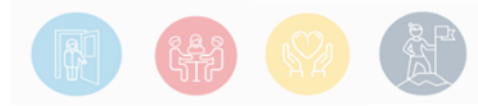


Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel

June 2025



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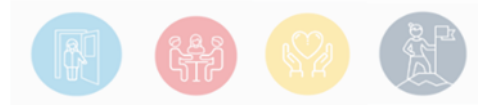
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Purpose of the Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel

The Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel (ISPCP) consists of 11 independent panel members, as pictured below, who are all volunteers representing the communities of Avon and Somerset. Their aim is:

‘To act as a ‘critical friend’ to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and to Avon and Somerset Constabulary by providing feedback on completed complaint files to the office of the PCC and to the Constabulary’s Professional Standards Department (PSD). The Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel (ISPCP) will review complaints against the police from a local citizen’s viewpoint.’

Further information can be found [on our website](#).



Figure 1 – The Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel

STRUCTURE OF THE SESSION

A total number of 24 completed complaint files were reviewed in detail by the panel prior to the meeting. The Panel opted to focus their meeting on delivery of duties and service. This category covers complaints about how police officers or staff carry out their **professional responsibilities**. It focuses on the **quality and standard of service** provided by the police, rather than their behaviour or attitude.

The cases scrutinised were discussed in depth verbally with Supt Larisa Hunt, Head of Avon and Somerset Constabulary’s Professional Standards Department (PSD) and Inspector Louise Pressly.

The Panel appointed a new chair, with the previous chair agreeing to remain in a supporting role as deputy. The panel also discussed succession planning and invited other members to come forward to stand as deputy; however, no additional members have volunteered at this time.

Panel Attendees – KS, BK, JB, JSG, AD, LC,
Apologies – TW, SB, EK, PR, JFT



Head of Operations Temp Supt Vicks Hayward-Melen attended the ISPCP and delivered an informative briefing regarding police Stop and Search powers.

Stop and Search powers were introduced in 1984 under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) as an alternative to arrest, allowing officers to search individuals for illegal items without immediately arresting them. To conduct a Stop and Search, officers must have reasonable suspicion that the person is carrying something illegal. The most common powers used are under section 1 of PACE, which permits searching for stolen items, offensive weapons, bladed articles, or items that could be used for criminal damage. Around 40% of searches fall under this section. However, the majority of Stop and Searches are carried out under section 23 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, targeting drugs and related paraphernalia such as rolling papers and small bags. While phones are not included under this act, different police forces interpret the powers variably due to the lack of clear case law.



Before conducting a search, officers must have reasonable grounds for suspicion based on clear, objective factors, outlined by the GOWISELY framework. This acronym outlines what must be communicated during a Stop and Search, including the Grounds for the search, the object sought, officer's warrant

card and their identity, and legal authority for the search.

Previous convictions or protected characteristics like race cannot justify a stop unless the person fits a specific description, which officers must explain. Complaints arise when individuals are told they match a description but are not told what it is; by law, officers must provide this explanation.

Recent policy changes by Avon and Somerset Constabulary now require at least three objective grounds for Stop and Search, ruling out cannabis smell alone. A receipt with QR codes for rights and feedback must be given. Searches can be done by any officer, but same-sex searches are preferred in public and can be requested. Phone interpreters are available, though force may sometimes be used before these services can be used.

Despite legal frameworks, challenges remain around dignity and respect during Stop and Search, as there is no formal legal requirement to uphold a certain standard, leaving much to policing culture. The practice can be seen as subjective and prone to stereotyping, raising concerns about bias and fairness.

Training is conducted annually but providing bespoke training tailored to all community needs is difficult due to capacity constraints. There are also suspicionless Stop and Search powers under section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, used in anticipation of violence, which require higher-level authorisation. Police officers determine the appropriate power to use based.

Stop and Search is a powerful but complex tool that demands careful use, clear communication, and ongoing cultural reflection to ensure fairness, transparency, and respect. You can read more about Stop and search policy for Avon and Somerset Police [here](#).



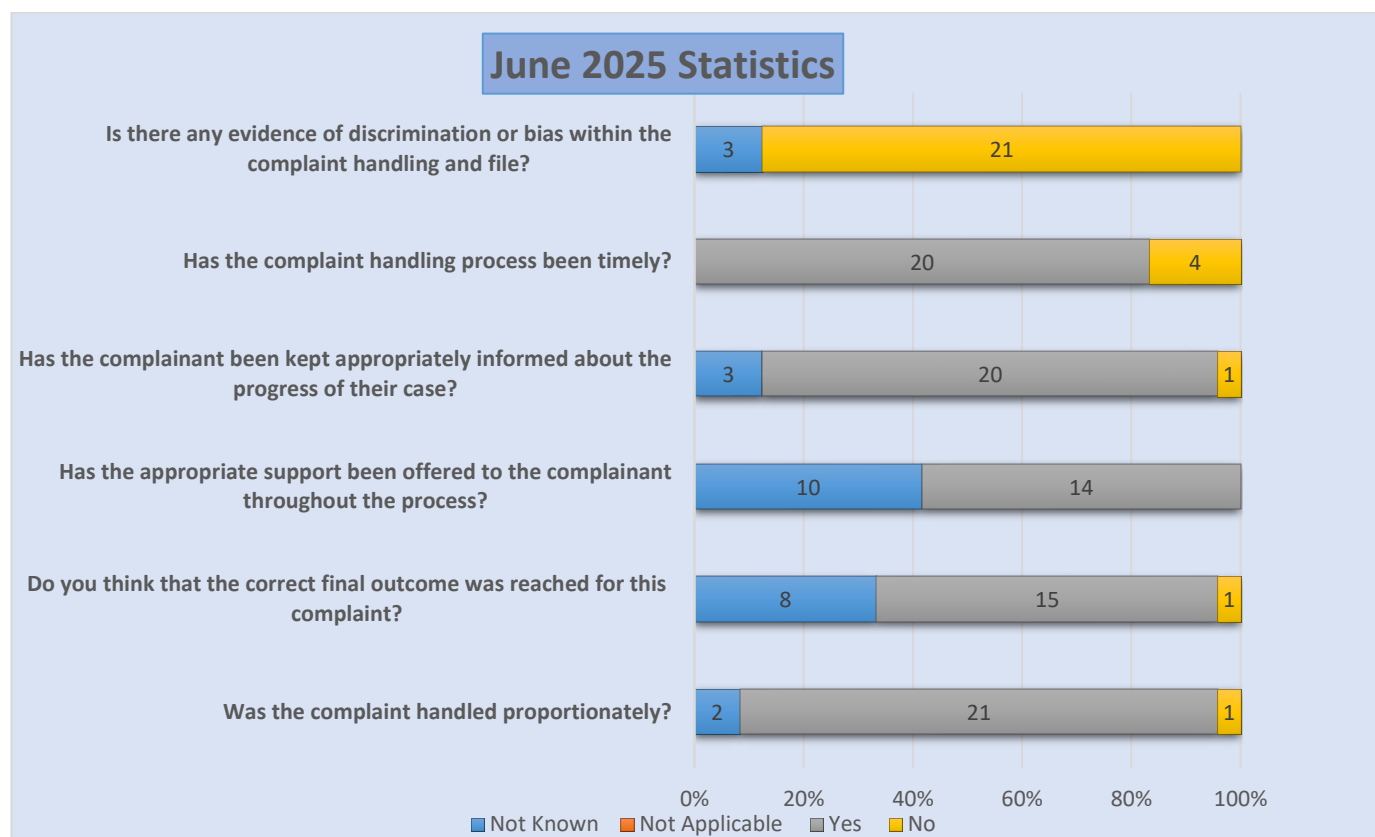
ACTIONS

This section records ongoing actions requested by the Panel and contributes to their continued scrutiny of police complaint handling.

No	Date	Action (OPCC, ASC, Panel)	Progress update	Completed Ongoing/ Keep In View (KIV)
1	2022-09	PSD to update the panel following Learning Meetings & provide a briefing on any recent complaint statistics of interest including the IOPC quarterly bulletins and annual complaints report. (ASC)	Dec 24 – C/I Baker shared Quarter 2 learning captured. Update sought for Sept 25 meeting.	KIV
2	2024-06	Individual Learning Tracker created. New feedback system introduced: panel issues identified with grammar, spelling & tone of correspondence being sent out by PSD to complainants to be fed back directly to relevant individuals, this will also include positive feedback.	Dec 24 – system continues to work well with feedback being fed back directly to named individuals, including areas for improvement and work that can be positively praised.	Ongoing
3	2024-09	IOPC Youth Panel National Survey Report - Youth-Panel-National-Survey-2024.pdf . ISPCP Chair requests an update from PSD on what they are doing to take account of the key recommendations contained in the report?	Due to recent staff changes from C/I Barlow, this action remains outstanding. BM to forward report to LH.	KIV
4	2024-09	Otherwise Than By Investigation Workshops	PSD – workshops rolled out over the autumn, Powerpoint presentation shared with panel SB & emailed BM.	KIV
6	2025-03	Police Integrity Inspection Feb 2025	Supt Hunt to provide a full debrief at the next meeting in June. Supt Hunt aims to present relevant performance data at the next panel meeting in Sept.	Update provided in June meeting. Ongoing



STATISTICAL ANALYSIS



This chart related to the six questions in the feedback form, 24 cases were sampled. Panel members record 'not known' when the case file does not give sufficient detail to allow a categorical yes or no answer

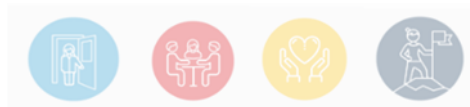
Useful Reading

- [Police complaints information bulletin Avon and Somerset Constabulary - Q4 - 24-25 | Independent Office for Police Conduct \(IOPC\)](#)
- Read the most recent IOPC Learning the Lessons issue 45 – violence and against women and girls - [Learning the Lessons issue 45 - violence against women and girls | Independent Office for Police Conduct \(IOPC\)](#)
- For a reminder on complaint categories see Appendix A (page 28) onwards - [Guidance-on-capturing-data-police-complaints-Feb-2024 \(1\).pdf](#)
- The IOPC produce a monthly Oversight Newsletter for complaints handlers in forces and OPCCs – you can read the June edition [here](#).



HIGHLIGHTS OF CONCERNS, QUESTIONS OR ISSUES RAISED BY THE PANEL

Panel Member Feedback	PSD Response
<p><u>JB/1 - Complaint Summary (Police Delivery of Duties and Service)</u></p> <p>A week after the theft of the complainant's bike the complainant was contacted by a police officer and advised that telephone contact would be made to track the incident rather than the police officer visiting the scene to collect evidence from the surveillance camera; the complainant stated that the police officer did not have the capabilities to go to the scene of the theft.</p> <p><u>Panel Member Feedback</u> <i>Positive comments - responses to the complaint were within allocated timescales. Complainant was advised that the complaint could be dealt with speedily. Correspondence was clear and concise.</i></p> <p><u>Question for PSD - Is it normal practice not to send a formal letter to close a complaint and to rely on telephone message and email.</u></p>	<p><i>Yes, if it's been handled outside of schedule 3 as an informal complaint, then no final letter required.</i></p>
<p><u>JB/2- Complaint Summary (Police Delivery of Duties and Service)</u></p> <p>Complainant been waiting since before Christmas to receive an update from the police officer involved with his case and an explanation as to why the defendant was only charged with due care when he (complainant) had ended up in hospital.</p> <p><u>Panel Member Feedback:</u> <i>Positive comments - once complaint was received the responses with outcomes were</i></p>	



Panel Member Feedback

PSD Response

carried out in a timely fashion. The final email was detailed and explained why the outcome reached in court was 'due care'.

Negative comments - *The complainant was clearly upset with the outcome of the case in that the defendant was charged with 'due care' following comments purportedly having been made by the police at the scene. The complainant's feeling of dissatisfaction was clearly compounded by not having received any communication from the said police officer. There was no mention in any of the correspondence to the complainant as to why the police officer dealing with his case had not updated the victim (complainant). The final letter could have been more empathetic in presenting the information rather than just stating the facts*

Questions for PSD - *No evidence of final letter being formalised relying on an email. As above, handled outside of schedule 3.*

As above, handled outside of schedule 3 so no final letter required.

In response to negative feedback: Having looked at this, I can see the assessor has tried to deal with this informally, aiming for a simple and fast response. However, I think in this case, because the responses from the supervisor and LSU worker were neither detailed or helpful in addressing the issues, using them to answer the complainant's concerns was poor handling and I suspect the complainant remains none the wiser. There was no reassurance from the Officer In Charge's (OIC's) line manager that he would address the lack of victim contact with him, which is what I would have expected as a minimum.

I will send this to our PSD Admin Manager to review the handling of this complaint and address accordingly.

LC/1- Complaint Summary (Police Delivery of Duties and Service)

Complainant asking for update on why her sexual assault case still hasn't gone to CPS after three years, and updates from the time between updates from the officer is months.

Panel Member Feedback:

No issues with complaint handling which was timely and efficient, but concerns on the need for the complaint (see negative and questions for PSD)

Negative feedback - *I understand this case was assigned to Bluestone, and as such all their caseload is likely to be serious sexual crimes - but I can't help but be empathetic to a victim who has waited in excess of 3 years to find out if their case would proceed to CPS, with very sporadic updates.*



Panel Member Feedback

PSD Response

Questions for PSD - Is this a typical delay (3years+) from reporting a sexual assault case to still be with the Bluestone team? Could anything be done to assist with timely updates to victims, e.g. timetabled reminders for check-ins?

I have had quick review of the investigation. I can see there are multiple witnesses and request for sensitive data from an outside organisation, all of which can cause extensive delays. There is a digital submission, and we are aware that the DVU has had significant delays which is now being addressed. However, I can see even when all the evidence had been gathered there were delays in the OIC completing the case file due to being seconded to other work. The sergeant has explained this in her response. It is far from ideal, and I am aware the demands and delays in Bluestone have been escalated.

Investigations into sexual offences are often very complicated and extensive and can easily take more than 12 months, before factoring in delays in allocation and staff abstractions.

With regard victim updates. OICs have set reminders every 28 days. Victims of serious sexual offences are allocated an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA), and I can see the victim requested all contact be through her ISVA and that they have been in regular contact with the victim.

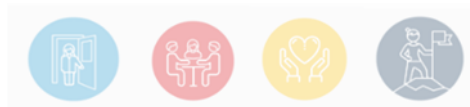
JS-G/1 - Complaint Summary (Police Delivery of Duties and Service)

Victim reported a person had threatened to harm them/their property but Police didn't make contact with victim, nor keep the victim updated.

Panel Member Feedback:

Positive comments - complaint responded to in timely manner.

Negative comments - despite having raised a complaint it still took some time for the suspect to be arrested and victim to be updated-given the context of them being 30+ weeks pregnant and describing feeling too scared to return to their home, it's disappointing that action wasn't taken sooner.



Panel Member Feedback

PSD Response

While it's impossible to know, I am also left wondering how long it would have taken for the incident to be dealt with had the victim not submitted a complaint.

Questions for PSD - this complaint would have been avoided had the complainant been satisfactorily communicated with in the first instance. There is mention in the files of there being over 70 outstanding logs on that day-I wonder whether these outstanding are RAG rated based on the victim's vulnerabilities?

Agree the initial communication is vital to setting expectations, which probably wasn't done in this case. The officers did act at the time, trying to locate suspect. They spoke briefly with victim and asked a daytime crew to return and speak with her more fully, but this got delayed due to demand hence the victim feeling let down. Yes, all logs are assessed based on Threat Harm Risk (THR) and prioritised accordingly.

In this case, the initial call of a male trying to break in initiated an immediate response with the highest THR. However, once officers had attended and confirmed suspect had left the scene, couldn't be located, and victim was safe, the log would have been downgraded for the follow up enquiries. THR becomes lower when the crime is no longer in progress and other more immediate incidents will take precedence and the downgraded logs become amassed waiting for attendance or pushed to niche for the OIC to pick up when back on duty. Comms operators will always try & consider vulnerabilities when assessing THR.

JS-G/2 - Complaint Summary (Police Delivery of Duties and Service)

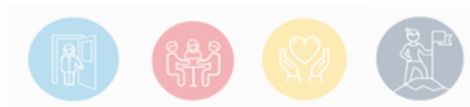
Complainant alleges Police have failed to act on multiple reports of alleged crimes including threats of harm to victim's children, damage to property, threats of harm to victim/close family and their property

Panel Member Feedback:

Positive feedback - once the complaint was subject to initial assessment, it was dealt with in a timely way and resolved in less than a week

Negative feedback - complaint not initially assessed for 8 days and given both complainant's vulnerabilities and the vulnerability of children being threatened with direct harm, this feels too long a wait.

When a complaint is received into PSD Admin they forward all complaints to the Assessors' priority in-tray, this will be reviewed each day to assess any new matters, and each one will be



Panel Member Feedback	PSD Response
<p>Question for PSD - as per previous-are complainants RAG rated based on their vulnerability factors?</p>	<p><i>assessed for seriousness. An assessor will look at any readily available evidence, including the Niche report to get an understanding of the seriousness of the incident the complainant is referring to. In this case they would have seen that the incident referred to was on 19th June and officers attended on the day. The complaint was submitted the next day on 20th June complaining about lack of police action. I have spoken with an assessor and they stated in this case it is likely they would have wanted to assess this after the officers had an opportunity to make follow up enquiries. The complaint would be put back into the in-tray to pick up after the priority cases.</i></p> <p><i>When the second complaint was received on 27th June, the assessors have linked it to the first and both were assessed on 28th June.</i></p> <p><i>They do take into account vulnerability of complainants when prioritising. That will be based both on personal vulnerability and the nature of the complaint.</i></p>



Comments Head of PSD Supt Larisa Hunt

"It was lovely to see everyone in person at the last meeting and it was a pleasure to provide some additional information from the debrief following the HMICFRS Integrity standards inspection. We now anticipate receiving the full report in October.

As always, it was really good to hear your conversations and thoughts about the complaints we receive and how they are managed and the feedback is always very constructive. It was also nice to see you all at the volunteers celebration event to be able to thank you for the work you do.

The number of complaints we receive increases most years and we have been working hard on our performance data to breakdown how we manage the complaints, and I look forward to sharing this with you at our next meeting. Thank you as always for your time, commitment and care."



Further information about the Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel (ISPCP)

Further information about the ISPCP can be viewed through the following link:

[Independent Scrutiny of Police Complaints Panel | OPCC for Avon and Somerset \(avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk\)](https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/independent-scrutiny-of-police-complaints-panel)

Get in touch

Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner
Avon and Somerset Police Headquarters
Valley Road
Portishead
Bristol
BS20 8JJ

www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk

Or you can contact the office by telephone on 01278 646188

You can find us on social media here:



Rebecca Maye

Scrutiny & Assurance Manager

Office of the Avon & Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner

Rebecca.maye@avonandsomerset.police.uk