Monitoring and surveillance of children and young people

Introduction

Safeguarding measures for young people can include the use of monitoring and surveillance technology such as GPS trackers and parental control software that allows the parent to see their child's location, view young people's text messages and even listen to their phone calls. The use of this technology should be balanced against the young person's right to privacy as enshrined in law (Human Rights Act, article 8; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 16; "Age appropriate design: a code of practice for online services", ICO, 2010) and **should not be automatically employed for all children as a default principle**.

General principles

- The use of monitoring and surveillance technology to safeguard a child should be in response to clearly identified risks and proportionate to the child's chronological and emotional age.

- Risk of harm should be identified in the child's risk assessment. Measures taken to reduce the risk should be sufficient, but not excessive, in order to reduce the potential invasion of the child's privacy. Monitoring and surveillance technology will generally be more appropriate for younger children than for teenagers, who need to learn how to protect themselves and become independent.

- When monitoring and surveillance technology is being used to record a child's whereabouts and activity online/offline the child must be made aware of this. Covert surveillance should not be used unless ordered by a court of law. This includes GPS location trackers and online parental controls. The Local Authority must give their agreement to the use of any monitoring and surveillance technology.

- Monitoring and surveillance should not be used in place of communication with the young person. Effective communication serves to educate children and develop their life skills and ability to protect themselves in the community and online. Young people often feel that parental control software is overly restrictive, and excessive restriction can lead to rebellion and defiance as well as negatively impacting trust within relationships. For this reason, the need to use parental controls with teenagers should be explained to them and regularly reviewed to ensure that it remains proportionate to the perceived risks.

- Resources to support communication with young people about online risks can be found at www.i-space.org.uk and on CEOP's website www.thinkuknow.co.uk.