

# IMC concept embraced by Chester City Council

13 Aug 08

By [Brian Sims](#)

Chester City Council has participated in a trial of Intelligent Moving Cameras (IMCs), the results of which have shown that a new relationship between human vigilance and machine-to-machine intelligence could well put an end to much of the country's crime and anti-social behaviour.

CCTV Control Rooms allow many public areas to be monitored by a very small number of highly experienced and well-trained camera operators using the latest sophisticated technologies. Skilled operators manage to circumnavigate this challenging ratio of 'many cameras versus few staff' by assessing several factors such that they might prioritise when each camera receives their full attention. For example, during daylight hours the town centre shopping areas will receive a higher priority but at night the pubs and clubs are the centre of attention.

Such prioritisation has proven to be very successful for the areas that receive the operators' constant viewing attention. However, the more cameras each CCTV Control Room has to operate and monitor the less attention each higher priority area receives. Until now, the methods described have been the only means by which a well-managed Control Room might stay on top of all its camera feeds. However, in those areas with a lower surveillance priority, random unpredictable crimes and anti-social behaviour remain a threat.

Even the most highly trained and experienced operators can miss things, so the natural next step for a Council looking to bolster its fight against crime is to seek out the latest technologies that might assist operators in gathering more evidence. A technology is needed to enable all 'CCTV protected' areas under a Council's management to benefit consistently and equally from a higher level of surveillance.

That said, a CCTV operator's trained vigilance is one of the highest accredited and licensed skills in the land and could never be wholly replaced by any form of technology. The seasoned operator will always develop a 'sixth sense', enabling them to focus their attentions full-time on the primary security issues of the day.

In recognising certain suspects and activities, and given today's political climate in which the threat to national security remains high, human operators will always be the central resource for fighting terrorism as well as crime and anti-social behaviour.

## Choice of trial installation

A community was identified as a particularly 'troubled' area, with the Control Room receiving calls relating to problems on a daily and sometimes hourly basis. Traditional 'moving' cameras had installed to monitor large populated or non-populated open spaces, and were intended to provide

effective coverage for the entire area. However, in reality they could only see a fraction of the space at any one time.

Having seen extensive, high profile media coverage of the Intelligent Moving Camera (IMC) technology that showed how it had consistently cleared up crime and anti-social behaviour, representatives from the Council chose the IMC system to play a role alongside co-ordinated crime reduction programmes.

When the lone IMC system was initially installed, Broadband communications were not available for the Remote Managed Service (RMS) to commission the system. Once the necessary Broadband communications became available, the RMS showed that the camera had been hit with a blunt instrument. It's assumed that this was because the camera remained 'unmanned' and thus miscreants in the local criminal community saw this as an opportunity to attack it. The camera was replaced with Forward Vision's rugged ART1-100 (ideally suited to such a challenging environment).

IMCs monitor areas in every direction at the same time. They work as 'assistants' to operators by mimicking the basic responsibilities of CCTV camera in a routine fashion. If a crime occurs and no-one is watching, the system will automatically request its camera to zoom-in and record close-up evidence.

## **Reports of criminality diminished**

With the IMC system and other security-related community initiatives in place, reports of criminality and anti-social behaviour ceased. Experience would suggest that the criminal and anti-social groups in any community will always pay more attention to cameras seen to be moving and monitoring the area proactively. The IMC system is seen to be consistently doing this day in, day out, and the appearance of its multiple camera unit is such that anyone studying it will see there is no way for criminals to create diversion tactics.

After the system had been in use by the operators for the first month, the CCTV supervisor asked the RMS for the daily surveillance profile to be modified between the hours of 7.00–9.00 am (so as to ignore children playing on their way to school and people stopping to read their morning newspapers). This change was implemented by the RMS immediately, and then monitored successfully by the operators.

The IMC system not only captured all reported incidents but also a number of crimes that would have passed by unnoticed by any other solution. Among others, these included a late night disturbance of gangs fighting (the 'ring leaders' were later expelled from the area under ASBO injunctions) and a drunken gang of youths trespassing on the Council Library roof to throw stones at members of the public.

The Home Office recommends the use of fixed cameras to enhance moving cameras. This functionality is integral to the IMC system, which not only enables it to capture excellent, high quality, close-up evidence of crime automatically, but also a fixed, wide-angle contextual view of exactly what happened in the whole area at the same time.

An IMC installation not only monitors its own area more effectively, but frees-up operators to give their increased attention to the higher priority cameras. This double benefit means that each new or existing camera using this technology creates a progressively greater improvement to the performance of the entire network.

Stuart Thompson, the managing director of Viseum (UK) – IMC product specifiers and licensors – commented: “A significant amount of the UK’s crime and anti-social behaviour occurs when it is least expected. The lack of solutions has gone unchallenged to the detriment of many business and residential communities.....until now. The local community in Chester where this trial took place welcomed the IMC with open arms. There was a recognition of the improved feeling of safety as they went about their daily business.”

### **What the Council thinks**

This is what Chester City Council has to say about IMC technology...

“Viseum IMC systems provide assistance to Operators thereby potentially increasing the number of incidents an Operator identifies. The Viseum system has contributed to a wider strategic approach to reducing crime and anti-social behaviour within the area of the trial. We would definitely consider installing the Viseum product on a permanent basis.

“The team of CCTV operators used the system along with other cameras to proactively monitor the area in question. The system provided an additional and effective piece of technology to assist the operators in remaining proactive. The system was beneficial to the area and assisted in helping to reduce the amount of anti-social behaviour taking place, and played an integral role alongside other crime reduction initiatives taking place within the same timescale.

“The system provided evidential data consisting of high quality images helping to identify individuals involved in anti-social behaviour which ultimately assisted in the successful issuing of ASBOs. As the system is constantly monitoring the area, this appeared to give the impression that it was being controlled by a CCTV operator. This would have provided both reassurance to residents and small business owners and a deterrent to would-be offenders.”

### **Effective support for a multi-agency operation**

In summary, the system effectively supported the current CCTV system and multi-agency operation aimed at reducing crime and disorder in the area in which it was deployed.

The IMC has been awarded 20 years’ patent protection for its method of effectively safeguarding open spaces. As owner of this patent, Viseum (UK) has licensed reputable manufacturers to produce various models of IMC, and announced what it refers to as an “even-handed policy” of licensing other businesses to produce more products using this technology.

**For further information on IMCs call Viseum direct on 01322 405724 or 0845 220 0368**

The video wall in Chester City Council's Control Room



The Intelligent Moving Camera in situ



The Forward Vision 'Metal Mickey'



The Home Office is running its own feasibility study on how the IMCs might help all local authorities make the best use of their CCTV schemes

