

National stop and search survey report

October 2023

Background

We recognise that when used correctly, stop and search is an important policing power, allowing officers to detain a person who is not under arrest, to search them or their vehicle for an unlawful item.

But it is one of the most contentious and intrusive policing powers and its disproportionate use against people from a Black, Asian, or other minority ethnic background, particularly young Black men, has damaged relations with some communities for many years.

Consequently, any failure to properly rationalise its use, or demonstrate effective scrutiny, significantly risks damaging public trust and confidence, particularly within the communities most disproportionately affected.

We repeatedly hear from complainants and others about their negative experiences of being stopped and searched - largely around a perceived lack of legitimacy - and the dissatisfaction and resentment that can be caused. Research shows that this can create marginalisation, exclusion, trauma, and ultimately a loss of trust in the legitimacy of policing. In some circumstances, relationships between the police and communities can break down. This can result in an unwillingness to report crimes and hinder the flow of the crime-related intelligence from witnesses.

In our National Stop and Search Learning report, we used evidence from our cases and engagement work to build upon existing research to identify common themes, patterns, and issues. This evidence informed [18 recommendations](#) aimed at increasing public confidence by improving the use and scrutiny of stop and search at a local and national level.

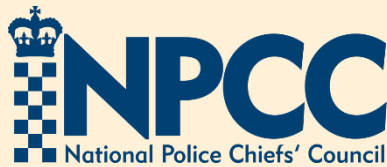
We recognised that some areas required consideration or action by individual forces; for example, to ensure officers' behaviour is in line with expectations, or to ensure that changes are implemented in a way that addresses local needs and context. For these areas, we addressed 22 questions to chief officers to encourage assessment of the position in their force and prompt reflection on any further actions to be taken.

We sought responses to those 22 questions between September and December 2022 and were pleased to receive responses from all 43 territorial police forces. We believe this demonstrates a genuine desire from those forces to engage with our work and to learn and improve.

This report provides a summary of some of the initiatives adopted by police forces to improve the use and scrutiny of stop and search. We have not evaluated the impact or effectiveness of these local initiatives but welcome the commitment of police services to drive improvements. We will share this report with the College of Policing

and encourage forces to share their innovations with them for inclusion in the College of Policing practice bank.

Full responses will be shared with the National Police Chiefs' Council portfolio lead for stop and search, Chief Constable Amanda Pearson, who has pledged to support both the sharing of good practice and provide support to those forces who may be behind others in their progress. She states:



“Stop and search is a valuable policing tool with daily examples of weapons and drugs being taken off the streets. We use stop and search powers on behalf of our communities, so it is vital

they have confidence in the way it is deployed and that our officers can use it effectively, appropriately and with confidence.

We know that the use of stop and search can have a significant impact on individuals and communities, particularly our Black communities and young people. It is our responsibility as leaders to ensure that we balance tackling crime with building trust and confidence in our communities. We know we haven't always got that balance right and we are committed to transparency about our use of the powers.

It is of utmost importance that our communities are well informed and confident in the use of these powers through open and honest communication and the subsequent scrutiny processes leading to learning, reflection and where necessary, changes to policy and practice.

The NPCC supports the use of stop and search and works on behalf of policing along with key colleagues and stakeholders to co-ordinate the national approach, to ensure that our stop and search powers are used in a way that achieves this balance. We will continue to work with forces to ensure the IOPC recommendations are embedded and to identify and share good practice.”

Recognising the role that local policing must play in scrutinising the use of stop and search in their force area, as well as holding their chief officers to account for any unexplained disproportionality, we will be sharing each force response with the relevant local policing body.

Alison Lowe OBE, who is Deputy Mayor for West Yorkshire and joint APCC lead for Race Disparities, Equality and Human Rights, observes:



Association of
Police and Crime
Commissioners

“I am pleased to see the focus on Stop and Search from the IOPC, as demonstrated by this report. Stop and Search is an essential tool for policing to keep our communities safe, but it cannot be done at the expense of equity and fairness. If trust and confidence is to be a reality within all our communities, police use of Stop and Search must be a key area of scrutiny for Police and Crime Commissioners and Deputy Mayors, alongside the people we represent. This is why I support the learning opportunity that this document represents, and I will be sending out a call to action to all my APCC colleagues to use their force's survey feedback to better hold them to account and to drive improvements in practice which support the elimination of unjustified race disparities.”

We will continue to monitor the impact of our learning recommendations to drive change that is genuinely felt particularly within communities most disproportionately affected. Later in the year, we will be following up with the NPCC, College of Policing, and the Home Office to understand what further work has been undertaken in response to our national learning recommendations.

Findings and points for consideration

The evidence we have received from police forces covers a wide range of practical action being taken to improve the use of stop and search. We recognise further actions may have been started since we conducted the survey.

Examples of positive and innovative practice centred around policies and guidance, training, and scrutiny are highlighted below. We encourage respondents to measure their progress against other force areas and reach out to other forces to find out more about their work in this area.

It is really important that forces can demonstrate the impact that these actions are having, and that initiatives being put in place are resulting in change that makes a real difference to policing in this area.

We have also identified some areas where further improvements could be made.

We recommend that forces take steps to assure themselves and their local communities that the actions being taken are having the desired impact.

Activities to eliminate stereotyping, bias, and disproportionality

Some of the general feedback provided in responses to the survey:

- Data on the use of stop and search (and use of force) is being compared with census data on the resident population, with consideration given to the impact of non-residents, and complaints data.
- Training (unconscious bias, diversity and inclusion, cultural awareness, etc.) is being used to minimise the impact of any assumptions, biases, or stereotyping.

Points for consideration:

- It is not clear whether force leaders are consistently ensuring data is being proactively used to identify and address any disproportionality.
- What is meant by 'recent intelligence' varies and improvements could be made by monitoring the impact of specific intelligence on stop and search outcomes.
- Most forces are using intelligence officers and systems; however, there is an acknowledgement that

Some of the specific examples given of activity undertaken:

- Avon and Somerset Constabulary are using a communications campaign that dispels concerns such as 'it's obvious' or 'its awkward to ask' to improve the quality of data on self-defined ethnicity.
- Gwent Police commissioned an independent consultant to review 400 stop and search records, 200 involving people from White backgrounds and 200 involving people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds. The grounds were weaker for people from a minoritised ethnic backgrounds. The findings and learning have been presented by the Superintendent portfolio lead to all sergeants during development sessions.
- Hertfordshire has introduced disproportionality "deep dives" to identify locations within the force where there is apparent disproportionality and better understand the use of the powers and assess whether there are any behaviours displayed by the searching officers which would cause concern.

Activities to eliminate stereotyping, bias, and disproportionality

there are areas for improvement, such as by replacing outdated technology and databases.

- Very few forces describe working with independent researchers and academics to help them measure the quantitative and qualitative impact of their actions and initiatives.
- Are forces giving sufficient attention to addressing any institutional (rather than individual) factors that may be perpetuating disproportionality in the use of stop and search? Things to consider include stop and search strategies, training, supervision, briefings, and intelligence and police intelligence databases.

- Wiltshire Police host a Disproportionality Meeting chaired by an Assistant Chief Constable looking at disproportionality in stop search and use of force.

Activities to ensure legitimacy

Some of the general feedback provided in responses to the survey:

- Forces are recognising the importance of acting on 'real time', relevant and recent intelligence, with some working towards defining what constitutes 'recent intelligence'.
- IT systems are providing officers with up-to-date crime data and maps showing where positive finds are occurring so they can target the most relevant locations.
- Up to date intelligence is being disseminated through briefing products to enable officers to access target, hot-spot, suspect, crime and safeguarding information on the street through mobile devices.
- Officers are being directed to conduct searches in response to organisational priorities informed by the local policing body's Police and Crime Plan.
- Community input is contributing to the intelligence picture in some forces.
- The smell of cannabis not being sufficient grounds for a search on its own is included in policies and

Some of the specific examples given of activity undertaken:

- Bedfordshire Police have an integrated Central Intelligence Bureau, where staff manage intelligence up to and including dissemination for further development. Staff in the unit carry out initial risk assessment, administration and linking of intelligence reports, ensuring the best regulatory compliance and data quality. Team members evaluate the provenance of the information, the accuracy of it, the relevance it has to policing purposes and current intelligence requirements and gathering strategies, and what action, if any should be taken with the information, including if it needs an immediate response. All of this contributes to the intelligence picture and allows officers and staff access to up to date, relevant and accurate information to enable their decision-making processes.
- In City of London Police, all intelligence goes through a process of ensuring the intelligence is robust, Management of Police Information (MoPI) compliant and correctly sanitised. If it does not meet the requisite standards, it is pushed back to the initiator to make the required amendments.

Activities to ensure legitimacy

procedures and reinforced through training, internal communication messages, and publications.

- Forces are incorporating the College of Policing's communication skills training alongside scenario-based learning and communication skills and de-escalation as part of Personal Safety Training.
- The importance of ending a stop and search encounter positively is a key learning point from internal and external/independent scrutiny of stop and searches and body-worn videos.
- Feedback from external, independent scrutiny and monitoring groups is being used to inform learning, training, and internal communications.

Points for consideration:

- Stop and search strategies driven by previous positive finds may result in the reinforcing and worsening of any disparities.

- Cheshire, Cumbria, and Norfolk Police forces used the 'SHACKS' mnemonic (Seen-Heard-Action-Conversation-Know) to help officers formulate strong grounds based upon multiple factors. West Yorkshire Police use a similar 'See-Know-Suspect' prompt.
- Warwickshire Police have developed a Power App that requires every stop and search record to include information about 1) the intelligence; 2) physical signs; and 3) behaviour to reduce officers' reliance upon smell of cannabis alone.
- Essex Police have adapted the GOWISELY mnemonic to also include 'R' for Reassurance and Safeguarding, the purpose being to familiarise officers with the need to provide reassurance to everyone stopped and searched, specifically where the search ended with a negative result. This reassurance includes a full explanation of the reasons for the search and an apology, where appropriate, for any inconvenience or embarrassment caused.

Activities to stop the use of force when it is not appropriate or necessary

Some of the general feedback provided in responses to the survey:

- Scenario-based training provides officers with opportunities to role-play different encounters to test their judgement and ability to manage a situation without the use of force. This includes practicing their communication and de-escalation skills and discussing their decision-making at each stage to avoid unnecessary use of force.
- Data on the use of force is being monitored by senior officers and force leads and scrutinised by external, independent scrutiny and monitoring panels.
- Feedback from external, independent scrutiny and monitoring panels is being used to inform training and development, such as Operational Personal Safety Training (OPST) training.
- Handcuffing policies are being created, which includes information on the use of handcuffs pre-arrest.

Some of the specific examples given of activity undertaken:

- British Transport Police have a policy stating there are no circumstances where handcuffing (or any other use of force) should be automatically applied: any use of force requires the officers using force to be able to justify it on objective grounds. Each use of force is recorded on a digital use of force report. These reports are scrutinised for trends, which are referred to their Independent Advisory and Scrutiny Group (IASG) and to the Police Standards and Integrity Committee (PSIC) of their Police Authority Board. The meetings of the PSIC are public meetings, which are also live streamed on YouTube.
- Gloucestershire Constabulary include use of force during a stop and search in their Officer Safety training, with issues around disproportionality and stereotypical assumptions being covered.
- The Metropolitan Police Service's Recruit Foundation Public and Personal Safety Training includes a day of training with community representatives from a variety of backgrounds. The day focusses on Trauma Informed Policing, the objective being to encourage officers to be

Activities to stop the use of force when it is not appropriate or necessary

Points for consideration:

- Forces should review their training to ensure they are challenging, and not inadvertently reinforcing racial tropes and stereotypes.

mindful of previous adverse experiences, tailor their approach and methods of communication accordingly and consider whether their response could be managed in some way other than the use of force.

Activities to drive transparency and internal and external scrutiny

Some of the general feedback provided in responses to the survey:

- Force tactical and strategic leads are playing a crucial role in supporting the scrutiny of stops and searches.
- All forces have established external community scrutiny and oversight groups with whom they are sharing details of stops and searches, including body worn video footage. Their assessments and feedback are informing individual and organisational learning, development, and improvement. Some forces have removed barriers that may prevent people with lived experience from participating in scrutiny panels, such as removing the requirement to be vetted to become a member.
- Compliance with the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice (APP), including the use of body worn video, is being monitored through internal and external scrutiny resulting in identification of good and bad practice and learning.

Some of the specific examples given of activity undertaken:

- Leicestershire Police have four levels of scrutiny: 1) local supervision – supervisors; 2) internal scrutiny group, comprising subject matters experts; 3) Police Intervention, Legitimacy and Organisational Transparency (PILOT) group, an internal group chaired by an Assistant Chief Constable; and 4) Coercive Powers Scrutiny Group, an external group chaired and held by The Race Equality Centre.
- Bedfordshire Police require a 'yes/no' answer to the recording of body worn video footage within the digital recording platform for stops and searches. Officers who have not captured a search on body-worn video have to provide a full rationale for this omission.
- Staffordshire Police have removed the 30 second video-only buffer on body-worn video to enable the capturing of both audio and video.
- In Gwent Police, a Sergeant within the force Continuous Improvement Department reviews every stop and search involving someone from a Black or ethnic minoritised background to check the quality of the

Activities to drive transparency and internal and external scrutiny

- Some forces are exploring technology that would extend the length of capture prior to the officer activating their body-worn video.
- Changes are being made to forces' systems to enable officers to record the availability of body worn footage and any reasons for body worn cameras not being used.
- Most forces use anonymous or confidential channels, including whistleblowing processes, to facilitate the reporting of inappropriate behaviour.

Points for consideration:

- Supervisors are dip sampling their officers' encounters, looking at body worn video footage and recorded grounds. Some supervisors receive specific training to help them to perform their monitoring and supervision duties; however, less than 20% of forces ringfence dedicated time for such tasks.
- In most forces (but not all) the use of body-worn video is mandated in force policy. However:

grounds and powers used. Feedback on themes is communicated to the force and individual officer feedback is delivered in person and via the Coercive Powers Quality Improvement group.

- Following successful pilots, Dorset Police are rolling out bystander training delivered by an external organisation and facilitated through learning and development.
- Essex Police has a Professionalism Strategy in place which gives a direction to all staff to adhere to five key pillars of professionalism: 'How we Behave, How we Lead, How we Learn, How we Work and How we Look'. This strategy, combined with the Code of Ethics, puts a clear onus and obligation on officers and staff to challenge inappropriate behaviours from colleagues and fellow officers.
- North Wales Police have an internal mechanism (Safe Call) for confidential reporting of inappropriate behaviours. Staffordshire Police's mechanisms for reporting the conduct of other officers includes an anonymous 'Bad Apple' option. Surrey Police have an 'Anonymous' system whereby officers can report wrongdoing confidentially.

Activities to drive transparency and internal and external scrutiny

- Twenty-seven forces replied that body-worn video was being routinely used to capture traffic stops.
 - Nine forces responded that body-worn video was being used but not routinely.
 - Seven forces responded that they do not routinely use body-worn video to capture traffic stops.
 - Three forces were unable to answer as they did not have the ability to check usage.
- It is not clear if forces are effectively using their scrutiny mechanisms to identify areas which require further development.
- Durham Constabulary have adopted a “dare to share” stance to ensure their scrutiny panel members see the full picture of the stop and search encounter.
 - In Avon and Somerset Constabulary, the professional standards department (PSD) works closely with the stop and search lead and any concerns about behaviour are fed into either PSD or the counter corruption unit (CCU). The CCU have access to a Qlik app that highlights concerning patterns of behaviour including use of force, complaints, and disproportionality. They also have a Peer Review Team where dedicated officers volunteer their time to review incidents including body-worn video and incident reports and assess their colleagues’ performance.
 - West Yorkshire Police launched a scrutiny feedback portal in January 2022. The system has allowed them to streamline the recording processes, allowing them to capture, analyse and track feedback from their independent scrutiny panels more efficiently and effectively via a central IT platform. It has enhanced their ability to identify trends and share best practice and learning on a wider, organisational level.

Activities to develop and use insight into the historical use of stop and search to break the cycle of trauma faced by those who are disproportionately affected

Some of the general feedback provided in responses to the survey:

- Force training is covering racial bias, stereotyping, profiling, discrimination, vulnerabilities, the history of the policing of people from Black communities, harm, and trauma.
- Some forces include community input or lived-experience accounts into their training, including the seminal moments in the history of the policing of people from Black, Asian, and other ethnic minoritised backgrounds.
- A trauma-informed approach to stop and search is being taken by some forces.
- Analysis of repeat encounters, where the same subject has been stopped and searched on multiple occasions, is being used by some forces to understand the potential for trauma.
- Some forces refer to the work on accepting and understanding trauma that is being delivered through the Police Race Action Plan.
- Equality Impact Assessments, Community Impact Assessments, and Human Rights Assessments are

Some of the specific examples given of activity undertaken:

- South Wales Police hold “Let’s Talk about Race” events with facilitators brought in from third-party race organisations.
- Derbyshire officers receive cultural awareness training covering the impact of stop and search on people from ethnic minoritized communities, with sessions delivered by people from Black, Asian, and Eastern European backgrounds.
- Thames Valley Police has invested in the harm-based training programme developed by Durham University, which is designed to improve operational culture among staff through the leadership of their supervisors to safeguard people from harm.
- West Mercia Police have an aftercare policy where every child or young person is visited by a youth intervention officer within ten days of being stopped and searched to explain why the search took place and see if any further interventions can be offered.

Activities to develop and use insight into the historical use of stop and search to break the cycle of trauma faced by those who are disproportionately affected

being used by forces to consider the potential impact of any actions taken.

Points for consideration:

- Some forces do not equip their officers with information on understanding the local and national context within which they are operating and the events that might have led to a lack of trust in the police.
- It is not clear whether force leaders are consistently ensuring strategic decisions about policy and practice consider the potential for causing trauma, or that officers, of every rank, are considering the impact of past events before deciding to use stop and search as a tactic.
- It is not clear if forces are involving partner agencies in embedding a trauma informed approach to officer training.
- It is not clear what forces are doing to safeguard the needs of children and protect them from the potential impact of adultification¹

- Leicestershire Police involve community members and representatives from the force equality and diversity unit in strategic decisions about use of stop and search.
- City of London police officers hear about the historical lived experiences of people from Black communities and policing, including about the Windrush generation, Brixton Riots, Stephen Lawrence, and Black Lives Matter.
- All senior leaders in Devon and Cornwall Police have received cultural and leadership training, which addresses the significant events that have taken place throughout policing history, as well as the internal culture and how this translates to communities.
- Surrey Police have hosted two continuous professional development webinars led by Stuart Lawrence, Stephen Lawrence's brother. Officers attending initial and refresher training on safety training received information on 'can't breathe, can talk'. The Inclusion Team produces an annual calendar of events and communications to raise awareness of lived experiences across the year with an enhanced focus

¹ Adultification is a form of bias where children from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities are perceived as being more 'streetwise', more 'grown up', less innocent and less vulnerable than other children. This particularly affects Black children, who might be viewed primarily as a threat rather than as a child who needs support. The National Society for the Protection against Cruelty to Children (NSPCC); 2022

Activities to develop and use insight into the historical use of stop and search to break the cycle of trauma faced by those who are disproportionately affected

- Some forces are yet to develop or commence work in this area.

during months such as Black History month, South Asian History Month, and Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month. This is complemented by Learning & Development CPD sessions for leaders.

Published October 2023

© IOPC 2023

OGI This is licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0
except where otherwise stated.

This does not include material on this site as belonging to third parties.
Authorisation to use such material must be obtained from the copyright holders concerned.

To find out more about our work or to request this report
in an alternative format, you can contact us in the following ways:

Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)
10 South Colonnade Canary Wharf London E14 4PU
Tel: **0300 020 0096**
Email: enquiries@policeconduct.gov.uk
Website: www.policeconduct.gov.uk
Text relay: **18001 020 8104 1220**

We welcome telephone calls in Welsh
Rydym yn croesawu galwadau ffôn yn y Gymraeg

