with other crime reduction methods such as retail 'radio-link’ systems and a close positive working relationship with the local police.

Ashford Borough Council and the Community Safety Partnership remain of the view that CCTV will diminish incidents of crime and public disorder where it is in situ. It also assists in improving community confidence thereby creating a safer environment for residents, businesses, tourists and visitors alike.

Ashford Borough Council is committed to demonstrate its compliance and effectiveness by publicising this Annual CCTV Report along with the Annual CCTV

Review, CCTV Code of Practice and an Annual CCTV Privacy Impact Assessment.

The Surveillance Camera Commissioner, invited all 433 Local Authorities to complete an on line self‐assessment tool. This tool helps local authorities assess public space CCTV systems against the twelve guiding principles defined within The Protection of Freedoms Act.

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

Local authority town centre CCTV can be instrumental in identifying those committing crime and public disorder offences to the police.

CCTV in action

The AMC operators were made aware of a large theft of jewellery from a location and a brief description of an offender.. Fortunately there was a police officer in the AMC at the time that the information was being released. Within a few minutes of carrying out a review and working with the police, the image of the offender, vehicle details and direction the vehicle left were obtained on camera and passed to patrols in the area. This resulted in the offenders being arrested by Kent Police.

This year during the Coronavirus lockdown 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.

**Background**

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on local authorities to do all they reasonably can to prevent;

* Crime and disorder in their areas (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment),
* The misuse of drugs, alcohol or other substances
* c). Reoffending in their areas.

This will lead to improvements in people’s quality of life as a result. To deliver against these requirements the council has recently invested significantly in the scheme to upgrade the monitoring, transmission and camera technology to ensure the scheme remains effective and is compliant with the Code.

Management responsibility for the monitoring, operation and technical maintenance of the CCTV scheme is undertaken by the Council’s Community Safety and Wellbeing Service.

The system is owned and maintained by Ashford Borough Council and the images are monitored 24 hours each day, 7 days per week for the monitoring centre by trained operatives

The scheme is operated in compliance with the internal approved Ashford Borough Council CCTV Code of Practice, which has been agreed with the Police and has been prepared as guidance for Council staff and the operators of the system.

This internal Code of Practice also reflects the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2000 and associated regulations and is refreshed bi-annually. The Council is listed on the Data Protection Register of the Information Commissioner’s Office and the registration number is Z8344724.

**Purpose of the System**

The Code details that the 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.

It states that such a legitimate aim and pressing need might include national security, public safety, the economic well-being of the country, the prevention of disorder or crime, the protection of health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

The Ashford Borough Council scheme is operated in relation to the prevention of disorder or crime and the reduction of the fear of crime. Additionally it may be used in relation to public safety.

The CCTV scheme is operated within applicable law/guidance and only for the purposes identified above. The scheme will be operated with due regard to the privacy of the individual.

The system will not be used to gather information on people going about their lawful business. To encourage confidence in the system all cameras used by the CCTV operator’s at Ashford Borough Council are overt and their presence is clearly indicated by signs covering the CCTV area.

Any data or information recorded will only be used by the borough council, police and other statutory Law Enforcement Agencies**Ashford Borough Councils CCTV Control Room**

Ashford Borough Council employed operators staff the CCTV control room, working shifts to provide cover 7 days a week. We have 82 Cameras, covering Ashford and Tenterden. The majority of cameras can pan, tilt and zoom (PTZ) allowing the operators full control of the cameras.

The CCTV control room makes use of digital recording equipment and flat Liquid

Crystal Display (LCD) screens to provide good quality secure images.

Digital images permit live viewing, recording and the facility to play back immediately. All digital recordings have an authentication, which cannot be altered. 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.

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 Ashford Borough Councils website.

We work very closely with the Community Partnership initiatives in Ashford where ‘Shopwatch’ and ‘Pubwatch’ schemes operate. All these have a radio link direct into our control room.

Public car park surveillance is another important role for the Council’s CCTV system. 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.

Our CCTV operators are responsible for the Council’s out‐of‐hours emergency telephone service. Our operators deal with various emergencies across the borough 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

Partnership working with other council teams and external agencies is an important element of CCTV service provision. The control room works closely with partners to support internal and external teams gathering information relating to Licensing, the

Night Time Economy Tasking group, Environmental Health, Planning, Kent Police as well as others.

**Control Room Operators**

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.

All CCTV operator personnel are vetted by Kent Police*.*

Refresher training is provided to operators to keep them updated on relevant legislation, CCTV Surveillance, First Aid, Health and Safety matters etc. Operators are encouraged to identify training they feel could benefit the service.

**Direct Surveillance**

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).

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.

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.

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, Ashford Borough 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.

**Review of Cameras.**

The Code requires schemes to be used for a specific purpose which is in pursuit of a legitimate aim and necessary to meet an identified pressing need. In addition, the use must take account of the effect on individuals and their privacy.

The Council recognise that we must have due regard to privacy when installing CCTV cameras and the councils CCTV system includes privacy setting software that allows for parts of an image to be blanked out.

This feature is promoted during public consultation for new cameras to provide reassurance to residents that the scheme is designed to monitor public open space and to highlight that the Council takes concerns regarding privacy very seriously.

In response to privacy concerns raised by residents for cameras that are situated near to their property we have installed privacy settings that blank out either windows or entire properties to ensure their concerns are addressed.

**Subject Access Requests**

Individuals have the rights of subject access as provided for in Section 7 Data Protection Act 1998. Any application must be made in writing on a standard form which is available on our website at [www.ashford.gov.uk/subject-access-requests](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/subject-access-requests)

**CCTV Performance Evaluation**

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. These include Camera reviews, downloads, incidents and camera usage.

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.

**The Future**

Ashford Borough 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.

Ashford Borough 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.