

Northamptonshire Police
USE OF POWERS SCRUTINY PANEL
11-05-2023

Pete Basham and Titus Ajayi (Co-chairs) welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting the pleasing mixture of new faces and returning Panel members.

CI Basham advised that the observers from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (who had attended the previous two meetings) had put him in touch with another force which was assessed as doing well with its community scrutiny arrangements. He had arranged to visit and find out whether Northamptonshire could adopt any of its ideas, but stressed that he would not be making any changes to the Panel without consulting the Community Co-chair.

The Panel was shown video clips of five incidents recorded by officers using their body-worn video cameras, two Stop & Search interactions, and three examples of Use of Force. The video clips were randomly selected from incidents occurring in March 2023. In an experiment, sensitive personal information had been “bleeped” out – one Panel member commented that this was a useful way of protecting the identities of the people searched.

Stop & Search

CASE 1: Officers encountered two males tucked into the corner of a stairwell outside a boarded up property. Both males are identified as drug users, and neither lives at the address or are visiting anyone there. They can give no reason for their presence. The property is known for drug activity, so both were searched on suspicion of possessing illegal drugs. No drugs were found. The Panel scored the officer at 83%:

- The search was conducted in a confined space – potential for problems if there was a fight
- Exceedingly polite and respectful, but missed the opportunity to educate the subject about littering as he dropped his cigarette
- Officer only put his gloves on half way through the search
- Officer kept the situation calm and collected; as the subject was co-operative a lighter grip might have been enough
- Officer had no gloves for part of the search; highly risky when searching for drugs
- Gloves not worn
- If entering data on phones were postponed until the search was finished, officers could give their full attention to suspects
- Should have worn gloves when searching known drug users (health & safety) – eventually wore gloves but not at the start of the search

There was then a pause in the proceedings as two officers attended – at the suggestion of a member of the Panel – to demonstrate handcuffing techniques, and the majority participated with enthusiasm. CI Basham warned that handcuffs were not designed for comfort, and could leave red marks on the skin if worn for a prolonged period. The Panel felt it was beneficial to be able to experience how it felt to be restrained in this way; happily, all behaved compliantly, and were speedily released!

CASE 2: This case was omitted, due to the time spent on the handcuffing demonstration.

CASE 3: When performing a vehicle stop for a faulty rear light, the vehicle was found to smell strongly of cannabis; the driver admitted to smoking a joint. The driver, his female passenger and vehicle were searched; cannabis was discovered in the footwell and glove compartment but not on either person. The driver admitted the cannabis was his, and he was issued with a Community Resolution (out of court) Disposal at the roadside (off camera). The Panel scored the officer at 89%:

- Better supervision when searching car as both appeared to have their backs to the subjects; otherwise good stop
- Correct PPE – gloves – not worn; subject’s hygiene and officer’s safety (needles)
- Officer did not wear gloves
- Female passenger was offered a female officer for search – good practice
- Officer communicated well and was polite, but should have worn gloves to improve safety when searching the vehicle
- Gloves should have been worn for the safety of the officers searching the vehicle
- Searching with no gloves – drug search
- No gloves – high risk of sharps, and of contaminating items in car which could be evidence
- Gloves would have provided a layer of protection
- Where is the safeguarding risk procedure around getting cut or pricked by a needle, especially when searching for drugs?

Use of Force

CASE 4: Information was received that the subject had assaulted multiple persons with a large weapon described as a machete, and was in the street outside his ex-partner’s address still holding the blade. Concern that subject may have access to a potentially lethal weapon that could be used to cause serious harm to members of the public in the vicinity, to officers attempting to detain and arrest the subject or to cause harm to the victims still inside the property. There was concern that subject may be aware he is wanted for a serious offence and may attempt to use violence in order to aid his escape. Significant resources were dispatched to the scene, including armed officers and a dog handler. The suspect was slow to respond to the commands from the officers with drawn weapons, but eventually dropped to the ground and was handcuffed safely. The clip was brief, and given the circumstances,

there was little two-way engagement between the officers and the suspect. The Panel scored the officer using the Taser (and this figure is skewed somewhat; although he scored highly for communication and reasonable force, the questions on politeness, respect and listening were considered “not applicable” by several Panel members) at 59%:

- Clear identifying of “Police”, but should avoid verbal loops – don’t repeat phrases if ineffective
- Officers may not always need to swear – can antagonize the suspect; officer adapted to situation; reacted to the threat well
- No concerns – officers’ actions appropriate with the information provided
- Looked like officer pushed down which may not have been necessary but also understandable due to risk
- Subject was shoved down to the ground but in the situation where instructions were not being followed so may be reasonable
- Based on intel appropriate response
- Both officers’ weapons drawn – suspect visibly unarmed, may be Taser first?
- Officer should better secure his rifle whilst cuffing the suspect – he was not in control of the rifle
- They were well prepared for the situation – good job!
- De-escalation from armed force to Taser – they informed the suspect

CASE 5: Officers attended the property in response to a 999 call reporting that the female occupant was “kicking off” and threatening to overdose. This was the second attendance of the day; the first report was of criminal damage, and the caller also disclosed that the female had previously tried to stab him with a kitchen knife. Following an *in situ* assessment by a mental health professional, the female was arrested. CI Basham clarified that a team of mental health professionals was on duty daily, between 10.00 – and 03.00hrs, and attended incidents to provide advice to officers by accessing healthcare systems, and to interact with and help people suffering from mental health challenges. It was judged unsafe to leave the female at home with the caller, so she was arrested on suspicion of criminal damage. In the course of the arrest, she bit one of the officers, and was further arrested for assaulting an emergency service worker. The Panel scored the officer at 89%:

- Very respectful officer – I would hope all officers are this polite, despite her resistance and crisis
- Officer tried to de-escalate the situation well; officers had gloves on – made a decision to benefit suspect
- I think the officer did extremely well – He was patient and compassionate throughout; very good example of how to support a person’s mental health
- Lovely interaction – very calm and offered lots of understanding; voice remained calm throughout
- Handled the situation very well – officer was extremely patient and communicated well

- Other officer has handcuffs at hand as if judging the situation – they have not used force for a long period of time but waited until absolutely necessary
- Officer in gloves 😊 - arrest was done sensitively to subject's mental health
- 1hr 30mins at scene – appreciate there are processes to follow but how much time is acceptable? Resources (ambulance as well as police) tied up with repeat call outs
- Assuming it's possible to effect the arrest in another way the use of handcuffs could have been avoided
- The officer was very observant to remove the walking stick, close the cupboard, etc to remove objects that could potentially cause harm. Well done
- The officer explained what was happening and reason for her arrest to the subject

CASE 6: A 17 year-old male is wanted for kidnap; he is known for assaulting police officers and for possessing weapons. Officers knock on the front door and male makes to run off through the rear. He is arrested as he tries to leave through the back door. The suspect falls and smashes a plate. He sustains very minor cuts from the glass; no first aid is needed. The suspect is actively resistant to start with, but allows officers to handcuff him compliantly. The arrest takes place in the kitchen in the presence of the suspect's mother and her dog; given the need to avoid the broken crockery there is little room to manoeuvre when helping the suspect to get dressed. The Panel scored the arresting officer at 91%:

- Good arrest – respectful and helpful despite situation; eg, removing dog from broken plates
- Gloves needed – took a step back from door to give the house owner personal space
- Arrest was managed well – good policing
- Officers at all times remained calm and professional; officers responded to accused's parent's wishes re dog's welfare – no concerns on conduct or manner of the arrest
- Fulfilled mum's wishes in moving the dog, avoiding escalating the situation further
- Officers were patient and also dressed the subject to make him more comfortable
- Should have moved away from the broken glass sooner to ensure safety, and answered the mother when she asked what the arrest is for earlier to calm the situation
- Ensured the safety of subject and others in house (including dog)
- Extra points for the "doggy care" and dressing the subject
- The way and manners of the officers coming in by the rear door – I guess they should wait for the subject outside; also, allow the subject to be decent before handcuffs
- An explanation to the mother straightaway might have calmed situation – what was the ground for entering the property?
- The officers handled the situation very well – mum, dog and subject were treated with utmost respect and dignity
- The officers explained to the suspect and his mother that they were arresting him – mindful of the dog, and the subject trying to escape

The Community Co-chair commented that he had found the handcuffing exercise a worthwhile experience, and expressed the hope that there would be more opportunities to experience police tactics safely in order to better empathize with the suspects in the video clips. In the light of the discussion at the last meeting about the manner in which a drunken young woman had been transported to custody, he suggested it might be useful for the Panel to examine a cell van at a future meeting. CI Basham advised that he was open to such suggestions, but warned that policing demand must dictate the availability of equipment and resources.

CI Basham commented that the Panel had been running for well over a year with a committed cohort of members with a broad range of ages and lived experiences who continued to add value to Northamptonshire Police with their insightful feedback. He stressed that whilst he would be canvassing ideas from the force recommended by HMICFRS, no changes would be implemented without the agreement of the Community Co-chair and consultation with the Panel.

KB

12-05-2023