



BODY SHOTS

Richie McBride explains how the growth of body worn cameras in UK prisons has benefited both prison officers and prisoners alike

Each year there are nearly 6000 reported incidents of assaults on prison officers within English and Welsh prisons, 700 of which resulted in serious injury last year. With figures of incidents rising by a third in 2016, the protection of staff and prisoners is high on the Government's agenda.

Statistics from the Ministry of Justice indicate that prisoner-on-prisoner assaults have, too, risen by a third in the last year, prompting comments from past Justice Secretary Liz Truss around prison safety and reform, and from the Prison Reform Trust which pointed out that "people in prison, prisoners and staff, are less safe than they have been at any other

point since records began". In the year to March 2017 alone, there were 344 deaths in our prisons, the highest number on record.

As part of UK-wide reform, the introduction of body worn cameras within Her Majesty's Prison Service in England and Wales, and subsequently in Northern Ireland and Scotland, was seen to be an effective, safe and scalable measure for tackling some of the abusive behaviour within the service.

"This is a significant and important step in ensuring that prison officers have the right tools... and will contribute to a safer prison environment" notes Justice Minister, Northern Ireland, Claire Sugden (2016-2017).

Assaults on prison officers rose by a third in 2016

Body worn cameras (BWC) have, for some time now, acted as deterrents to, and evidence-capturing devices of, aggressive and abusive behaviour in industries such as the Police, Civil Enforcement for Local Authorities and within the private security sector. Simple to use, unobtrusive to wear, and requiring little training, these devices are designed to capture unbiased audio and video footage of incidents, providing valuable evidence and records when required.

With its roll-out now complete to HMPS across England and Wales, Edesix Ltd. is the preferred supplier for the UK Prison Service nationally. The company's VideoBadge Body Worn Camera, iconic for its front facing ID badge, is the camera of choice for prison officers. However, it is the sophisticated solution provided by the company, inclusive of bespoke hardware and software, which really benefits the service most.

EFFICIENT WORKFLOW

The hardware and infrastructure provided by Edesix ensures efficient workflow and ease of use for prison officers and those managing the data. Using a combination of DockControllers (a device which allows up to 84 VideoBadges to be connected, assigned and managed from one instance of VideoManager) and MicroServers for data storage; large estates of cameras can be simply rolled-out and centrally managed.

Although complex in its design, the Edesix solution ensures that the day-to-day operation of prison-wide BWCs is simple to manage, unobtrusive for staff,

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and easily scaled upon demand. The cameras worn by prison officers are capable of recording up to eight hours of footage including audio, and come with flexible mounting options for uniforms. The entire solution is secure and encrypted, meaning that even in the worst circumstance, a lost or stolen camera's footage cannot be viewed, deleted or shared.

In order for the BWC deployment to work for prisons, as is the case with many other industries, daily routines and workflows were examined so as to ensure collection and use would be as simple as possible for staff. The majority of services using cameras utilise RFID cards for swipe-and-assign collection of BWCs. In doing this, the user of the camera need do nothing more than swipe their ID card over the RFID reader, at which time the system automatically allocates a fully charged BWC to that user. They then un-dock the camera, which flashes and beeps at them, with the camera remaining assigned to that user until it is re-docked and footage is offloaded. There is no requirement to log into the system manually, nor assess the status of the suite of badges before choosing one to use; this deployment method is efficient, secure and ensures only authorised users can obtain a camera – those not allocated are incapable of recording footage.

The aspect of security was key for those prison services utilising BWCs. With the original impetus

for procuring the devices stemming from a need to protect those within prisons, cameras have proven to de-escalate situations, which in the past would have almost certainly resulted in verbal if not physical abuse of staff. Feedback from prisons using the devices shows that staff feel more confident in asserting themselves during conflict, and prisoners have verbalised the benefits to them, stating that it enforces true and just accounts of incidents, placing responsibility and consequence on those at fault.

This theme of security continues throughout the utilisation of BWCs into the safe viewing, storing and sharing of footage. This aspect of deployment lies in the back-end management of footage; ranging from authorisation to view footage through to the safe storage and deletion policies of captured video. Through software, tiered user-levels can be easily created, providing varying access authorisation for users. Those with basic access are simply authorised to record and offload video, where those with higher levels of access can view, share and manage footage for evidential purposes – all of which is stored in a non-editable audit log. Standard deletion policies are encouraged to be implemented; ensuring non-evidential footage is destroyed in line with industry regulation.

COST SAVING EXERCISE

As with UK police forces, the deployment of BWCs is also hoped to exact cost savings as their use escalates within UK prisons. It was proven that, in one small trial deployment within Police Scotland over the course of a year, 697 officers and 453 civilians were not required to attend court due to the evidence gathered using BWCs, with the number of upheld complaints against officers wearing BWCs dropping to zero. With the use of BWCs expanding significantly within UK Police Forces, these numbers have been replicated across the country. The reduction in the time taken to affect justice significantly reduces costs associated with officers spending time in court and away from their daily duties. This example can quite clearly be replicated within prisons, reducing the duration of time a prison officer will spend suspended while an accusation against them is investigated. Statistics published towards the end of 2016 indicated that compensation claims paid to prisoners and guards reached £100m in the past six years. By introducing BWCs, false accusations will reduce, and escalated incidents have also been proven to decrease.

With the largest deployment still in its infancy, and further roll-outs planned within the UK's Prison Services, the stats associated with the utilisation of BWCs are still to come. However, it is pleasing to see that the early indicators point towards reduced violence, increased staff satisfaction, and improved incident management within our jails.

Although still a relatively young industry, there has been huge growth in the body worn camera market over the last few years. Increasingly, more and more sectors are exploring using them to improve security, transparency and training.

An expanding marketplace also brings about new challenges for suppliers. Edesix is at the forefront of innovation within this sector, and as demand grows

for its product, it is essential that new cameras and accessories are produced to meet the growing needs of users.

The latest product is the VideoTag; Edesix's smallest, lightest and most discreet incident recorder to date. Designed for industries requiring less frequent use than the 8 to 14 hour recording time of Edesix's VideoBadge, the VT-50 is lightweight, unobtrusive, cost-effective and easy to use. It requires no extra training, streams live footage and has a standby battery-life of up to three months. The VT Series also provides complementary audio and video capture of incidents when utilised as part of a larger body worn camera and CCTV security function.

Another new innovation from Edesix is ONStream, its new camera streaming gateway software, which enables ONVIF compliant Video Management Systems (VMS) to be compatible with Edesix cameras, streamlining the management of footage for users. VideoBadge and VideoTag cameras integrate seamlessly with VideoManager and leading CCTV Video Management Systems via ONStream, meaning captured footage can be instantly shared and viewed by security staff.

As with all new technology, there are questions

around the security of data, access to information, and the regulations around use, which pose as initial challenges when introducing BWC to a new market.

However, Edesix has worked hard to ensure that its devices are secure and encrypted, that data simply cannot be obtained from the cameras without secure log-in credentials and that only authorised users have access to review and manage footage. It has found that, due to successful deployments to trusted organisations such as PSNI and HMPS, these challenges have lessened significantly.

CAMERAS ARE CAPABLE OF RECORDING UP TO EIGHT HOURS OF FOOTAGE INCLUDING AUDIO

Edesix offers bespoke solutions to ensure that each BWC roll-out works for the organisation to complement work-flow and daily routine, as well as data and security requirements. Therefore, challenges in the sector are met head-on, and dealt with in the early stages of deployment, which has allowed Edesix to overcome all industry challenges so far ●

Richie McBride is a serial entrepreneur and investor. He previously co-founded Axon Networks, which was acquired by 3Com where he assumed the role of Investment Director looking at new technologies and acquisitions. He is the Managing Director and co-founder of Edesix Ltd.

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Picture credit: Edesix