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The Chinese State is watching us on Surrey Council's cctv?

7 July 2026



Surrey County Council is deploying CCTV cameras from a Chinese manufacturer which has been banned from government departments over national security concerns.

Cameras made by Hikvision, a company partly owned by the Chinese state, are in use in council libraries in several towns and villages across Surrey.

These include sites in Guildford, Ash, Chertsey, Cobham, Farnham, Merstham and New Haw, according to a Freedom of Information response to the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS).

Chinese law dictates that any companies operating within China must hand over data to the government in Beijing on demand, which prompted the UK to stop the installation of Chinese-made surveillance cameras in "sensitive sites" across Westminster in 2022.

However, this directive does not apply to local government and other public sector bodies at present.

A Surrey County Council spokesperson told the LDRS that its library cameras operate as closed systems, meaning they are not connected to any corporate networks or the internet.

They said: "As a result, the primary risks normally associated with these devices – such as remote access or cyber vulnerabilities – do not apply in this case. The main residual risk would be physical access. However, all units are located within staff-only areas and are appropriately secured. Therefore, the risk level is considered low and appropriately managed within the current setup."

Hikvision has also faced criticism over its alleged links to the mass repression of Uyghur Muslims in China's Xinjiang region, where the company's surveillance technology has been reportedly deployed. Hikvision denies any direct role in human rights abuses.

In 2022, a report by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that "serious human rights violations" had been committed against the Uyghur people of Xinjiang.

As many as one million Uyghurs are believed to have been detained in camps and across the region since 2017. The Chinese government denies human rights abuses, and claims the camps are for educational and training purposes.

But analysts have pointed to reports of forced labour and torture inflicted upon the Uyghurs, and have urged authorities in the UK to review their policies towards Hikvision.

Senior Policy Director at the China Strategic Risks Institute Sam Goodman told the LDRS: "After several years of public reporting regarding allegations of Hikvision's links to human rights violations in Xinjiang and the government banning Hikvision from Whitehall citing national security concerns, there really isn't an excuse for councils like Surrey County Council continuing to use these cameras."

A Hikvision spokesperson told the LDRS their products meet "strict security requirements" and "comply fully" with UK laws and regulations.

They added: "Our position on human rights is a matter of public record. We have never knowingly or intentionally committed human rights abuses, and we never will. Hikvision has joined the UN Global Compact, committing to its Ten Principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption."

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

Image: Hikvision CCTV camera (Credit: Pixabay)

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