Talking CCTV brings voice of authority to the street

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A new CCTV system, trialled in Middlesbrough, is coming to 20 additional communities over the next few months.

The pilot used enhanced CCTV cameras with speaker systems to allow workers in control rooms to speak directly to people on the street.

Success in Middlesbrough

The programme was first tried out in Middlesbrough earlier this year, and it proved an immediate success, bringing about a noticeable drop in anti-social behaviour.

According to officials there, over the last few weeks fights have been broken up, litterers have sheepishly picked up their rubbish and skateboarders have stopped rolling through traffic when told to do so by the camera-borne voice.

The Home Secretary, John Reid, said the technology was part of the government's overall policy of dealing with anti-social behaviour head-on, and finding innovative ways to stop crime at the source.

'CCTV cameras already go a long way in helping make our streets safer; making people feel less vulnerable,' Dr Reid said. 'Talking CCTV is another tool in creating safer communities. We know from Middlesbrough's example that this works.'

Tackling littering and public order offences

Middlesbrough Council's physical security manager, Jack Bonnar, said the system forms an additional layer of security.

'At the bottom end of the scale, we use the talking CCTV for littering offences, for which it's proven to be absolutely a 100% success. Middlesbrough's cleanliness has improved dramatically since the speakers were installed.' he said. 'As you move up the scale a bit on public order offences - like drunkenness or fighting - we're proving the speakers are coming into their own, and we're recording about 65% to 70% success rate for those kinds of offences.'

Other communities to have talking CCTV soon

Based on Middlesbrough's experience, 20 communities throughout the country have submitted proposals to create talking CCTV systems of their own, and have received funding from the Home Office.

The systems will roll out later this year in communities such as Darlington, Salford, Blackpool, Coventry, Northampton, Derby, Harlow, and in the London boroughs of Southwark and Barking and Dagenham.