Live Facial Recognition

Annual Report

September 2026



Bedfordshire Police has been using Live Facial Recognition (LFR) technology since July 2024, when it was first piloted at the Bedford River Festival. During this initial deployment, the system generated seven alerts. At that time, the technology was loaned by South Wales Police, which had already established experience in its operational use.



Following the successful pilot, Bedfordshire Police submitted a bid to the Home Office to secure the equipment and technology directly and become a host force. As a result, Bedfordshire Police is now one of seven forces nationally using Home Office-provided LFR technology.

While policing continues to embrace technological innovation to enhance operational effectiveness, LFR remains one of the most scrutinised policing tools. Nevertheless, it provides significant opportunities to locate individuals who are wanted for offences, identify missing persons, and support the management and supervision of individuals subject to court-imposed conditions, particularly where all other proportionate policing tactics have been exhausted.

In September 2025, Bedfordshire Police increased the use of LFR across town centres within the county. Prior to this, a comprehensive review of policies and documentation was completed, alongside media engagement and consultation. This included providing opportunities for independent scrutiny panels to review the technology and raise any concerns regarding its use.

The evidence presented within this report demonstrates the outcomes and successes achieved through the deployment of LFR between 19 September 2025 and 18 September 2026. As part of our commitment to transparency, a full annual review has been conducted and shared with our communities. We remain focused on building public trust and confidence while seeking continued support for the responsible and proportionate use of this evolving technology.

Sergeant Kim Coates • Live Facial Recognition Operational Lead

18 September 2026

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RESULTS

The results cover the period from 19 September 2025 to 18 September 2026.

1. Bedfordshire Police deployed Live Facial Recognition (LFR) on 72 occasions across the county, including Luton, Bedford, Leighton Buzzard, and Dunstable.
2. LFR was deployed at four major events across Bedfordshire in support of the overarching aim of protecting the public. The technology was used at: Bedford River Festival, Luton Carnival (the first time LFR had been deployed at this event), Bedford Summer Concerts. All event deployments were supported by key stakeholders.
3. During the period 19 September 2025 to 18 September 2026, LFR produced the following results:
    a. 227 alerts were generated, of which 215 were confirmed as true alerts.
    b. 13 alerts remained unconfirmed. In these cases, operators were satisfied with both the match score and the similarity between the live image and the watchlist image, but officers were unable to locate the individual. Typical reasons included individuals changing direction, leaving the area, or being lost within dense crowds.
    c. There were no false alerts.
    d. A total of 1,564,116 faces passed through the LFR system during this reporting period. This number does not indicate how many individual people were seen, as a face may be scanned multiple times within a frame.
    e. 91 individuals were arrested following LFR alerts. Of these:
        - 44 individuals (48.3%) were wanted by the courts and were subject to an outstanding warrant. They were arrested and subsequently placed before the courts.
        - 47 individuals (51.6%) were arrested because Bedfordshire Police had reasonable grounds to suspect they had committed, or were committing, a recordable offence. In each case, the necessity criteria for arrest were considered and justified by the arresting officer.
        - In addition, some individuals identified for arrestable offences were dealt with through alternative disposals. Where appropriate, evidence was reviewed to determine whether arrest remained necessary or whether the investigation could progress through alternative means, such as arranging a voluntary interview, 25 alerts were disposed this way. This approach can reduce unnecessary delays in custody while ensuring that investigative opportunities are maintained. These outcomes remain positive disposals, as the individual is made aware of their status as a suspect, their contact details are updated where necessary, and interviews can be arranged where appropriate. This allows officers to manage risk proportionately while exercising professional judgement.





f. Domestic Violence Protection Orders and Knife Carrier Watchlists
   - Two individuals subject to a Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO) was located and checked. One individual who was in breach of thier DVPO was identified while walking with the victim through Luton Town Centre.
   - DVPO subjects have recently been added to the LFR watchlist capability.

g. Bedfordshire Police have also piloted the use of LFR to identify known knife carriers. Since the River Festival pilot, six individuals on this watchlist have been stopped.
   - Individuals included on the knife carrier watchlist have undergone scrutiny and are assessed using a scoring matrix based on arrests, convictions, and relevant intelligence.

h. Registered Sex Offenders
   - 83 alerts (36.5% of all alerts) related to Registered Sex Offenders (RSOs), including those subject to Sexual Harm Prevention Orders.
   - Individuals included on the watchlist are assessed as presenting a high or extremely high risk of harm.

i. Immigration
   - Seven alerts related to individuals subject to immigration bail conditions, where there was an intelligence requirement to establish their whereabouts within Luton.

Overall Statistics	Bedford	Luton	Leighton Buzzard	Dunstable
Average Number of Alerts	2.5	4.0	0.0	0.0
Average Arrests	0.9	1.7	0.0	0.0
Average Managed Offenders	0.9	1.7	0.0	0.0

Supporting Public Protection

4. Bedfordshire Police manage more than 800 Registered Sex Offenders across the county. LFR provides valuable support to the specialist teams responsible for monitoring these individuals by delivering timely intelligence through unplanned encounters.

5. These unexpected interactions reduce the opportunity for offenders to prepare for police contact and assist officers in ensuring compliance with licence conditions, court orders, and notification requirements. This supports proactive offender management, helps prevent further offending, and contributes to keeping the public safe.

BREAKDOWN OF LFR DEPLOYMENTS

Town	Number of Deployments	Number of Alerts
Bedford	33	84
Luton	36	143
Leighton Buzzard	1	0
Dunstable	2	0

A total of 72 deployments took place in identified crime hotspot areas across four locations in Bedfordshire: Luton, Bedford, Dunstable, and Leighton Buzzard.

1. Applications for authority to deploy Live Facial Recognition (LFR) are reviewed and authorised by an Authorising Officer (AO) of at least Superintendent rank. The deployment of LFR must be supported by crime data, intelligence reporting, and/or operational experience. The primary locations identified for deployment are the town centres of Luton and Bedford. The AO considers whether the proposed location meets the relevant criteria and whether LFR will support the operational objectives. These locations require an enhanced police presence to address crime and anti-social behaviour, and LFR provides an effective tool to support these policing efforts.
2. At present, LFR deployments are typically conducted once a week using one or two dedicated vans, rotating between Luton and Bedford. Deployments were previously trialled in Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard and achieved some positive results. However, LFR operations require a minimum level of resourcing, and the operational demands outweighed the benefits achieved during those trials. This does not preclude future deployments in these areas. Should crime trends or intelligence indicate that an LFR presence is necessary, deployments will be considered accordingly. To date, the most successful outcomes have been achieved in Luton and Bedford.
3. The authority to deploy LFR, together with the selected location, is subject to consideration of both human rights and equality impacts. Assessment of any deployment location will consider areas where individuals may have a reasonable expectation of privacy, ensuring any deployment remains necessary, proportionate, and lawful.





ARRESTS

All 91 arrests were deemed necessary, and each individual was accepted into custody and their detention authorised.

A breakdown of the offences is below.

Arrests through LFR	Bedford	Luton	Leighton Buzzard	Dunstable	Total
Assaults	4	4	0	0	8
Criminal Damage	0	1	0	0	1
Public Order	1	0	0	0	1
Theft and Fraud	5	10	0	0	15
Sexual Offences	0	3	0	0	3
Stalking / Harassment / Mal Coms	4	14	0	0	18
Warrants	15	29	0	0	44
Weapons / Firearms	0	1	0	0	1
Drugs	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**29**	**62**	**0**	**0**	**91**

EXAMPLES OF LFR ALERTS:

A warrant was issued on 7 November 2019 for an individual who failed to appear at court in relation to an offence of driving a motor vehicle while over the prescribed alcohol limit. They were arrested on 5 June 2026 after generating an LFR alert. Their whereabouts had been unknown for six years and seven months.

An individual was wanted on a bench warrant issued on 13 January 2023 in relation to an offence of violent disorder committed in 2021. When the LFR system alerted officers on 11 December 2025, the individual's appearance had changed compared with the enrolled image and they initially provided different details. Following further comparison, officers remained satisfied that the individual was the person sought, which was subsequently confirmed through fingerprints in custody.

RSOs are regularly identified during LFR deployments, providing opportunities for officers to gather relevant intelligence. For example, individuals attending the Bedford River Festival generated intelligence, while others who had notified their Officer in Charge of changes to their mobile phones were subsequently identified during deployments. Where appropriate, image galleries on mobile phones are reviewed and any concerns are referred to the relevant Offender Management team.

An individual was outstanding for a firearm offence, which they were forensically linked to in June 2025. They were arrested in November 2025 after being located through LFR. He was charged and remanded by CPS initially but never convicted.

COMPOSITION OF WATCHLISTS

1. Watchlists are typically generated on the morning of an operation. During the creation process, Bedfordshire Police manually review all images linked to the individual, downloading and assessing them to ensure they are suitable for inclusion
2. Following the deployment, the watchlist is permanently deleted and cannot be retained or reused. Consequently, if an individual later requests confirmation as to whether they were included on a watchlist, Bedfordshire Police would be unable to provide this information, as the data is not retained.
3. The individuals included on a watchlist will vary depending on the specific operational purpose. However, due to Bedfordshire Police being a small force area with strong transport links between its main towns, individuals based in Bedford may frequently travel to Luton and vice versa. As a result, there is only a minimal difference between the watchlists used in the two locations.
4. The composition of the watchlists for our two hotspot areas, Bedford and Luton, is broadly similar, although not identical. Approximately 1,150 individuals are listed for arrestable offences; however, only around 800 of these have a suitable photograph available to support identification. These images are typically sourced from the custody database. When Registered Sex Offenders (RSOs), individuals subject to Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) and known knife carriers are included, the total watchlist comprises of approximately 937 individuals.

A summary breakdown

Watchlist Categories	% Watchlist
Wanted by the courts	61%
Wanted for a suspected arrestable offence	21%
Managed offenders with/without conditions	13.98%
DVPOs	1.6%
Knife carriers	1.7%





DEMOGRAPHICS

The following tables show true alerts.

Gender	Total Alerts	%
Male	208	91.6%
Female	19	8.37%

Ethnicity	Total Alerts	%
IC1	129	57%
IC2	20	9%
IC3	34	15%
IC4	42	18%
IC5	0	0%
IC6	2	1%

The IC codes are defined as follows: IC1 – White – North European,
IC2 – White – South European, IC3 – Black, IC4 – Asian – Indian Subcontinent,
IC5 – Chinese, Japanese, Southeast Asian,
IC6 – Arab, North African.

Under 18s	Bedford	Luton	Leighton Buzzard	Dunstable	Total	%
Assaults	0	0	0	0	0	
Criminal Damage	0	0	0	0	0	
Public Order	0	0	0	0	0	
Theft and Fraud	0	0	0	0	0	
Sexual Offences	0	0	0	0	0	
Stalking / Harassment / Mal Coms	0	0	0	0	0	
Warrants	0	0	0	0	0	
Weapons / Firearms	0	0	0	0	0	
Drugs	0	0	0	0	0	
Alternative Disposal	0	0	0	0	0	
Knife Carrier and Other Intel	3	0	0	0	3	
Total	**3**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**3**	**1.32%**

Bedfordshire Police does not hold any data related to a breakdown of ethnicity on each watchlist.

NON LFR DATA

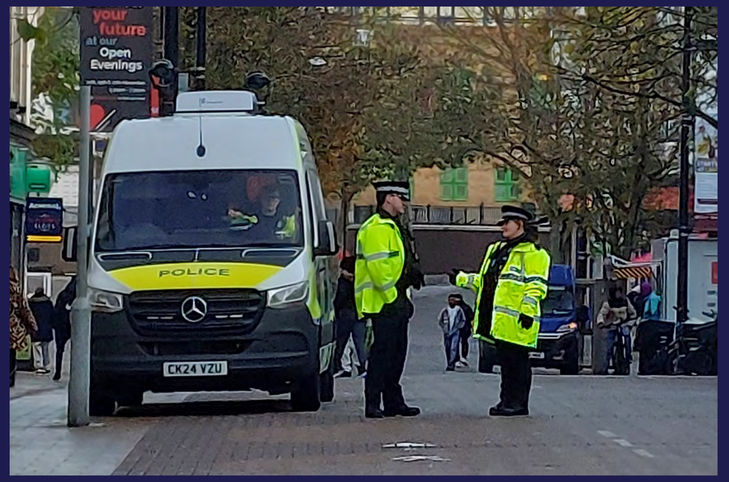
1. Having LFR deployments in our town centres provides an additional visible policing presence and enables officers to respond to incidents reported by members of the public. Officers can self-generate incidents such as stop searches and offer to support incidents occurring nearby.
2. Intelligence is regularly submitted during deployments. This is particularly valuable in relation to RSOs, while information provided by members of the public about issues such as drug use and other concerns is also recorded.

Non LFR Totals	Bedford	Luton	Leighton Buzzard	Dunstable	Total
Arrests	7	11	0	0	18
Alternative Disposals	3	2	0	0	5
Positive Stop Searches	1	1	0	0	2
Negative Stop Searches	2	3	0	0	5
Concern for Welfares	2	1	0	1	4
Intel Submissions	38	62	0	0	100

Examples:

During an LFR deployment, a member of the public flagged down officers and reported an individual for a public order offence involving racial abuse. When officers approached the individual, they spotted a knife concealed within their clothing. The individual was arrested for possession of a bladed article in a public place and was subsequently charged.

While carrying out an LFR deployment, officers saw security staff pursuing an individual suspected of committing a theft from a shop. Officers intervened and found the individual to also be in possession of cannabis. They were given an out-of-court disposal..







LEARNING

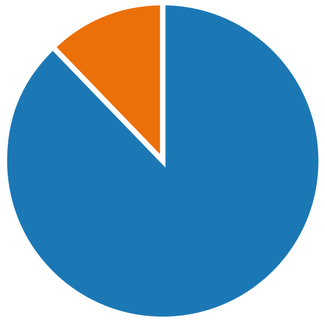
1. Throughout Bedfordshire Police's first year of Live Facial Recognition (LFR) deployment, trained operators have developed a comprehensive understanding of camera reliability and the environmental factors that can affect the identification of individuals.
    - To ensure the system is operating effectively, operators conduct testing using a "blue watchlist", which contains images of police officers. The success of these tests, along with the match score achieved, helps determine whether environmental conditions are affecting performance. The current threshold setting is 0.64.
    - Shadows and glare can create areas of poor visibility within pedestrianised locations. For an accurate comparison to be made, an individual's face must be either fully within the designated zone of recognition or clearly visible in natural daylight.
    - During wet weather, achieving the minimum threshold score can be more challenging, resulting in fewer alerts being generated.
    - At night, factors such as poor street lighting, vehicle brake lights, traffic signals, and varying light levels can reduce recognition performance. Testing is currently being undertaken with alternative camera systems to assess improvements in these conditions.
2. Public understanding of facial recognition technology remains limited, particularly regarding the different forms of facial recognition available.
    - Live Facial Recognition (LFR) compares faces captured in real time against a predefined watchlist of individuals who are known to the police and are being actively sought.
    - Retrospective Facial Recognition (RFR): used to identify an individual from an existing image or recorded footage.
    - Operator-Initiated Facial Recognition (OIFR): Used when an officer needs to establish an individual's identity and specific criteria have been met, typically while the person is present with the officer.
    - We continue to engage with members of the public to improve understanding of these technologies and address concerns regarding the storage of biometric data. Where no match is made against a watchlist, the biometric data captured is deleted immediately.
3. Significant improvements have been made in understanding and assessing the location of every alert generated by the system. Experience has shown that the positioning of the zone of recognition is critical to achieving optimal performance.
    - Where the zone of recognition is positioned too far from officers or includes multiple exit routes, relocating it closer can improve operational effectiveness and increase opportunities to engage with individuals following an alert.
    - Operators must also consider pedestrian movement. Individuals may initially pass through the area with their backs to the zone of recognition but may subsequently turn around for any number of reasons, allowing the system to capture a suitable facial image and generate an alert before continuing to walk away from officers.
    - An operator remains within the vehicle throughout the deployment to monitor ongoing alerts. On several occasions, multiple alerts have been generated within seconds of one another, reinforcing the need for continuous monitoring and rapid assessment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

Given that LFR is a policing tool that attracts significant public scrutiny and debate, it is important that members of the public, community panels and key stakeholders have opportunities to raise concerns and share their views. LFR is regularly reviewed through independent AI Scrutiny Panel meetings, which take place every three months to ensure its use remains proportionate, lawful and aligned with its intended purpose. To gather additional feedback, 75 panel members and stakeholders were invited to complete a survey in September 2026, following the first year of LFR deployment.

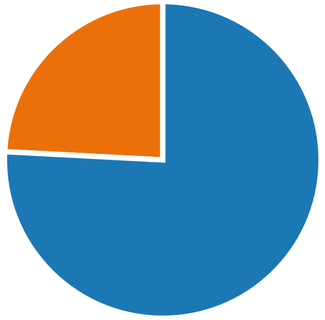
1. Have you heard of Live Facial Recognition before today?

Yes	66
No	9



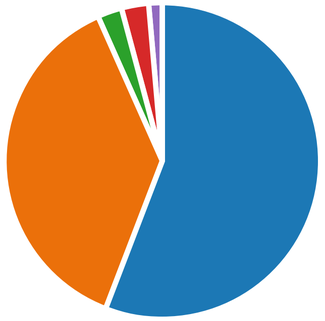
2. Were you aware that Bedfordshire Police has been running LFR regularly in Bedford and Luton Town Centres for the last year?

Yes	57
No	18



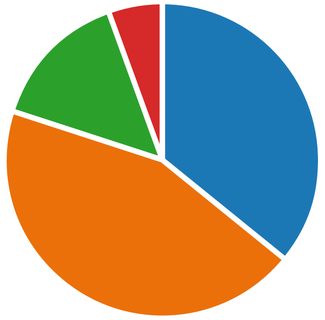
3. What were your views of LFR before Bedfordshire Police introduced it in September 2025?

Very supportive	27
Supportive	33
No opinion	11
Had concerns	4
Against	0



4. Now that Bedfordshire Police has been running LFR for one year, what are your views now?

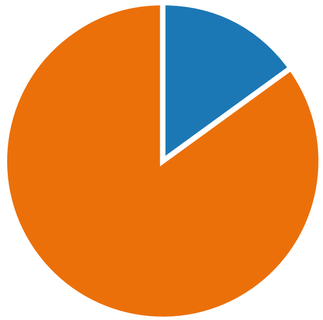
Very supportive	42
Supportive	28
No opinion	2
Had concerns	2
Against	1



After members of the public and stakeholders were provided with data demonstrating the outcomes and effectiveness of LFR, as detailed within this report, they were asked a series of follow-up questions to gather their views, perceptions and feedback on its use.

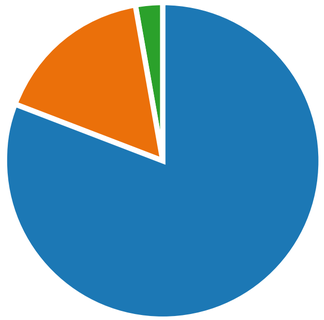
5. Now you are aware of these statistics, has your view of Bedfordshire LFR deployments changed?

Yes	66
No	9



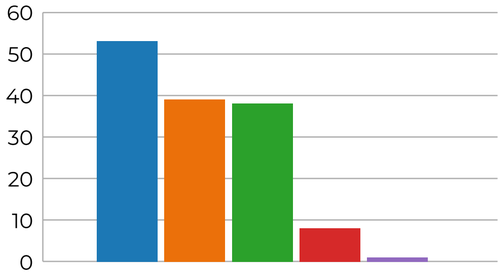
6. What are your views now that you are aware of these statistics?

Very supportive	42
Supportive	28
No opinion	2
Had concerns	2
Against	1



7. How would you like Bedfordshire Police to use LFR in the future?

Deploy more often	53
Increase capacity (more cameras)	39
Install permanent / static cameras	38
No change - continue to deploy	8
Deploy less	1
Stop deploying altogether	0



Overall, respondents expressed positive views regarding the use of LFR and supported its continued deployment. Several individuals who initially had concerns about the technology reported that their views became more favourable after being presented with performance data and operational outcomes. While a small number of respondents remained cautious about its use, they were generally reassured by the visible presence of police officers in town centres alongside the technology.

A recurring theme within the feedback related to the advertising and notification of LFR deployments. Respondents frequently commented on the visibility of communications informing the public when and where LFR was being used. This approach aligns with guidance from the College of Policing, which promotes transparency and ensures that members of the public are aware of deployments and have the opportunity to avoid the area if they do not wish to have their face scanned.