

SCRUTINY OF POLICE POWERS PANEL ANNUAL REPORT

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A YEAR OF CHALLENGE AND CHANGE

1. THE SCRUTINY PANEL (THE PANEL) OF 16 LOCAL PEOPLE HAS COMPLETED ITS THIRD YEAR OF:

- Independent scrutiny of Avon and Somerset Constabulary's, (the Police) use of their powers.
- Enhancing the public's confidence in the work of the Police.
- Ensuring openness and transparency by the Police.
- Acting as a 'critical friend' to the Police.
- Offering feedback to the Police on their use of their powers, in particular the use of force.

2. THE FOCUS FOR THE YEAR HAS BEEN:

- Discrimination/disproportionality in the use of Taser and Stop and Search.
- Data quality.
- Monitoring the use of Body Worn Video.
- Promoting de-escalation and providing feedback on the de-escalation training for all Patrol Officers since Autumn 2019.
- Scrutinising the enforcement of coronavirus regulations.

3. SCRUTINY OF USE OF FORCE AND ENFORCEMENT OF CORONAVIRUS REGULATIONS

Over the last 6 months, the Panel has adapted to remote scrutiny of cases and online quarterly meetings. The case scrutiny involves reading background information and viewing Body Worn Videos. In total, 154 cases were reviewed and the full Panel reports are available on the [PCC website](#).

From the outset of coronavirus regulations the Police recognised the benefit of independent

scrutiny of their interaction with the public. Consequently, the Panel remotely scrutinised 40 of these cases and the April, May and June 2020 reports are available [online](#).

The quarterly meetings included updates and question and answer sessions with the Police on topics chosen by the Panel.

We welcomed observers to our meetings during the year. These included the Regional Director and the Engagement Officer from the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) and a member of the HMICFRS (Inspectorate of Constabularies).

Our reviews show the professionalism of front line officers, who are working in exacting and sometimes threatening circumstances. Our feedback includes commendations, questions and suggested learning points.

The panel is to be commended for its adaptability and work rate in order to maintain the level of scrutiny of use of force and, additionally, to scrutinise coronavirus cases. The Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC's) office has been most supportive in enabling us to continue our work.

4. A FLAVOUR OF THE PANEL'S WORK

March 2020 Panel report case review examples:

Case 9: Stop & Search. Under 16s (12 & 14) – Bristol - 19/1/2020 5.30p.m.

2 boys searched because they are near the site of an attempted robbery. However, one Panel member commented on the search of the 12 year old. The Stop and Search information is not fully explained, the Officer is not heard to identify himself but may have been done earlier before the body worn video is switched on. A receipt is also not offered. On the search of the 14 year old, a full Stop and Search explanation is given, including a receipt.

Constabulary response: The Constabulary thanks the Panel for their response to this incident and notes the Panel's feedback, which has been forwarded onto the officers' supervisor for their awareness and consideration.

Case 15: Use of Force – Handcuffs, strike and Spit/Bite Guard used – 15/12/2019 12:38-1am.

Compliments to the Officers: All three Panel members agree: BWV is turned on before attending the location, providing good information and context. An excellent example of Officers patiently maintaining the safety of an aggressive and strong man and themselves in very difficult circumstances. The use of the Spit Guard (put on easily) is appropriate because the suspect makes credible threats and spitting. The leading officer uses a very calm but authoritative tone during the whole interaction and keeps attempting to reason with the man. The other Officer tries to reason with him too. He even remains calm following the spitting and chooses to remain with the man in the back of the van. The need for restraint continues when the male is in the police van. Praise to this officer for his calm approach. This was a difficult situation, well handled. Ethnicity recorded as: blank. The person is actually white.

Constabulary response: Thank you for the positive feedback. This has been shared with the officers involved and I agree that they dealt with this challenging situation very well. I note

the comment in relation to recorded ethnicity – I have reinforced this point and this feeds in to our ongoing focus around data quality in this respect.

Case 16: Use of Force – Taser fired – 7am on 27/1/2020

Compliments: The Female officer with the Taser is very clear and calm with instructions, using the Taser Red dot but the male does not comply. The Officer gives ample and appropriate warnings that the Taser is going to be used. The Taser is then discharged. The male remains up and the Taser is discharged again. The Officer is very calm, in control and empathetic throughout, trying to calm the male and says that the police are there to help him. The female officer demonstrates excellent policing, despite the obvious threat from a large suspect with either mental health or substance issues.

Constabulary response: The differing views from panel members are noted with the panel commenting on the good communication, although query with the timing. This will be passed to training for consideration in future deliveries, although I do feel the Taser deployment was justified in the circumstances.

Case 21: Use of Force – Physical restraint – Holiday resort 18/12/2019 1.50a.m.

One concern is the type of restraining technique used. At 05:03, is kneeling on the back of the neck standard restraint procedure for a suspect on the ground? Otherwise the Police action seems proportionate to the level of threat. Ethnicity: blank but actually white

Constabulary response: The panel comments are noted with thanks. The panel concern raised in relation to the restraining technique is noted. As the panel mention, this is not a technique that is taught due to the potential for injury, however, due to the aggressive nature of the male this sometimes results in unconventional approaches to gain control. I will feed this back through our training school for consideration for future inputs.

5. THE POLICE'S INTERNAL SCRUTINY PANEL (ISP)

Avon and Somerset Constabulary's internal group's first meeting took place in October 2019 and our Panel Chair attends each of their quarterly meetings. This has proved to be of mutual benefit. The ISP invites contributions from our Panel and in turn the ISP provides insights and statistics to support our Panel's work, which makes our scrutiny more targeted and effective. Our Panel appreciates the openness and co-operation from both the ISP and the Police.



6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We are conscious that our work is broadly unknown to the public. We are therefore anxious to reach out to community organisations and the public to provide an understanding of our scrutiny work. This is work-in-progress and we expect to make significant progress on this over the next six months.

[Read the Panel Chair's blog.](#)

7. WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT US

- HMICFRS February 2020 Report commented on the Panel, saying:

"This well attended forum has a diverse membership offering a broad range of views. An independent Chair and Vice Chair channel the exchanges of views, which are sometimes robust, but respectful. Chief Officers and thematic leads attend the meetings. Their

presence reinforces the importance of the meetings."

- The IOPC Regional Director attended the Panel meeting in September 2020 and later commented:

"I was pleased to observe the Scrutiny of Police Powers Panel at work. I saw first-hand the important contribution made by members of the public to review the use of powers by Avon and Somerset Police. I look forward to following the panel's progress and their impact on local policing practice".

- PCC Sue Mountstevens said:

"I am delighted to have appointed and to support the independent Scrutiny of Police Powers Panel since May 2017. The members are from our local communities and make the police service more open and subject to scrutiny by checking and commenting on public interactions with Police. The aim is to increase public trust and confidence in ensuring that the Constabulary continues to serve, protect and respect – with the public's consent."