

Police scrutiny of use of police powers

Internal police team to scrutinise stop searches and uses of force.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Ethics and values Leadership, development and learning
Organisation	Avon and Somerset Police
HMICFRS inspection report	Avon and Somerset PEEL Assessments 2021/2022 (HMICFRS)
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Region	South West
Partners	Police
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	October 2019
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Workforce
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Aim

The internal scrutiny team was created to:

- provide insight to the use of police powers
- identify areas for improvement and learning
- recognise best practice so it can be shared and commended

Intended outcome

The outputs are that each use of force or stop and search is measured by the team against an assurance framework. This turns qualitative assessments into numerical values for ease of understanding. The quantitative aspect relates to the individual findings and feedback for uses of powers that have learning or best practice identified upon review.

The intended outcomes are:

- a reduction in poorly scoring reviews against the framework, indicating that quality is improving in the area the team is focusing on (use of force or stop and search)
- officers receiving timely and relevant feedback that helps encourage best practice or can be considered more formally through the performance (or conduct) avenues if appropriate – providing reassurance to communities in our legitimacy in using our powers

Description

The internal scrutiny team has approximately 80 volunteer members. The team gives detailed insight into themes where police powers are used.

A different theme is selected each quarter to provide a sample of incidents for team review – for example, stop searches of black males in Somerset or uses of force during stop and search.

By opening membership of the internal scrutiny team to police staff and officers alike, it offers the opportunity to expand the scrutiny across a wider group of people. Some of these people have protected characteristics or lived experiences that may not be as common if the group was limited to a smaller selection of people, such as response officers, for example.

Background

In October 2019, the stop and search lead identified a need for more effective scrutiny of stop and search use. This followed an audit of stop and search grounds as part of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) spotlight report on disproportionate use of police powers.

The tactical lead sent out a request by internal media (email weekly bulletin) for volunteer support in reviewing stop and searches once a quarter. It was initially stop and search-focused, with use of force setting up a similar group later. Both groups have since merged to create a use of police powers scrutiny team.

How themes are chosen

The use of powers internal scrutiny panel (which has since been superseded by other forms of governance) determined that data would inform the focus theme for each quarter.

QlikSense (data analysis software) was used to identify emerging trends – such as disproportionality in Somerset or an increase in the use of stop and search in south Bristol – and focus the efforts of the team.

Once the theme was decided, a BusinessObjects report was run to identify the Niche numbers matching the defined requirements for each theme. Niche is a record management system. Niche numbers refer to stop and search records in the system, with each occurrence having its own unique record number.

Once a list of Niche numbers was generated, they were sent out to the team for them to review.

Distributing the workload

This was coordinated by the tactical lead, who scoped (by email voting buttons) how many reviews people could take on ahead of each quarter.

Flexing to individuals' workload demands for each quarter meant the attrition of volunteers was low, as they only took on what they felt they could manage rather than a pre-determined amount.

Recording and grading the reviews

Initially a spreadsheet template was compiled for people to populate their reviews on. This included columns based on community and stakeholder feedback about areas that were important to them, as well as organisational objectives such as body worn video (BWV) use.

This developed into a formal assurance framework that used numerical values to grade qualitative measures. For example:

- BWV used, saved correctly and narrative provided – scores 5
- no BWV used and no reason for why not – scores 1

Using the findings

The findings were compiled by the tactical lead and provided as updates into force governance processes, as well as in updates to stakeholders through independent advisory groups and community advocates.

Any patterns or trends identified through the scrutiny were addressed in force-wide training, either as bespoke online inputs or during the yearly public and personal safety training (PPST) refreshers.

The team has now merged into an overall use of police powers scrutiny team. It has around 80 members and alternates its focus every quarter between stop and search and use of force. This was in response to there being insufficient time between scrutiny periods to provide effective feedback before the process started again.

Now, quarter one focuses on stop and search scrutiny. The following quarter is used to provide the stop and search feedback while the team are reviewing use of force incidents in quarter two.

Overall impact

- The use of internal scrutiny in this way has now been mirrored across other areas of the organisation and provided a template for achieving large-scale insight into an area, while also

engaging the workforce in improvement activity.

- Stop and search quality has improved, which has been seen through a reduction in overall searches and increase in find rate in 2021/22.
- The stigma of scrutiny has reduced, particularly with officers (known through informal conversations and checking and testing).
- The scrutiny findings have been incorporated into yearly stop and search continuing professional development (CPD) packages.

Learning

The key to this being effective is being flexible and clear in communication to potential volunteers that they can take on as much or as little as they're able to in a quarter period. This reduces the stress in delivering something that is ultimately voluntary and allows volunteers to engage without pressure.

Scrutiny of each incident has been achieved through volunteers who were interested in the area and wanted to become more involved in understanding and scrutinising the use of police powers. Motivations varied between police staff and officers, but all were committed to helping the force improve.

There was no requirement for funding or costs (no overtime was offered). Before joining the team, volunteers needed to be satisfied that it could be delivered alongside their day job – which came first – and seek appropriate line manager approval where necessary.

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Tags

Stop and search