

Proposals for a city operation centre and updated CCTV network

The city council will bring forward proposals to set up a citywide operations centre to oversee a new CCTV system instead of improving the Capital's current network which would be "a waste of money".

The "resilience hub" would allow the council to monitor its CCTV coverage across the city, as well as a new license plate recognition system, street lights, traffic signals and congestion.

The council currently has 226 CCTV cameras across Edinburgh including 17 that are re-deployable. Around £634,000 is spent on staff operations of the service and almost £62,000 goes towards maintenance of the ageing system.

The long-term vision has been aided after council officers visited Bristol, which is a similar size to Edinburgh and has recently set up a 'Smart City' model – which the authority is hoping to learn from.

In a report to the council's Culture and Communities committee, officers said: "This capability will enable Edinburgh to develop a proactive rather than reactive management response, creating a cross-domain opportunity to leverage the city's strengths in data driven innovation to improve city functioning."

The new facility use also monitor “a new Automatic Number Plate Recognition camera network to be installed in the city” which police could use to track vehicles and could help enforce action against motorists flouting bus lane rules.



Cllr Mark Brown

Conservative Cllr Mark Brown, who chairs a working group looking at the future of the city’s CCTV network has welcomed the plans for a strategic approach to upgrading security systems.

He said: “It’s absolutely paramount that all stakeholders work together to make sure that these major incidents are few and far between from this collaborative work.

“The operations centre is part of a wider strategic programme. It’s no secret that the CCTV system within the council is urgently in need of an upgrade and an overhaul.”

He added: “The vision is that there’s a dedicated facility to house a new strategic place for the council to run its CCTV operations – like a resilience hub. That has to be worked out and have all the key stakeholders that will benefit to work together.

“It’s one of the biggest projects the council will undertake for some time and we can’t rush into it as we need to provide good value for money.”

CONCERNS RAISED

But concerns have been raised over privacy of residents, despite the need to upgrade the CCTV system, which earlier this year was described by Independent councillor Claire Bridgman as “creaking at the seams”.



Cllr Alex Staniforth

Green Cllr Alex Staniforth said: “Edinburgh’s CCTV system is in urgent need of updating, and I welcome the proposed changes which will keep Edinburgh’s civic CCTV in the hands of Edinburgh City Council.

“Obviously all CCTV has privacy and human rights implications and that is why as part of the update I have been convening a policy sub-group in order to produce policy guidelines which not only comply with GDPR but go even further towards making sure Edinburgh’s CCTV is the gold standard for privacy protection.”

The city council has applied for £365,000 from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the Scottish Cities Alliance smart cities initiative for the operation centre. Funding of £534,000 is being made available from the council’s capital budget for its CCTV upgrade.

A council spokeswoman said: “We have established a working group which is looking at the future options for our CCTV network in Edinburgh, including the upgrading and future proofing of CCTV systems.

“Alongside this, we are in the early stages of developing a city operations centre concept that would bring together our upgraded CCTV system, as well as our traffic management systems to allow us to have a more joined up view of the city and manage it more proactively.”

Police welcome strategic multi-agency approach

Police Scotland has welcomed the multi-agency vision to renewing CCTV systems by the city council.

Currently, the public space strategy costs the council £955,354 but only £128,000 is paid back by police for use of the service – despite the force getting the most use out of the images.

During 2016/17 the Police requested 1,369 CCTV image reviews from the council with 152 resulting in court evidence packages being prepared. Seven portable camera assessments were also performed.

Last week, the council approved an upgrade of new monitors – which officers said would mark a “key step in the council’s transition from analogue to digital” technology.

Superintendent Mark Rennie said: “Partnership working is key to achieving positive outcomes for our communities in Edinburgh and keeping everyone who lives in and visits the capital safe.

“CCTV is a vital tool in both the prevention and detection of crime and we are working closely with the City of Edinburgh Council to ensure any new system is effective as possible.

“We welcome any improvements which will enhance our joint capability to prevent crime, respond more effectively to incidents and ensure the safety of those attending the multitude of events and gatherings that take place in the city each year.”