

Merseyside use of body-worn video a success

Published on 11 August 2020 Written by Sergeant Adele Ward, Merseyside Police

Practice note: Wearing video in voluntary attendance interviews during the coronavirus pandemic gets great praise from staff

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It's rare to come across a change in practice that has been put into general police use at pace during a crisis, but we've managed it in Merseyside.

In 2019, we launched a pilot allowing staff to record suspect interviews for all offences on body-worn video (BWV) camera at flexible locations, where it was appropriate and safe to do so. We created a step-by-step workbook to ensure that this was quick and easy to do while maintaining the appropriate risk and legal considerations. This followed a change in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) that enables chief constables to authorise BWV as approved devices for interviews, if set criteria about the environment are adhered to.

As the pilot drew to an end, an independent review team spoke to staff involved and the feedback was some of the most positive we've ever received. Even staff who usually struggled with voluntary attendance (VA) or technology – or at 4am on their last night shift – were able to breeze through the process. Word began to spread about this new, simple, efficient way to deal with suspects. Teams that we had not anticipated wanting to be involved, started to request authority to use the process as well.

As the COVID-19 pandemic hit the UK, Chief Constable Andy Cooke provided official authority for a full rollout. After an initial Skype training input, staff can now use the process to protect themselves and the public from the spread of the virus, and to assist with social distancing while still progressing investigations to a timely outcome for victims.

The key to this project's success has been the culture of empowerment and trust, which has allowed innovation to thrive. Staff feel empowered to make decisions for the right reason, to help keep communities safe. Staff have been able to interview shielded persons at their home address with full personal protective equipment (PPE). In one instance, officers saw a known juvenile out

during lockdown and found them in possession of drugs. The youth was returned home to their parents and an interview was conducted on BWV. That family did not need to travel outside, which reduced exposure to the virus, and officers were able to finalise the matter efficiently.

The commitment by staff to continue a high level of service during these troubled times has been astounding. Hundreds of audio-visual interviews have been recorded by setting the camera up on a coffee table, mantelpiece or desk in all sorts of locations, including empty police stations, partner agency offices, the suspect's place of work and home addresses.

There are wider benefits too. Staff are able to manage their own demand more efficiently, avoid VA at custody suites during peak times, combat suspect transport problems and return to their frontline duties more quickly. The process is also more cost-effective than custody or station-based VA, and is much better when dealing with vulnerable suspects. It has enabled us to interview juveniles and those with mobility, mental health or learning disability concerns at locations more convenient for them, away from police stations. This has assisted with safeguarding and has maximised the potential of each interview.

During a recent staff survey on general VA, numerous free-text responses were received singing the praises of the new process and requesting that it never be taken away as an option, such is the overwhelming enthusiasm in Merseyside. Perhaps your force could benefit too?

- For more information, documents training and ideas contact [**Sergeant Adele Ward**](#)

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