

USE OF POWERS COMMUNITY SCRUTINY PANEL

Discussion Meeting: 13 June 2024

1 INTRODUCTION

Chief Inspector Wakeman confirmed he had replaced Pete Basham, now Superintendent Basham, as Co-chair of the Panel. He did not intend to introduce changes to the format, but was open to suggestions from members of ways in which the Force could improve its community scrutiny process.

2 FEEDBACK ON CASES FROM 9 MAY 2024

CASE 1: A report is received of a known transgender person stealing a bottle of wine; she is also known to have a communicable disease, to behave violently towards officers, and to spit at them. The suspect is located and spoken to, but makes off before the arrest can be completed. Following a chase, she is restrained by officers, and arrested. The suspect is subsequently re-arrested for assaulting a police officer. The Panel scored the officers at **71%**.

The Panel reiterated its concern that, if the suspect was well known to the police, the arresting officers should have been more alert to the possibility that she would attempt to flee and taken preventative steps. CI Wakeman accepted this was a valid point, but commented that the Force had an inexperienced workforce, and if the officers were young in service, they may not have encountered the suspect before, or have had the confidence - which comes with experience - to assert themselves.

Post meeting note: The sergeant responsible for supervising the two officers confirmed that she had spoken to them:

From speaking to them about it and watching the footage, we have had a reflective discussion about what could have been done better and what was good practise, so that they can build on this in the future.

They both took this on board and were grateful for the feedback, as well and the praise from some of the comments.

CASE 2: An intoxicated, verbally abusive female – described as being “of very large build” - has been arrested on suspicion of assaulting door staff and handcuffs applied; she is restrained against a wall. She is resisting arrest and has also assaulted the arresting officers. The footage shows her being taken to the floor and further restrained. A MegaMover is then used to carry her to the police vehicle. The Panel was divided in its views on this case, and scored the officers at **68%**. Of particular concern was the sheer number of officers attending this incident and the perceived lack of one officer taking charge; the Panel felt that communication with the suspect might have been less confusing for her if one officer had assumed this responsibility.

Post meeting note: The inspector responsible for supervising the team involved in this incident confirmed that he had shared the Panel's concerns, and provided brief feedback from the officers:

-Looks to be a fair assessment.

-In response to the part around walking the female to the van- this was tried but that was when the officer was kicked.

-I'm not sure if it fully came across on the footage but she was a big girl and was very shouty and aggressive.

Sgt O'Connor-Frisby (Northampton Neighbourhood Policing Team) advised that Operation Nightsafe - patrolling the nighttime economy in the county's town centres at weekends - tended to involve a lot of student officers, it being a tour of duty almost guaranteed to expose them to violent, alcohol-fuelled, situations. She suggested that this might, in part, explain why there were so many officers at this incident. The Panel clarified that it was not the number of officers but the apparent lack of leadership which caused concern, and wondered whether it was for the Force Control Room to better manage such deployments. CI Wakeman advised that, in Northampton, Operation Nightsafe would usually involve a team of one sergeant and six constables, supported by special constables – volunteer officers with the same policing powers as regular officers. Whilst other officers might self-deploy on hearing radio calls for assistance, the Force Control Room would always monitor an incident via CCTV, sending officers away if fewer could safely manage the situation.

CASE 3: Two officers attend a domestic incident, taking more than hour in patiently negotiating the male party – in breach of bail conditions - out of the house. Once outside in the street, he continues to be verbally abusive towards the female party and is arrested on suspicion of public order offences. Patrolling officers attend to assist in gaining control of the suspect. The Panel scored the officers at **51%**; the feedback confirmed that the female officer swearing at the suspect was a major concern.

CI Wakeman confirmed that their supervisor had viewed the body-worn video footage for himself, and discussed the Panel's feedback with each of the officers involved:

They have taken the feedback well and agree it could have been more professional, there was a couple of things that led to the way they reacted which I think is fair is mentioned.

The male had just returned after being negotiated with for an hour or so and officers had left and had to come back due to him returning and secondly there is prior knowledge for [female officer] who had dealt with him the previous week on night time economy and he was violent and required several officers all the way to custody and in the holding bay, he may have even been red dotted [ie, Taser aimed but not fired] but I don't know for sure. It is also worth mentioning that all the officers in this incident are probationers inside their two years.

I think a mix of adrenalin, frustration and inexperience is how we got here but all have realised that how we come across is important and there is nothing that they wanted mentioning to the group.

On learning that these officers were still in their probationary period, the Panel queried why a more experienced officer had not been deployed to support them. CI Wakeman explained that new officers were tutored by an experienced constable, who accompanied them on each deployment, for a period of ten weeks; once the student officer could evidence a prescribed range of competencies, he or she was signed off for independent control for a two year probationary period. During those two years, a probationer's performance was closely assessed – often using body-worn video footage – and supervised. He noted that the number of probationary officers was currently out of proportion to the workforce as a whole whilst the Force assimilated an influx of new recruits.

CASE 4: Officers attend a suspected cannabis factory to execute a Misuse of Drugs Act warrant. A male attempts to flee from the rear of the property and is arrested. The Panel scored the officer at **79%**, above the remedial intervention threshold.

3 ACTION FROM MARCH 2024 DISCUSSION: Seatbelts

CI Wakeman presented the feedback from the Sergeant Sae-Thang in the Force's Learning & Development Team, who had reviewed the footage of the whole incident with the specialist lead trainer:

In relation to this review both myself and PC Dyer have looked into it and exactly as was said on the night prisoners should always be transported with a seatbelt on and best practice is to have someone travel in the back of the car during travel to apply optional restraints taught for violent persons in a vehicle.

The officers did do the right thing in recognising that the prisoner had become too uncompliant to continue and removed him into a van. Their Tac coms [tactical communications] throughout were also good in trying to de-escalate the male's behaviour and calm him.

We will be arranging for some feedback/learning to occur with the officers involved. Some of this will cover the risks of the prisoner being handcuffed to the front which does allow the person more movement if they become aggressive – or if they take their seatbelt off, which they can do when cuffed to the front. On top of this we will also refresh them on the transport guidance and tactics to ensure they are making the right decisions when transporting prisoners and using the most appropriate vehicles.

In addition to this we are introducing a new "van transport" tactic which has come from the College of Policing around the safest way to place someone into a cell van. This is now being taught in all our officer safety refreshers and a briefing video will be out in the next couple of weeks that all frontline officers will be required to watch.

The Panel welcomed the acknowledgement that the subject had been transported incorrectly, noting it was positive that the Force had taken on board its feedback. CI Wakeman agreed, adding that this was the real benefit of the Panel, providing a different perspective on policing activities.

In addition, Sgt Sae-Thang extended an invitation to the Panel:

I am in the process of writing a document to look at how we can better involve our community engagement with operation training (and Taser) and as mentioned before we would really like that to start with the community panels so, as soon as we have got a plan in place I will be back in touch to ask people to come and watch the training we deliver and offer us some feedback (as well as help better the understanding of what is and isn't taught amongst the observers).

The Panel expressed a particular interest in observing Taser training, expressing a feeling that officers seemed to resort to Taser far too readily when other, lower key, tactics might resolve a situation. CI Wakeman advised that Ms Billingham would circulate dates and other information as soon as Learning & Development was ready to receive observers. He also noted that a Taser instructor could be invited to a future meeting to provide an overview of the training delivered, but stressed that this could not incorporate a live firing demonstration.

4 NEXT MEETING, 11 JULY 2024

CI Wakeman invited the Panel to suggest a theme for the next set of video clips; particular interest was expressed in scrutinizing the manner in which officers dealt with **young people**. Given the offer by Learning & Development, **Taser** deployment was also nominated.

The Community Co-chair thanked everyone for their participation, noting that his new counterpart had stepped into his role so seamlessly. CI Wakeman reiterated his commitment to making Northamptonshire Police as transparent as possible, using the Panel's feedback to improve performance, and eradicating disproportionality in officers' use of force.

KB
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