

For Information
on 18 March 2014

Legislative Council Panel on Security
Use of Body Worn Video Cameras by the Police

Introduction

This paper provides information on the use of Body Worn Video Cameras (BWVCs) by the Police and the related field trial.

Background

2. Under section 10 of the Police Force Ordinance (Cap. 232), the Police are responsible for prevention and detection of crimes and offences. To carry out these duties in an effective manner, the Police are dedicated to continuous improvement in their pursuit of excellence, including the use of technology to enhance officers' professional abilities. Since 2006, the Police have been using hand-held video recording devices to record incidents with law and order implications, for both investigation and evidential purposes. With technological advances, BWVCs have become available and offer, in some circumstances, more effective assistance to police officers in the course of their work given their size, convenience and ease of use. At Members' request, the Administration provided the Panel on Security with information on 5 April 2013 about the Police's field trial of BWVCs.

3. In fact, BWVCs are widely used in many overseas jurisdictions. For instance, the police forces in many cities of the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia are using BWVCs. The results are positive. Making reference to overseas experiences, the Police believe that the introduction of BWVCs can effectively enhance frontline officers' capability and accuracy in evidence gathering, as well as achieve a higher degree of transparency and accountability of police operations.

First Stage of the Field Trial

4. The Police introduce the BWVCs in a progressive manner. First stage of the field trial commenced in March 2013. During the six-month field trial, trained uniform officers from Police Tactical Unit of Hong Kong Island Region and Emergency Units of Kowloon West and New Territories North Regions used the BWVCs to assess its effectiveness. BWVCs were used in confrontational scenarios, or

incidents where a breach of the peace had occurred or was likely to occur. Officers using BWVCs were in uniform, overtly wore the cameras, and where reasonably practicable, notified the person prior to the commencement of the recording. The BWVCs procured by the Police are equipped with outward-facing screens, so that those who are being video-filmed can see the captured images.

5. Clear and stringent internal guidelines have been formulated by the Police to regulate the use and operation of BWVCs, the handling of its data and submission of its captured footage to the court as evidence. Such guidelines are drawn up to ensure that police officers would comply with the relevant requirements of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance and court proceedings when using the BWVCs. Professional training will be given to police officers to ensure that they are conversant with the use and operation of BWVCs. Footage with investigative or evidential value will be treated as case exhibit and be retained for investigation and court proceedings. Once the purpose of collection has been fulfilled, the captured footage will be destroyed. Footage carrying no investigative or evidential value will be deleted after 31 days from the date it was produced. If the footage is to be retained for more than 31 days, written authorisation from a Senior Superintendent should be obtained and such an authorisation should be reviewed on a monthly basis by the authorising officer.

6. The first stage of the field trial was completed in September 2013. Having reviewed its effectiveness, the Police found that most of the police officers participating in the field trial supported the introduction of BWVCs as the device would facilitate officers in exercising their duty of prevention and detection of crimes and offences in a more effective manner, as well as enhancing their operational efficiency and transparency in handling confrontational scenarios and incidents involving a breach of peace. Frontline officers participating in the field trial indicated that, in a considerable number of cases, the persons involved would apparently become calm and restrained because of being video-filmed, thereby reducing the chances of confrontation with the Police and shortening the handling time of such incidents by officers. Besides, BWVCs may help strengthen officers' capability and efficiency in handling confrontations and incidents involving a breach of peace. During the field trial, the Police did not receive any complaint cases against officers in relation to the use of BWVCs.

7. The effectiveness of using footage captured with BWVCs as evidence in court has yet to be assessed because the cases concerned were

concluded without trial and the footage was not used in court for evidential purpose.

Second Stage of the Field Trial

8. As the results of the first stage of the field trial are positive, and the effectiveness of using footage captured with BWVCs as evidence in court has yet to be assessed, the Police consider that the field trial should be extended to other police units in order to further assess the effectiveness of the use of BWVCs in different areas. The Police plan to launch the second stage of the field trial in the second quarter of 2014, which will last for a period of one year, with the participation of various units including Emergency Units and Police Tactical Units of all Regions, as well as frontline operational units responsible for performing tasks of a similar nature, i.e. Quick Reaction Force of New Territories North Region and patrol cars of all Police Districts.

9. A detailed review will be conducted by the Police upon completion of the second stage of the field trial with an aim to considering the scope of use of BWVCs and relevant long-term arrangements.

**Security Bureau
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