

Northamptonshire Police
USE OF POWERS SCRUTINY PANEL
13-07-2023

Pete Basham and Titus Ajayi (Co-chairs) welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting the encouraging number of young people in attendance. He stressed that he was keen to understand their perceptions of the style and tone used by officers in their interactions with members of the public and reminded the Panel that their feedback was used to identify learning and development opportunities for individual officers, as well as informing Force policy.

The Panel was shown video clips of six incidents recorded by officers using their body-worn video cameras, three Stop & Search interactions, and three examples of Use of Force. The video clips were randomly selected from incidents occurring in May 2023 by the Community Co-chair.

Stop & Search

CASE 1: Officers attended Wellingborough Railway Station in response to concerns that a female was threatening to harm herself. When asked, she admitted that she had a razor blade and some glass which she might use to harm herself, but refused to hand them over. The female was formally detained, her coat and bag were searched, and the sharp objects seized. The Panel scored the officers at **88%**:

- *Officer had good interaction with lady – got down to her level to speak to her – remained calm and polite*
- *Listened to the girl whenever she spoke – didn't speak over her – communicated very well*
- *Treating a person who is at risk of harming themselves as if they are a burden by reminding them that you have been called to the location multiple times may cause them to feel worse, and therefore, increase the risk of self-harm*
- *Mental health professional should have been involved in a situation like this*
- *Male officer obliged the subject by not searching her person*
- *Body language – officer had his hands in his pockets; should not lean against a wall – could be pushed over easily as off balance and next to train tracks!*
- *Officers were very polite and helpful, taking into account the subject's size and disability*
- *Good response – was the mental health team alerted?*

CASE 2: Officers attending a potential kidnap advised that they had identified the three suspects involved as having cannabis on them. There was a strong smell of cannabis within the vehicle and on the persons stopped – the subject searched was one of a group of four who attempted to make off from officers upon their arrival. No drugs were found. The Panel scored the officer at **88%**:

- *A lot of people gathered to watch – may have been useful to request others to move, or move subject*
- *Officers engaged well with the young person – remained calm and respectful*
- *Officer was very calm and informative*
- *Appeared to grab him before telling him he was being stopped and searched – what were the grounds for checking whether the phone was stolen?*
- *The bystanders should not have been allowed to watch/interfere in the process*
- *Police could have insisted on the other guys stepping back and giving them room to do their job – on-lookers were talking to the subject*
- *Should have explained phone search/SIM card removal prior to doing so*
- *Good to see youngsters were handcuffed to safeguard everyone*
- *Male’s friends could have been moved away?*
- *Should not have used the phrase “Don’t be silly” – on the one hand this was used as a way of communicating in a way that the subject was familiar with; however, it could also be a trigger for younger subjects to act out even more and not co-operate*

CASE 3: Young male spotted on town centre CCTV carrying an article which might be a knife or a baton. No weapon was found. The Panel scored the officer at **88%**:

- *Answered subject’s questions very well and calmly*
- *The interaction is OK and the officers did a great job – I think the technology that led to the intelligence should be improved upon; the subject was said to be carrying weapon/baton but nothing was found!*
- *First police officer got too close before ascertaining that the subject had no weapon; she put herself in real danger*
- *Subject did not look like a 16 year old, so there was no reasonable ground for the officers to have taken his age into consideration*
- *May be beneficial to have image from CCTV sent through to show subject reason for search – may not be possible though*
- *Search took too long – too many officers surrounding the person; no need as he was very co-operative*
- *ID him first? Why so many officers? Could live feeds be sent to officers on ground?*

Use of Force

CASE 4: A patient had absconded from St Mary’s Hospital, threatening suicide. Hospital staff reported they were unable to restrain her but by the time officers arrived, they had the patient on the ground. Officers used force to move the patient to a sitting position and applied handcuffs. Fast straps were applied to her legs due to the degree of resistance shown. She was transported back to hospital, accompanied by a member of the hospital

staff. CI Basham reminded Panel members that they were to assess the officers' interactions with the patient, not those of the hospital staff. The Panel scored the officers at **81%**:

- *Resulted in a good outcome in the end, but mental health staff allowing officers to speak to the subject sometimes felt their interactions were overwhelming*
- *Could have communicated with the subject's health worker/carer more, to help her in diffusing the situation*
- *No need to use the knee*
- *Because the subject was moving, officer having a knee on her back could cause harm if it comes into contact with the back of her neck or head*
- *Dignity trigger – the subject should have been allowed/assisted to pull her trousers up more regularly*
- *On arrival, I felt the officers should try to calm him/her down and explain things to him/her*
- *A more appropriate vehicle would have greatly improved the situation – in the absence, the strapping is appropriate to get the subject into the car*
- *Nothing to do with the officers, but the staff at the hospital added to the distress of the subject by not giving clear instructions to the officers which could have made the subject more comfortable and compliant*
- *Officer could have taken off PPE before driving off*
- *Subject was a danger to herself; force was necessary to keep her safe*
- *Don't give someone options and not follow through when they chose one; ie, car versus van*
- *Consider trigger issues – subject became increasingly distressed when officer suggested sitting on them – possible that they have previous traumatic experiences*
- *Possible that blue lights from car caused sensory overload. Difficult situation but very well handled*
- *Use van rather than car – easier to put someone in a van; must take account of mental health issues*
- *They did very well to contain the person who was very difficult to contain 😊*
- *Great job!*
- *More conversation between the police officers making contact with the subject, especially when the subject was being moved across different seclusion rooms*

CASE 5: A female was arrested on suspicion of burglary and further arrested for assaulting the arresting officers – kicking and headbutting. She was aggressive and verbally abusive, and a cell van was required to transport her. Given that she claimed to be pregnant, and to have concealed drugs in her anus, she was taken to custody via A&E; the footage shown to the Panel only depicted events once the female had been discharged from hospital – and arrested again for assaulting an emergency services worker. The Panel scored the officers at **78%**:

- *We didn't see the entire footage but during the footage we did see and when the subject was calm they didn't attempt any positive engagement. I think the officers were very patient – difficult subject to manage. Mental health professional attended which calmed the situation down*
- *Police could have talked through reasons for restraint more – spit hood could have been taken off when subject was talking to mental health professional*
- *Officer was too nice*
- *Officers didn't retaliate to individual calling them names which allowed the situation to keep calm*
- *No need to offer aggravating opinion "You're exhausting"*
- *If the subject specifies that two particular officers are triggering her reaction (irrespective of the validity of the reason) try swapping the officers as an intervention*
- *Members of the public did not need to see the arrest of the subject – to protect the dignity of subjects, the police could get a space at the hospital to erect a tent/canopy/shelter as a holding place*
- *Should not have moved prisoner until van arrived; should have avoided unhelpful comments*
- *Great to see a mental health practitioner respond; good to swap roles – often a fresh face solves a problem*
- *Did well, but van took far too long to arrive*
- *Did well to contain this lady from harm – abusive and spitting*
- *She could have banged her head on concrete – would it be better to be sat up?*
- *Good to see other services deployed – at the hospital, could there not be a holding room to temporarily detain persons?*
- *Should have been more communication between the officers and subject on every step/action taken*

ACTION: CI Basham to explore whether there was scope for the county's general hospitals to provide a discrete space where detainees awaiting transport to custody could be held in private to minimize disturbance to other patients.

CASE 6: An Intoxicated 17 year old male was arrested on suspicion of assaulting his girlfriend. Tactical communications failed to calm the male down; as he was actively resisting arrest and had become aggressive and verbally abusive, the male was safely pinned to the ground and handcuffed. He was further arrested for resisting arrest. As the male continued to resist, his legs were pinned in order to gain control. The Panel scored the arresting officers at **87%**:

- *Why do they keep turning the subject over? Would it be a bad thing to allow subject to sit up and "rant"? Subject disclosed he had ASD so having him face down would not help; asking him to calm down wouldn't help either*
- *Officer could have explained reasons for arrest earlier to help minimize resistance*

- *The amount of force used was unreasonable – number of officers made him feel uncomfortable*
- *Reason for arrest wasn't clear straightaway in the video, possibly causing individual to be confused and worsening the situation*
- *Initial physical intervention triggered escalation*
- *Getting in touch with mum or sister might have improved the situation; he is 17 – how does that affect the situation?*
- *Should have offered the opportunity to sit up – may help with compliance if providing a clear path to not lying on the floor. Great kindness shown*
- *Officers did well to contain the offender – why did they have to wait so long for the van to arrive?*
- *Cuffs not used soon enough!! Delay in moving the male?? Velcro straps not used?*

The Community Co-chair thanked everyone for coming, noting that some of the footage had been emotionally disturbing. CI Basham congratulated him on selecting such a wide range of cases for the Panel to review, covering different genders, ages and ethnicities, enabling the Panel to consider whether people were treated differently.

KB
14-07-2023