

Body-worn video (BWV) live-streaming in hostage and crisis negotiation

Boosting real-time situational awareness to inform decision-making, de-escalate situations faster and improve outcomes during high-threat harm-risk crisis and hostage negotiation incidents.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Intelligence and investigation Operational policing Vulnerability and safeguarding
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Region	South East
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Health services

Key details

Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	June 2024
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people General public Offenders Victims

Aim

To improve real-time situational awareness and decision-making capabilities that traditional practices could not achieve, to enable crisis and hostage coordinators to further support operational crisis and hostage negotiators.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are:

- improved real-time decision-making and coordination
- reduced unnecessary deployments of a limited resource
- faster and enhanced situational awareness in high-threat harm-risk situations to inform the commander and the negotiation coordinator (NegCo) in their decision-making and direction to support operational crisis and hostage negotiators, in other words, what is going well and keep doing and what is not going so well and stop talking about
- support for isolated officers - negotiators working alone can feel more supported knowing that their actions are being monitored in real-time, providing a sense of security and backup
- high level efficiency opportunities:
 - quicker resolutions through focused advice

- remote triage and expert support or direction sooner
- reduced radio traffic (such as not needing a dedicated airwave channel where there is two way communication)
- where patching in via the BWV is an option – less need to negotiator(s) to ‘break away’ from the subject to report back boosting the quality of response, boosting resilience as may be times when only one negotiator is on scene
- enhanced situational awareness for remote-based oversight
- enriched support for isolated officers through real-time monitoring

Description

This initiative involves the use of body-worn video (BWV) live-streaming to enhance real-time situational awareness during hostage and crisis negotiations.

It was adopted to address limitations in traditional practices, particularly the delay in relaying information from negotiators to coordinators and commanders in offering tactical level support.

The live-streaming capability allows role-based access, enabling those with the appropriate skills and responsibilities to observe incidents as they unfold, so access is restricted to those in the command chain and required skills.

The practice was piloted by Kent Police and operationalised by South Wales Police and West Midlands Police. It enables NegCos and commanders to:

- remotely monitor incidents
- provide timely tactical advice sooner
- support frontline negotiators without necessarily requiring physical presence at the scene

The NegCo can gather information through the livestream and can directly engage with the negotiator through the BWV or a dedicated airwave channel.

Kent Police ran a pilot within a hostage and crisis negotiation course, conducted in February 2024.

South Wales Police launched this capability operationally first for the hostage and crisis negotiation specialism in 2021. Their tactical lead has provided the following case study.

South Wales Police can offer individual case studies but because of their reporting, cannot offer exact statistics for negotiator deployments. There are estimated to be up to 40 deployments per year.

One such scenario was a subject intent on jumping from a significant height. The officers were on the ground, making efforts to engage when the negotiator team was deployed. The officers were cautious in their engagement, and early negotiator advice provided as a result of the live-stream body-worn video provided them with the confidence to provide some reality checks.

Being firm but offering a compromise after the subject's return to safety provided the catalyst for an early "surrender". The officers were able to use the NegCo guidance and direction from the command log to great effect. The officers confirmed in the debrief that they did not have the confidence to do this and were effectively willing to do anything the subject demanded to prevent them jumping. The NegCo early strategy, tactical advice and direction to the ground commander could only be this effective with live-stream.

Overall impact

- From the live-stream video, the NegCo can assess the situation and capture a more rounded situational awareness before providing advice around tactics (beyond generic advice) and early assessment, which could negate the need for them to deploy to the scene.
- Engagement from the NegCo from the outset means a more effective brief to the tactical and force incident commander to task out operational decision-making whilst maintaining chain of command. The commander also has access to the live-stream footage.
- Kent Police have stated that the efficiency this practice brings can lead to quicker resolutions through more focused advice and reduced breaks in engagement with the negotiator who would be briefing and being directed by the NegCo.
- South Wales Police have used live-stream since 2021, initially just for the negotiator team and latterly across all frontline resources. The live-stream capability of non-specialist resources provides for a better briefing between the force incident manager (FIM) and the NegCo as they often stream the incident to assess the frontline request for the negotiator team.

Learning

- South Wales Police commented on several occasions where the NegCo engagement with the first responders has provided an earlier resolution. Often cancelling negotiators en route, or building a picture to minimise the time taken at scenes. This is carried out using live-stream and command and control logs to brief back. This represented a cost saving.
- South Wales Police, like many forces, have a limited negotiation and NegCo capability. The ability to better triage before deployment prevents burning through the negotiator on-call and resource. Kent Police supported sharing how in times of peak demand limited people with this specialist skill were called upon multiple times causing resilience and over time cost implications.
- South Wales Police highlight the live-stream capability of non-specialist resources provides for a better briefing between the FIM/Oscar1 and the NegCo as they often stream the incident to assess the frontline request for the negotiator team.

Identified risks and challenges

- Privacy concerns - continuous live-streaming can raise privacy issues, especially if the footage captures sensitive or private moments. Robust data protection impact assessment and management of police information considerations should be reviewed with this capability in mind.
- Technical limitations - the effectiveness of live-streaming depends on the availability of a strong and stable signal. In areas with poor connectivity, the live-stream may be unreliable.
- Cost - implementing and maintaining live-streaming capabilities will have to be balanced against other competing priorities.
- Blurred rank or role risk - Kent Police have highlighted a risk of perception vs interpretation if roles were to get blurred with command. For example, a raised voice over live-stream may sound like an escalation to a commander, but a NegCo may interpret it as expressive given their specialist training. It is important to set clear roles across individuals who have access to the live-stream footage.

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