



USE OF POWERS SCRUTINY PANEL

Summary of On-line Discussion: 13 October 2022

Chief Inspector Pete Basham welcomed participants to the first on-line discussion.

PREVIOUS MEETING

Chief Inspector Basham referred to the report of the meeting held on 8 September 2022, and reminded Panel members that their scoring of individual officers was used to grade the Force's response to those officers:

- 100 – 80%: Officer(s) praised, and the scenarios possibly used in further training as an example of good practice
- 60 – 79%: Learning points and possible training refreshers for the officer(s)
- 0 – 59%: Automatic referral to Professional Standards Department – potential detrimental impact on the community

Of the six cases considered at September's meeting, two were addressed by the Force as a result of the Panel's feedback.

Case 2

Although this officer was scored at 85%, it was noted that she had used her personal phone to send an image to a colleague; whilst this message was sent for the policing purpose of establishing the identity of the person Stopped & Searched, it created the potential for data security issues, and was contrary to the training delivered across the Force at the beginning of the year. Chief Inspector Basham confirmed that he had spoken to the officer's inspector who had briefed all of the officers in that individual officer's team about the need to be mindful of data security. He advised that if the issue of using personal devices recurred, he would consider issuing Force-wide communications.

The Panel disagreed with the Force's response, recommending further action be taken now, rather than waiting for the same issue to happen again, with possibly serious consequences. Members felt there had been sufficient time for officers to assimilate their training so doubted they had viewed a one-off incident. They were also concerned by the potential data security risk of using personal devices for a policing purpose.

ACTION: Chief Inspector Basham to issue a reminder to all officers and staff in his next Vlog of the data security implications arising from the use of personal devices.



Case 6

This officer was scored at 63%, the lowest score achieved thus far. The Panel's feedback indicated that the officer should have done more to calm the suspect down which would have enabled the arrest to be completed without resorting to the use of PAVA (incapacitant) spray. Chief Inspector Basham advised he had met with the officer and the officer's supervisor for a "reflective conversation" (effectively, a debrief of the incident). In his defence, the officer pointed out that the suspect had markers for violence and was arrested on suspicion of committing a violent offence; he, therefore, maintained that the level of force used was commensurate with the situation. Nevertheless, the officer took the feedback on board, and will be mindful moving forward. (Chief Inspector Basham pointed out that, in a rank-based organization like the police, summoning a PC to a meeting with a chief inspector automatically imposed gravity to the topic under discussion.)

The Panel pointed out that a second officer had been present at the arrest, who did nothing to challenge his colleague's behaviour. Members hoped that the officer would reflect before deploying his PAVA in future.

Chief Inspector Basham thanked the members for their feedback on these two cases. He recognized there would be times when opinions differed, but it was essentially the role of the Panel to provide a forum where the police and the community could have frank discussions with a view to assisting all officers to improve their interactions with members of the public.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Chief Inspector Basham advised that he and the Force's Head of Learning & Development, Chief Inspector Thayanithy, had established a mechanism for ensuring that the Panel's feedback reached those developing training on use of powers.

For the first time, the Force was introducing mandatory refresher training on Stop & Search. The package was still in the early stages of development, but would go beyond legislative requirements and include guidance on cultural sensitivity issues. For example, he was aware that some communities considered it disrespectful for young people to look an older person in the eye; an inexperienced police officer could wrongly interpret this as "shiftiness" or even guilt. He was hoping that community leaders would be involved in developing the package, and, eventually, he would be seeking the Panel's feedback on the finished product. The Panel felt that cultural sensitivity, amplified by a certain nervousness when encountering a police officer, was a very important issue to address; in some communities, young people found it hard to reconcile the behaviour expected of them at home with that expected in other settings, such as at school. Overall, the Panel welcomed the initiative, and was keen to be involved.

Chief Inspector Basham reported that he had met with the Commissioner's Office, and was pleased that he had secured the support of an outreach youth worker to recruit (and accompany) some young people to join the Panel.

Apologies for the difficulties experienced in gaining entry to Force Headquarters were proffered, alongside an assurance that a police officer would be posted at the security barrier for future meetings to make access easier for Panel members.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

The Community Co-chair played a recording of a woman praising the police officers she had witnessed Stopping & Searching a group of young people. He used this incident to demonstrate that the unfavorable media coverage of the police was not universally accepted, and that the public was able to identify when police officers were doing well. Chief Inspector Basham greatly appreciated the gesture; whilst he was always ready to publicize good practice, equally he wanted to foster confidence within the community that any poor practice uncovered would be addressed robustly. The Panel was an opportunity to show how the Force was trying to improve, and he hoped that scrutiny panels dealing with other areas of policing – such as custody – would follow.

Greater police involvement in community events was urged so that police officers could get to know the community in “normal” situations, not just when there were crimes to investigate. Chief Inspector Basham welcomed the suggestion and offered to ensure that any such invitations were re-directed appropriately; whilst he was happy to get involved at a strategic level, it was more important that neighbourhood officers got to build relationships with community members at local events.