

Northamptonshire Police
USE OF POWERS SCRUTINY PANEL
14-03-2024

Pete Basham and Titus Ajayi (Co-chairs) extended a warm welcome to everyone, especially those attending for the first time. CI Basham stressed the value of the Panel and its feedback to the Force, and hoped that members would spread the word through their personal networks to boost the drive to recruit new people.

The Panel watched video clips of six incidents recorded by officers using their body-worn video cameras, three examples of Use of Force, and three Stop & Search interactions. The video clips were selected from incidents occurring in January 2024 by the Community Co-chair, the latter at random, but the former concentrating on the use of Unarmed Skills.

Use of Force

CASE 1: An angry male was arrested on suspicion of a car key burglary, handcuffed to the front, and transported to custody in the rear of a police car. The Panel scored the officer at **81%**.

- *Feel like that's a lot of officers for one person, especially someone with trauma around police – could be more empathetic; in the car, officer was patient and calm*
- *Officers kept constant communication with the subject throughout in attempts to de-escalate the situation; well managed situation and use of force appropriate*
- *Suspect had no seat belt – driving officer not fully in charge of vehicle – why forward handcuff; if known, why not rear cuff?*
- *8+ officers? Why didn't rear seat officer communicate with suspect? Kneeling on back and pelvis area?*
- *Maybe get back up and have a van to put this person in the back rather than a car*
- *Took so long to calm the situation – could have done better*
- *Not sure if there was an officer in the back with suspect to effectively restrain him*
- *High time criminals get charged for damages caused to property – police cars are purchased with public funds*
- *The officer maintained a calm voice which is commendable. Officer observed stepping on the subject's legs – used his foot to step on suspect whilst on the floor – is that an approved technique?*
- *Officer calm – trying to use distractions*
- *Does suspect have his seatbelt on?*
- *Why wasn't suspect put in the van in the first instance?*
- *No seatbelt on suspect; "wind your neck in" comment was not really helpful in the circumstances*
- *Sometimes less words when someone is heightened is more; less interactions when the male was ranting may have worked – having said that, officers remained calm and professional at all times*
- *Police officer was very calm and concerned and polite*
- *Officers should have remained silent – obviously, there was history with subject*

CASE 2: An extremely intoxicated male was arrested on suspicion of assault, criminal damage and theft; he was escorted outside and permitted to smoke a cigarette before leaving for custody. The male had warning markers for violence and self-harm, and was a known escaper. The Panel scored the officer at **80%**.

- *Difficult because he was drunk but would be good to get more of the subject's voice as lack of voice could be down to physical injuries*
- *Good how they got the suspect to the floor gently; communication was very clear and de-escalated the situation at the earliest point*
- *Minimal resistance due to substance misuse – conversation around next steps could've taken place away from subject; communication following the use of force was better than initial communication*
- *Unclear of previous events, however, surely handcuff first. Seriously disagree allowing smoke – risk to officers; officers appeared too relaxed*
- *Never give a lighter . . . when the person is drunk; handcuff first, then call for back up, as 2 people were not able to handle*
- *Officers noted to have gloves*
- *Allowing the subject to smoke is a kind gesture but it led the to risk of escape; the officers did not search the subject before his arrest – could this be an oversight?*
- *Officers could have spoken to the subject more; officer was left alone with male who has warning markers for escaping and male was not handcuffed*
- *Both officers were polite, professional and showed respect*
- *Clearly the suspect was very intoxicated so should the officers not put him in van earlier?*

CASE 3: Two officers re-attended a care home in response to a child's emotional dysregulation episode. Her carers reported that she has assaulted them, and she then assaulted an officer. (Following the use of force, the officers remained in the care home, calming the child and trying to discover why she was so unhappy and what extra support she needed.) The Panel scored the officer at **87%**.

- *Don't threaten with being locked up in cells as it only escalated subject*
- *Good, clear communication about why they are restraining and that they don't want to; officer whose body cam it was, was very empathetic*
- *On occasions, could've given the subject more space; could've held the silence on a couple of occasions*
- *Given opportunities to subject to make better choices despite assaulting officer; really good attempt to de-escalate and explore causes of behaviour*
- *Restraint straight after head butting the wall would have improved the situation*
- *Great that officers attempted to help – police time taken in other services' scope; What powers do [care home] staff have to restrain?*
- *Officers did very well to assist the young lady – maybe could have called her parents to calm the situation*
- *I'm not quite certain she got the right support – were the staff of the care home trained to restrain? Was the presence of police officers appropriate for a young woman who was distressed?*
- *More understanding of subject's mental health needs; staff involvement*

- *The escalation could have been avoided with more time; the cuffs made it worse*
- *I think the officers handled the situation very well*
- *Handled really well by officers, but care staff should have gone to another room, out of sight*
- *Officers remained calm and respectful, and positive to see that their first reaction wasn't to arrest the young girl*
- *Specialists should have been called; this is a mental [health] case – child suffering traumatic experiences*

Stop & Search

CASE 4: Police were alerted by members of the public to the presence of three males trying doorhandles in a block of flats. The young men were searched for articles indicating an intention to commit burglary, but none were found. The Panel scored the officers at **89%**.

- *Couldn't have asked for more – the officer was calm, spoke to them respectfully, even when they were a bit evasive – she give them options and listened when they spoke*
- *Really well managed situation, with very clear communication and explanation; officer did a good job*
- *Is it time-sensitive to inform parents?*
- *They all handled it very well; good job*
- *Officers should be more careful in protecting themselves – when you have gloves on, you shouldn't keep touching your face or surfaces with the same gloves*
- *Gloves worn*
- *Access to translators?*
- *Three suspects were searched but only one was handcuffed whilst the search was carried out; all of them co-operated*
- *Wearing gloves has now become second nature*
- *Officer checked whether mum speaks English – very good; officer was very tenacious in speaking to parent*
- *The officer could have called the parent rather than the young person*
- *Should there not be more space between the subjects searched?*

CASE 5: Officers patrolling an area known for drug dealing spotted a male who covered his face when he saw them, and got into a vehicle. The driver of the vehicle was searched because he attempted to hide a cannabis pot which he claimed he had just found, and because he stated he did not know his passenger, who smelt of cannabis. No drugs were found. The Panel scored the officer at **85%**.

- *Audio was difficult to understand so some stuff may have been missed; communication around how to get info regarding the Stop & Search wasn't clear*
- *The search of the car was not thorough enough; only the driver's section was searched properly*
- *No check of back pockets, spare wheel area or carpets at rear of car; didn't ask age or details prior to search and didn't follow up on insurance*
- *Good and simple Stop & Search; use drug scanner to make like easy and quicker*

- *Would it be in order if police ask suspects to take of jackets/shoes, rather than searching through layers of clothing and spending so much time too close to the suspects? Same as airport style to reduce risk*
- *Should they have questioned the [presence of the] hammer?*
- *Why wasn't suspect's shoes searched? I don't think a thorough search of the vehicle was made*

CASE 6: A male was seen on CCTV removing a bag of white powder, then sniffing the powder and passing the bag to two females present. CCTV contacted the police and directed officers to the male, who was detained and searched at the location. No drugs were found. The Panel scored the officers at **82%**.

- *Feel it could've been quicker and identifying details could've been clearer*
- *Officers should have identified themselves at point of Stop & Search and explained legislation*
- *Didn't ask about sharps; didn't check lower body or shoes*
- *Why was not the [subject's] cap removed during search?*
- *The banter between the female officers was disruptive and unprofessional – police officers ought to maintain respect for their office – not necessarily being high-handed – but be more professional*
- *Officer wears gloves*
- *Unsure if grounds of search etc were stated*
- *Why were the two ladies at the scene not searched? Three of them were seen on CCTV and only one searched. If they were seen on camera to be passing around what looked like powder, how come nothing was found?*
- *Police didn't question why older male was with two young females – possible child sexual exploitation*
- *I am confused with search because officer appeared distracted with other conversation – officers and two young ladies*

Sgt Sae-Thang, an operations trainer in the Force's Learning & Development Team, joined the meeting remotely to answer the Panel members' questions on the use of Unarmed Skills. She also gave an overview of how officers are trained.

The Co-chairs thanked everyone for their participation, expressing their appreciation of the Panel members' commitment to this initiative. CI Basham announced that the Panel would concentrate on Use of Force from the next meeting onwards.