

# PRISON SECURITY

**Richie McBride** examines the rise of body-worn cameras modernising prison security across the UK

**B**ody Worn Cameras (BWCs) are well suited to high-security environments. Edesix VideoBadges have been present in UK prisons since 2015, and have been proven to make prisons safer places for both guards and prisoners. Deterrent, de-escalations and gaining prosecution evidence when needed has all helped

to increase order and welfare in prison establishments. In addition, BWC footage has also been used as reflective practice for prisoner order and rehabilitation. The VideoBadge is now an established part of how a UK jail is operated.

Each year there are nearly 6,000 reported incidents of assaults on prison officers within English and Welsh prisons, 700 of which resulted in serious injury last year.

**Cameras create a safer environment for wardens and prisoners alike**



New security methods for deterring aggression and capturing evidence are now key. Prisons have turned to technology for assistance with these problems. CCTV surveillance has been widely employed within prisons since the nineties, and its prevalence has been growing year on year. The use of BWCs has taken this a step further. BWCs enable slick and effective capturing and sharing of evidence from the camera to the courtroom. With the ability to attain real-time footage of any incidents, our prison officers and police are safer, and convictions can be made more quickly, void of biased views and human memory dependency.

## SAFER WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Cameras create a safer working environment for wardens and instill greater harmony between prisoners by acting as a visible deterrent for possible outbursts of abusive behaviour and violence. Through equipping themselves with BWCs, prison staff can quell any violent behaviour before it even begins. Prisoners are made aware that both their actions and the staff's actions are being carefully monitored and recorded in evidential HD quality to support disciplinary action or even criminal charges. Initial trials of BWCs in prisons have been well received by all parties involved, and since the cameras are only mounted on prison wardens, the impact of inmate privacy is minimised when compared with traditional CCTV. BWCs are also used in conjunction with CCTV to supplement static recorded footage with point-of-view visual and, crucially, audio evidence.

The VideoBadge is small, lightweight, and durable, designed to be worn on the prison officers' uniform to record evidential-quality audio and visual evidence of incidents. Images and audio captured by BWCs are encrypted and are used in conjunction with secure back-office video management software to protect confidential and sensitive footage. 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, 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.

In order for the BWC deployment to work for prisons, daily routines and workflows were examined to ensure that collecting and using body worn cameras would be as simple as possible for staff. A BWC system must be simple to deploy, easy to manage and straightforward to use; the wearable camera is a tool for the user to protect themselves – but it isn't the focus of their job and nor should it be. It is essential they are easy to use and deploy with minimal training. While the back-office management suite needs to be secure and able to deliver court-admissible evidence packages. The majority of services using Edesix 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 off loaded. 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 BWC users

can obtain a camera – BWCs that are not allocated are disabled and incapable of recording footage.

As with UK police forces, the deployment of BWCs is also hoped to produce cost savings as their use escalates within UK prisons. During a small trial deployment within Police Scotland over the course of a year, it was revealed that 697 officers and 453 civilians were not required to attend court due to the evidence gathered using BWC, with the number of upheld complaints against officers wearing BWCs dropping to zero. With the use of BWCs expanding 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 can quite clearly be replicated within prisons, reducing the length of time a prison officer will spend suspended while an accusation against them is investigated. Statistics published towards the end of 2016 indicate that compensation claims paid to prisoners and guards reached £100-million in the past six years. By introducing body worn cameras, false accusations will reduce, while escalated incidents have been proven to decrease.

## BWC FOOTAGE HAS BEEN USED AS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE FOR PRISONER ORDER AND REHABILITATION

One of the reasons high-security environments turn to body worn cameras is that the system has been designed from the ground up with high-end encryption, end-to-end system controls and provable evidence integrity. Edesix now supports over 100 establishments and has many thousands of high-security customer systems in daily use, which are often in difficult environments with challenging situations. Camera use is often extended to health and education support staff to help protect and to allay any fears in the workplace. Since Edesix's England and Wales MOJ/HMPPS contract win, other prison services have taken up the company as its BWC provider of choice, including the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), and just recently the Irish Prison Service. Some private prison service providers and international prison services are also now utilising the VideoBadge.

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, Body worn 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 situations involving conflict, while 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 adoption of BWCs into the safe viewing, storing and sharing of footage. This aspect of BWC 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 Edesix's VideoManager software, tiered user-levels can be easily created, providing varying access authorisation for users. Those with basic access are simply authorised to record and off load video, while 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. As with all other industries serviced by Edesix, standard deletion policies are encouraged to be implemented; ensuring non-evidential footage is destroyed in line with industry regulation.

Body worn technology has already proved its effectiveness and value for money within many aspects of the criminal justice sector, and so the growing prevalence of BWCs in prisons is the next logical step. Body worn cameras have been proven to help improve the safety of those in public-facing roles, while producing compelling legal evidence when needed. BWCs can provide two-fold protection to

staff – firstly, members of the public naturally change and moderate their behaviour for the better when they realise that they are being recorded, or might be recorded – but importantly those recordings can then be used, when needed, to provide evidential-quality footage to secure convictions, or to uphold the account of staff in the event of a complaint or incident. Police forces all over the globe are increasingly issuing BWCs as integral operational equipment to capture court-ready evidence, refute false claims and de-escalate heated situations.

A study conducted by Cambridge University found that police officers wearing body worn cameras received 93 percent fewer complaints and led to a “profound change in modern policing”. Similar benefits are expected to be experienced by correctional officers deploying BWCs including much improved morale among staff members and more harmonious relationships between prisoners and officers; not to mention the usefulness of the videos captured for real-life incident training and identification of best practice techniques, so as to improve prison security well into the future ●

**Richie McBride** is Managing Director and co-founder of Edesix Ltd. which has grown to become a market leader in the provision of body worn camera solutions. Edesix provides its solutions to those in public facing roles, such as police, security personnel, emergency services workers and the transport industry.

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