



## Over 80% of public support law enforcement surveillance in their local area, new research reveals

- Figures show preference for local oversight rather than central control;
- Public want to see police given more of a role in deciding when to use powers.

**London, February 20, 2009 – Four out of five people are favourable towards the use of directed surveillance powers in their local area according to new research published today (Fri).**

According to a PSB study commissioned by the New Local Government Network, there is **strong public support for local councils to use surveillance techniques such as covert video recording to tackle anti-social behaviour, drug-dealing and theft.** However the survey found that the **public are less favourable towards councils using the technology to check whether residents are putting their bin out on time or living in the right school catchment area.**

**64%** of those surveyed said that it is very appropriate for **councils to use directed surveillance to tackle drug dealing**, whilst **62%** felt it was very appropriate for **organised crime**; **59%** for **theft** and **50%** for **benefit fraud**. However, **only 17%** thought it was very appropriate for **councils to use the powers to check that residents weren't breaking school catchment rules** and **only 14%** that it should be used to check whether people were putting their rubbish out on the wrong day.

The think tank urges councils to take a common sense approach to surveillance and not to use it for "spurious" investigations. It also criticises a recent report from the House of Lords Constitution Committee that warned that surveillance risks undermining fundamental freedoms and privacy.

The polling also found strong support for local police to have a greater say in how councils use the powers, with **61% of respondents saying that assigning a local police officer to monitor surveillance operations by a local council would make them more favourable towards their council's use of surveillance powers in general**

The use of surveillance powers – set out in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) – is currently under review and consultation by the Home Office. A number of councils have been accused of using the powers disproportionately, for example monitoring the rubbish of household bins to examine how much non-recycled waste was being thrown away, or employing staff to monitor local paperboys to ensure that they are employed with the right permits.

In a report accompanying the polling, NLGN argues that councils should be allowed to use powers to tackle offences that are of high priority to local people, but that it should be more transparent about where and why it is using any monitoring.

Authors Nick Hope and James Hulme argue:

"It would be a mistake if all monitoring and surveillance efforts by local authorities were treated as equally 'sinister', when many efforts help fight local criminality and have strong public support. New technology can help to produce more effective law enforcement; in the same manner that DNA

technology has helped to solve more crimes, so a sophisticated use of monitoring powers in limited circumstances can reduce offences and lawlessness.”

“However, it is clear that a new contract of understanding is required between local authorities and their residents to use the powers proportionately and only on issues that are of a high priority in the local area. Our research also shows that citizens would like to see greater input from local police and as such we recommend appointing a senior local police officer to work with the council to decide where action is justified.”

“We also encourage councils to hold regular, open public meetings with residents and police to discuss why they use certain surveillance techniques and the impact they are having on combating crime and anti-social behaviour.”

NLGN also said that it hopes that the Home Secretary will continue to allow local authorities to use the powers where they feel they are effective and proportionate and not to back proposals by the Lords Constitution Committee to move the decision-making process to an unelected Information Commissioner.

**About this survey:** NLGN commissioned Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates to conduct 300 interviews with a representative sample of the UK general public. Fieldwork was conducted between the 24<sup>th</sup> of December, 2008 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 2009.

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*Little Brother? Getting the balance right on surveillance powers* by Nick Hope and James Hulme is published on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> February. Embargoed advance copies are available for journalists by contacting [james.hulme@nlgn.org.uk](mailto:james.hulme@nlgn.org.uk).

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**New Local Government Network** (NLGN) is an independent think tank, seeking to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities. [www.nlgn.org.uk](http://www.nlgn.org.uk)