



## CCTV IN TOWN CENTRES: THREE CASE STUDIES

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### Summary

Results from earlier studies published in this series suggest that CCTV can, in certain circumstances, make a useful contribution to crime control. However, very few evaluations of town centre schemes have been carried out, and those that have only look at the effect of cameras in the short term.

This paper examines how the police are using CCTV systems to deal with crime and disorder within three different town centres in England - Newcastle, Birmingham and King's Lynn. It examines the effect in the medium term of the use of cameras on local patterns of offending for different types of offence within these different types of town centre. It also attempts to provide some indication of the mechanisms through which CCTV has its effect.

### Key findings

One of the main benefits of CCTV systems for the police is as an aid for managing resources more effectively. Within the study areas, the police use CCTV to 'patrol' town centres and discover incidents as they occur, and use the information to co-ordinate appropriate and effective responses. Radio links between shop staff, police officers and camera operators can also be used very successfully in conjunction with camera systems to improve communication. In relation to false alarms, the information provided by CCTV can liberate police resources by providing better information on whether or not a police response is necessary.

Filmed evidence of an incident can also benefit the police considerably. It can play an extremely

important role in directing the investigation of an offence and ensuring the swift detection of an offender.

Analysis of crime and incident data indicates that in the short term, the presence of CCTV can have a strong deterrent effect on a wide range of offences. For example, in the area of central Newcastle covered by the cameras, the number of burglaries fell by 56%, cases of criminal damage by 34%, and non-motorvehicle theft by 11% after CCTV was installed. Commensurate figures for the whole force area were a fall of 2% for burglary, and rises of 8% for both criminal damage and for theft. However, the effect of cameras may begin to fade after a certain period of time. In order to sustain the effect, the use of the cameras must be seen to increase the risk of arrest.

The evidence suggests that CCTV is most effective in reducing property crime, particularly burglary, in town centres. Personal crimes such as robbery, theft from the person and assault are more difficult to control using CCTV. In relation to assault the value of cameras may lie less in preventing such offences than in co-ordinating a swift police response to incidents and collecting evidence should it be required.

It appears that CCTV has most effect on crime levels in town centres with geographically simple layouts where the extent of camera coverage is high. In a geographically complex town centre a high degree of camera coverage can be more difficult to achieve and displacement of crime may take place.

### Points for action

The findings show that CCTV is most effective when it is used by the police as an integral part of a command and control strategy, to assist the deployment of officers. To sustain any deterrent effect of CCTV, the police must also use the system to make arrests. With the assistance of other agencies, police forces, therefore, must aim to:

- ensure that information can pass swiftly from CCTV operators to officers on the ground and vice-versa, thus allowing the swift deployment of officers to deal with incidents. Most arrests are made when the system is used to coordinate timely responses to incidents as they occur. Attempting to use recorded information to identify suspects retrospectively is more time consuming and much less effective.
- maximise the possibility of arrest for offenders by making sure that camera operators are informed about local crime patterns. Camera operators can direct their patrols by using local intelligence information. For example, they can keep an eye out for persons wanted on warrant. They can also 'patrol' problem areas, either in the short term in response to spates of offences, or in the longer term, for example checking on the entrances to certain nightclubs and public houses, or transport facilities where the potential for trouble at certain times may be high.
- minimise the potential displacement of offending by selecting camera sites very carefully and making sure that camera views are not obstructed. Moreover, police forces must pay special attention to surrounding areas within the town centre area, for example car parks, that are routinely used by members of the public but may have little or no camera coverage.

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