



Committee and Date
Cabinet 16th October 2024

Item

Public



Shrewsbury Town Centre CCTV service following public consultation.

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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Robert Macey, Culture and Digital		

1. Synopsis

This report seeks approval from Cabinet for a revised Shrewsbury Town Centre CCTV service following public consultation and detailed discussions with partners.

2. Executive Summary

Shropshire Council’s Customer Service Centre (CSC) currently oversees management of a team who provide both the 24/7 CCTV monitoring for Shrewsbury town centre and the Council’s out of hours call support and triage for highways, homelessness, parking emergencies, some social care calls and other services.

- 2.1 Given the Council’s financial challenges and need to make £62.5m in savings in 2024/25 to remain within budget, the Council must review all non-mandatory services it provides, which includes its CCTV service for Shrewsbury. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy agreed by the Council in February 2024, identifies a £334,000 saving against a new model for the delivery of Shrewsbury Town Centre CCTV monitoring and out of hours call triage.
- 2.2 In July 2024 Cabinet approved a six-week public and stakeholder consultation on the options which set out how Shropshire Council and partners (Shrewsbury BID, Shrewsbury Town Council and West Mercia Police) could run and fund CCTV for Shrewsbury Town Centre in the future, while separately ensuring the Council’s statutory out of hours emergency call handling is covered.

- 2.3 The consultation included four options to offer different models of CCTV operation. Option 1, the preferred Option, was for a passive monitored CCTV system with a “best endeavours” approach to a monitored service. Option 2 was the same as Option 1 but enhanced with some volunteer led active monitoring. Option 3 was the cessation of CCTV monitoring and recording altogether and option 4 was the same as option 1 with additional resource of two staff, to provide active monitoring as rotas allow; however, this additional resource would have required partner funding for the extra active monitoring resource.
- 2.4 A total of 315 consultation replies were received, while around 20 individuals and businesses attended a consultation event. A full analysis of the consultation feedback is at Appendix 1 of this report.
- 2.5 The outcome of the public consultation was 64% of respondents indicated that they prefer Option 4, which asks partners to contribute to staffing for active CCTV monitoring for approximately 75% of the time.
- 2.6 Following the consultation closure and the feedback from consultees, the outcome of the consultation and the views of partners have again been sought with regards to any contributions that could be provided for funding active CCTV monitoring.
- 2.7 For CCTV to continue operating in Shrewsbury, this requires ongoing investment in maintenance of the camera network and system. These costs for the last three years have been met by Shropshire Council. The whole system has been recently updated with new additional cameras continuing to be added however, to prevent the CCTV system degrading ongoing maintenance is required. During the consultation period, Shrewsbury Town Council confirmed its commitment to contribute towards maintenance costs of the system. This offer is very welcome, and Shropshire Council would like to thank the Town Council for this support. Shropshire Council understand that the Town Council is having to balance the financial ask to support CCTV with other requests for financial support for local non-statutory services currently provided by Shropshire Council and must consider how it prioritises such requests. Until this picture and any associated financial requirement is fully known, the Town Council have stated, that it cannot at this stage make any further funding commitment to support CCTV, and this should be seen against its existing commitments to fund other town centre community safety initiatives.
- 2.8 West Mercia Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner have reiterated that financial support for CCTV is limited to capital costs only and not day to day running costs that funds staff monitoring. Police have installed a new town centre policing team, and discussions are ongoing with West Mercia Police about technology required to provide remote access to CCTV which has been achieved in other Local Policing Area’s within West Mercia Police. Police state that CCTV has been a key tool in responding and resolving to crime and public safety matters in Shrewsbury for several years. CCTV’s overall benefit is influenced by cameras being in the right places, standards of ongoing maintenance, the direct line of communication with Police (or partners) to respond, and the ease of the evidential recovery process. In the absence of a live monitoring service, Police say they will work with Shropshire Council and partners to consider all possible options to ensure the remaining service continues to maximise impact and keep the town centre a safe place to be.

- 2.9 Shrewsbury BID's scope for financial support is limited by its five-year business plan, which was approved by a democratic ballot of businesses in 2023. This plan makes no financial provision for CCTV but helps fund other safety initiatives in Shrewsbury Town Centre. Any significant changes to the BID's business plan and spending priorities during its five-year term would require an alteration ballot under The Business Improvement Districts (England) Regulations 2004. Business Improvement Districts exist to fund and operate projects and services in addition to those baseline services provided by the local authority at the time of ballot. There is no precedent for a Business Improvement District to call an alteration ballot to help fund a service previously operated by the local authority. Additionally, any changes to the BID's business plan and spending priorities could have a negative impact on its wider projects to support businesses in the town.
- 2.10 Partners have said they would actively support any initiatives to provide any volunteer-led support to monitor CCTV. Shrewsbury Town Centre Residents Association have also indicated that members would support such an initiative and during the consultation further steps have been undertaken to develop a council wide volunteering offer that could encompass CCTV, mirroring the example as run in Oswestry. The Council is also working with partners to establish a clear volunteering recruitment pool and if this can support CCTV monitoring, subject to volunteers meeting legal and training requirements.
- 2.11 Following the consultation period and partner engagement, and for the reasons outlined above in terms of the feasibility of the options, this report recommends that Option one which was the Council's original option prior to consultation remains the preferred option.

3. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 3.1 In absence of any further partner funding commitment to support the most popular option from consultation (Option 4), and to help meet the Council's savings target, approve Option 1 with monitoring of CCTV moving to a "best endeavours" approach where staff's priority will be responding to out of hours service calls, rather than CCTV monitoring.
- 3.2 Agree to explore with partners the feasibility of a volunteer programme to provide additional monitoring capacity. This could provide additional active monitoring capacity during specific identified peaks and higher risk times.
- 3.3 The Council and other partners continue to seek other funding options to help support additional CCTV monitoring.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1 In reaching the recommendations for cabinet, we have identified and addressed the associated risks as follows:
- 4.2 An Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) has been conducted to screen the proposed options for consultation for anticipated equality impacts, whether neutral, negative, or positive. Adoption of the preferred option (Option 2) would bring an anticipated neutral impact for people across Protected Characteristic groupings in the community, as defined in the Equality Act 2010, with a likely neutral to low negative impact for those that may be vulnerable. This is because, alongside the active monitoring of CCTV to promote community safety, the CCTV team also answers calls to the council made outside office hours and would continue to do so. These are emergency calls that cannot reasonably or safely wait until offices are next open, mainly calls for urgent highways issues that may involve risk to health or safety, calls from people who face immediate homelessness that evening and the overflow of calls to social care where vulnerable adults or children may be at risk. The emergency out of hours provision is a vital service that needs to continue. Withdrawing the service would have a negative impact on vulnerable individuals and members of the public who could be at risk. Therefore, it is imperative that we continue this service to support those in crisis. The preferred option for consultation maintains the out of hours service and CCTV recording provision, and overall impact may therefore be anticipated to be neutral. However, as it is at a different level to the current “gold standard” service there may be perceptions amongst communities and groupings in communities that they will become more vulnerable because of any changes to the service. Assessment of any such perceptions would be a useful element of the consultation, as it would enable the council to gauge depth of views and utilise the findings to aid decision-making processes.

Risk	Mitigation
<p>The move to a passively monitored CCTV system would impact negatively on levels of crime and may be viewed negatively by the public and businesses.</p>	<p>CCTV would remain in operation 24/7 which will continue to be deployed with other interventions; this is proven to be an effective deterrent to crime.</p> <p>CCTV would not stop monitoring altogether – a best endeavours service would remain.</p> <p>Police have installed a new town centre policing unit, and discussions are ongoing with West Mercia Police about technology required to give Shrewsbury Police’s control access to CCTV as is done in other command areas in West Mercia Police.</p> <p>Partners have been offered the opportunity to fund other approaches, which would allow some active monitoring to remain.</p> <p>Working with partners, a system to recruit volunteers will be explored, who with the necessary training and clearance, can provide a level of active monitoring at key times.</p> <p>Funding will be sought to provide active monitoring for specific higher risk events as identified by police, such as Category 1 derby football matches.</p>

	An appropriate communication plan will be developed to stress that CCTV remains in operation and that changes are part of the Council's measures to review non statutory expenditure considering its budget challenge.
There is a perception of a reduction in public safety and increase in crime in Shrewsbury town centre	The recommendation would retain a 24/7 CCTV system to remain in operation in Shrewsbury town centre for use in criminal detection and deterrence, with footage made available on request to police or other law enforcement. This is in line with other towns in and outside the county.
Additional costs of maintenance and upkeep of the CCTV equipment are not met, and system degrades.	<p>The Council has made a considerable investment in repairing and refurbishing the hardware and infrastructure of the CCTV system.</p> <p>Partners have been approached to meet the costs of maintenance and replacements and their ability to support this to ensure the system does not degrade. Shrewsbury Town Council has offered to fund maintenance costs to ensure the system remains in good working order.</p> <p>Further cameras are due to be added to the system during 2024 following a successful funding bid.</p>
Several council services, who could benefit from CCTV coverage will no longer do so.	This is not borne out in the requests received by the CCTV team in 2023 data, nor during the consultation.
Changes to the Pubwatch and Shopwatch scheme offered by Shrewsbury BID affects the service provided to BID members	<p>The CCTV team's active monitoring is just one element of the Safer Streets support scheme offered to businesses.</p> <p>Many aspects of the Watch schemes run by Shrewsbury BID are not dependent on the CCTV team. For example, radio contact between members would continue as it does now. These schemes can continue with a passively monitored CCTV.</p>

5 Financial Implications

5.1 Shropshire Council is currently managing an unprecedented financial position as budgeted for within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy approved by Council on 29 February 2024 and detailed in our monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. This demonstrates that significant management action is required over the remainder of the financial year to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all Cabinet Reports provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. Where non-essential spend is identified within the Council, this will be reduced. This may involve

- scaling down initiatives,
- changing the scope,

- delaying implementation, or
- extending delivery timescales.

5.2 The current service provision costs the council c£600k per year. This covers both CCTV support and out of hours calls to the council, and the out of hours social work support team.

5.3 Implementation of the Option 1 and the removal of the need for the Council to cover the regular maintenance and accommodation costs would reduce the overall running costs of the service to the Council to £250k, making a reduction in cost of approximately £350k.

6 Climate Change Appraisal

6.1 There are no direct implications for climate change because of this report and full implications and considerations of climate change as a result of any changes to the approved approach will be reviewed at that time.

7 Background

7.1 Shropshire Council CCTV team currently provides 24/7 CCTV monitoring for Shrewsbury town centre, as well as the Council's out of hours emergency call handling and triage that operates when offices are closed, across 365 days of the year. These out of hours calls are mainly contacts for highways, homelessness, stair lifts repairs and locked in car parks, as well as some social care and lone worker calls. These are calls that cannot reasonably or safely wait for normal office opening times.

7.2 Since April 2022, to make best use of their shift-working status, in addition to real time CCTV monitoring, the CCTV team has provided the out of hours call triage service for most council services. In 2023, the team received 4,691 out of hours calls.

7.3 The CCTV network has 39 fixed cameras located in and around Shrewsbury town centre. 31 are located within the river loop with the remaining cameras in the Abbey Foregate, Coleham, Frankwell and station areas. During 2024 additional cameras are being installed within the river loop, following a successful funding bid. The team also monitors cameras at Monkmoor on behalf of Shrewsbury Town Council and in Craven Arms on behalf of Craven Arms Town Council.

7.4 During 2023, there were 3,144 occasions where the CCTV team took control of a camera to actively monitor a situation or were asked to retrieve footage. This includes both real time and reactive incidents, where evidence has been requested after an incident by police. A total of 36% of these were police review and footage requests, 33% relate to safer streets and 31% are other incidents recorded by CCTV monitoring.

7.5 The council does not hold information as to the outcome of any CCTV intervention as to whether it has contributed to successful prosecutions or prevented criminal activity or anti-social behaviour. Anecdotal examples presented during the consultation CCTV intervention by some respondents highlighted the added value of live CCTV monitoring.

- 7.6 The council's Medium Term Financial Strategy seeks to review all non-statutory functions the council provides and identify areas where savings towards the council's £62.5m savings target can be identified. CCTV provision is a non-statutory function with the current service operating at a "gold standard".
- 7.7 The Council provides no similar service in other parts of Shropshire. The nearest comparable system is in Oswestry operated by Oswestry Town Council. This uses volunteers and is run on a predominantly reactive basis. Shropshire Council has separated out the respective costs of the CCTV team's work to put costs against their key tasks of answering out of hours calls and supporting these statutory functions and CCTV monitoring and provision, a non-statutory function.
- 7.8 This has allowed the Council to develop a costed financial ask to the partners in Shrewsbury. This has been put to partners so they can consider the costs to maintain a functioning system for the town centre and whether they would wish to fund active monitoring or a reactive service and any contribution towards the system's maintenance. During the consultation, the Council also spoke with other CCTV providers to help establish a benchmarked cost of CCTV monitoring.
- 7.9 The total staffing costs for CCTV monitoring and handling Shropshire Council's and social care out of hours calls is £602,700. Whilst this does provide three functions, those costs are not sustainable going forward.
- 7.10 CCTV or public space surveillance camera systems have an essential role to play in keeping people safe. To ensure good surveillance they must conform to a set of standards including deploying appropriate equipment and, while CCTV schemes incorporating active monitoring generate the highest impact on crime, schemes deploying multiple interventions such as those in operation in Shrewsbury town centre including Pubwatch, Rangers and policing presence alongside CCTV generated larger effect than schemes deploying single or no other interventions alongside CCTV. This is the case in many similar towns to Shrewsbury and is the case in the other towns in Shropshire.
- 7.11 The impact on health and wellbeing is expected to be neutral. We do not envisage any change to the ability to answer and appropriately triage public and professional contacts received for our out of hours service which will still be handled by experienced and appropriately skilled staff. The preferred option would still provide a CCTV system recording 24/7 for Shrewsbury town centre and this is comparable with the level of CCTV monitoring in many other similar towns and other major towns in Shropshire.

8 Additional Information

- 8.1 The analysis of the consultation on the Options for CCTV is attached at Appendix 1

9 Conclusions

- 9.1 An actively monitored CCTV service provides many benefits in towns such as Shrewsbury. However, the cost of providing a non-statutory service at the current level is not sustainable given the council's budget position and the need to prioritise statutory services in the face of the £62.5m savings the council must make and continued rising demand particularly for social care.
- 9.2 The council has had several discussions with partners prior to this report to explore the options and opportunities for partners to fund the costs of operating and maintaining a CCTV service to achieve the best possible outcome for Shrewsbury's businesses, residents and visitors alike.
- 9.3 Following public consultation, Cabinet is recommended to support Option 1 in the absence of any clear offers of further funding. In the meantime, the Council will work with partners to harness any volunteer support with a default option that would allow the service to continue in a different format to how it is delivered now as this is not financially sustainable.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Local Member: *Cllr Nat Green*
Cllr Alan Moseley
Cllr Julian Dean
Cllr Dean Carroll
Cllr Mary Davies
Cllr Kate Halliday
Cllr David Vasmer

Appendices

Appendix 1- Analysis of the consultation