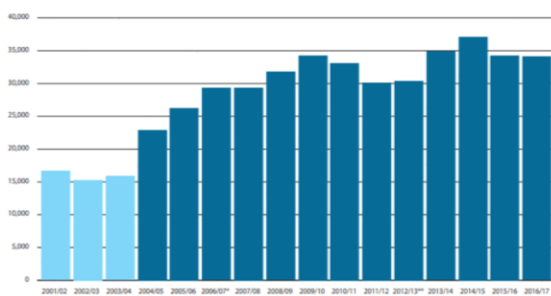


Overview

In recent years there has been growing concerns over the future of the police and their relationship with the public. As according to most accounts there has been a long-term decline in public trust in the police in Great Britain, with serious consequences in terms of cooperation, social cohesion and anxiety around crime and disorder (Bradford and Jackson, 2011, 2). As illustrated in figure 1, since 2001/02 there has been a surge in the last decade in the number of complaints recorded.

Figure 1: Complaint cases recorded 2001/02 – 2016/17



(IPCC, 2017)

The relationship between the Police and the public is vital for maintaining public safety and effective policing, is it therefore of great importance that the police force proceeds to address any long-term declines in public trust. One solution, that has the potential to help address the issue at hand is the usage of body-worn cameras. These small cameras are attached to officers' clothing or equipment and switched on during patrols or at the scene of an incident to record specific incidents or activity. Across the UK police forces are being equipped with the with body-worn cameras, with the Met police rolling out the equipment to 22,000 frontline officers, this is thought to be thought to be the largest rollout of body-worn cameras by a police force anywhere in the world.

Body-Worn Cameras (BWC) and Police/Public relations

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Legislation

Police officers across the UK are subject to legal guidelines when employing body worn cameras, to prevent the misuse and abuse of the technology. The key pieces of legislation which outline these guidelines include;

- Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
- Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996
- Data Protection Act 1998
- The European Convention on Human Rights (Articles 6 and 8)
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 and the Surveillance Camera Code of Practice

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Body-worn cameras and police/ public relations

Since the rollout of body-worn cameras, there has been several studies conducted to examine the impact of the cameras on policing and its impact on public relations; through measuring its impact on the number of complaints recorded whilst in use.

Firstly, in 2011 ODS Consultants examined the impact of body-worn cameras on police forces in Aberdeen and Paisley. The initial findings of the study suggest that body-worn cameras helped to improve the relationship between the police and the public, based on the interpretation of the decline of police complaints against officers using the equipment in comparison to those who didn't. For example, the cameras were deployed over an 8-month period, 5,000 times across both regions resulting in only 7 complaints. However, building on the 2011 ODS Consultant study, in 2016 the criminology department at the University of Cambridge conducted a comparative study of US and UK police forces comprising of 2,000 officers across seven sites. Across the seven experimental sites, 1,539 complaints were lodged against police officers in the 12 months preceding the study, or 1.20 complaints per officer. The number of complaints lodged against the police then dropped in the posttreatment period to 113 or 0.08 complaints per officer. Resulting in an overall decline of 93% in police complaints when cameras were in use.

What is clear from both studies is that the use of body-worn cameras has a positive impact on reducing complaints. Arguably, this can be interpreted to suggest that when the cameras are in use, the police are less likely to abuse their position, which can help to improve relations with the public. Therefore, body-worn cameras have the potential to be used as a technological fix that would revitalize police-public relations and prevent these incidents (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). However, one must acknowledge it is still early days for the technology, and more tests must be conducted before coming to a formal conclusion. But, in the meantime previous studies are a solid foundation for ideas on how the police can tackle declining public relations.