

## CCTV in the UK is not a statutory function

Posted on May 23, 2015 by [Philip Ingram MBE](#)



CCTV in the UK is not a statutory function

Tony Porter, the Surveillance Camera Commissioner was speaking at the CCTV User group this week. He is a regular speaker at industry related events and is known for his straight talking.

“The User Group has accused me in the past of not understanding the level of cuts facing parts of its membership. This is an accusation I reject completely.” he said.

“I fully understand that public sector organisations are still in the maelstrom of challenging financial times. In this financial year alone (2015-16) councils in the UK will have to find £2.6 billion of savings – a mind-boggling figure!.

Local Authorities have told me time and again the challenges they face, that we’re still in an economy where savings must be made in nearly every aspect of the services provided to the public. Public space CCTV in the UK is not a statutory function that Local Authorities must provide.

I am now beginning to see evidence that councils are looking at reducing or already have reduced their CCTV provision. I’ve seen councils in large towns like Blackpool and Derby stop monitoring their systems twenty-four seven. My understanding is that this is not as the result of a review or public consultation but simply to save money,” he continued.

Porter then highlighted a deterioration of standards and training as CCTV managers' roles are being cut and supervisors with little or no knowledge of CCTV are being left to report to senior managers.

"I am also concerned about the level of knowledge that Local Authorities have about the totality of public space surveillance cameras controlled by their organisation. And if they are all code compliant – that is a legal requirement," he emphasised.

He stated that most town centre public space CCTV is generally inline with the code where it is being controlled through a CCTV manager however, cameras being used by traffic management, waste management, housing and environmental services tend not to be and are not meeting their statutory requirements in all cases.

"I am sure that this kind of thing is happening in Local Authorities across the UK – breaches of the code that they have a legal requirement to pay due regard to. No privacy impact assessments, no regular reviews and no familiarity of the code at all!

There is still a huge challenge to get all parts of Local Authorities code compliant but it's one that I'm determined to overcome. I will continue to offer advice on how to comply with the code and where necessary meet minimum standards." Porter stated to the group.

"The Protection of Freedoms Act places a statutory requirement on relevant authorities such as Police Forces and Local Authorities to pay due regard to the code."

However, in a stark warning about standards he recounted a conversation with a colleague; "I was discussing this with a colleague on my Standards Board recently. We're talking about whether there need to be statutory minimum standards. Something in legislation that sets a bare minimum that everyone must legally meet.

After some discussion he said to me "Tony – you need to be careful about setting minimum standards in legislation as you may very well see a race to the bottom."

I think it's clear what he meant in that if there is a minimum that is all people will strive for – they won't go over and above it, it becomes the lowest common denominator."

Porter added he had seen great examples of how standards were being applied where his team worked with authorities to ensure that what they are doing is code compliant.

"I've seen great examples in Birmingham and Sedgemoor in Somerset of Local Authorities carrying out reviews of their town centre CCTV systems leading to the removal of ineffective cameras and cost savings."

Jokingly Porter referred to an element of the CCTV user group known affectionately as the "grumpy old men"

"Of course I know the reference to grumpy old men in this group is tongue in cheek and there is a drive to make the industry the best it can be – recognised as one of the best in the world.

You may have heard a famous quote – "evil happens when good men do nothing...". I am not doing nothing" concluded Porter.