

USE OF FORCE AND STOP & SEARCHES

**JULY 2023
REPORT**

Our advisory panel is made up of representatives of various community groups and services from across the region, police officers and staff from the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner. Each quarter the panel meets to review how Northumbria officers have carried out stop and searches and how they have used force when required.

THE HEADLINES

- Sufficient grounds for searches have reduced from 82% to 78%, this is due to the force providing greater scrutiny on compliance on the searches that have been conducted.
- We've introduced a new training package for our officers to complete around best practice for stop and searches.
- Northumbria Police's Community Engagement Teams are reviewing their community engagement guides to improve officers' understanding of diverse communities and how best to engage with these communities.

PANEL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE WAY WE USE FORCE

WHY DO WE USE FORCE?

Police respond to hundreds of incidents every day and the vast majority of them are resolved peacefully. On occasion it is necessary for officers to use force to uphold the law and keep the public or themselves safe from harm.

VIDEO 1 REVIEW: Footage of a subject with a knife who threatened to self-harm

After viewing the video footage, the panel made the following comments:

- At the start of the video footage, a friend or a relative was seen calmly talking to the subject, asking him to drop the knife.
- This interaction continued for a few minutes, whereby the friend/relative had remained calm so the panel were surprised with the action of the police officer.

- The police officer raised her voice as she approached the subject and continued with this tone throughout the interaction with the subject, before tasing him.
- After tasing the subject, the police officers' priority was the health and wellbeing of the subject – the police officer was polite and provided re-assurance to the subject.

In response to the issues raised by panel members, Northumbria Police's Training Officer made the following points:

- The Training Officer agreed with the panel – the officer has a raised voice as she started to engage with the subject and continued with this tone throughout the interaction.
- The officer should have considered attempts that had been made by the subject's friend/relative to de-escalate the situation and used this to consider next steps.
- As the officer had started the interaction with the subject with a raised voice, there was no alternative approach she could take, other than taser the subject, who did not respond to the request to drop the knife.
- Once the subject had been tasered, the officer was polite and showed empathy, ensuring the wellbeing of the subject.
- The Training Officer explained that the course of action taken by the officer would have been discussed with her in the debrief.

VIDEO 2 REVIEW: Footage of a subject with a weapon who had locked himself in a room and threatened to self-harm (accordion)

After viewing the video footage, the panel made the following comments:

- There were occasions when it was difficult to see the video clip clearly and it appeared that discussion had taken place prior to the police forcing the door and tasing the subject.
- Question raised to what options were available to officers in this situation and whether the subject could have harmed himself whilst the police made a number of attempts to enter the room.
- A panel member posed the question, whether the police should have made greater efforts to de-escalate the situation instead of forcing entry and tasing the subject.
- Another panel member was in agreement with the action taken by the police. In her experience, speedy action is required in situations whereby mental health is most likely to be a contributing factor and where a subject could self harm.

In response to the issues raised by panel members, Northumbria Police Training Officer made the following points:

The Training Officer explained that as mental health was an issue, the action taken by the police, in forcing the door and tasing the subject was proportionate.

- After the subject was tasered, the police officers focus was on the wellbeing of the subject. The officers were polite and showed empathy to the subject.
- The subject was in supported accommodation so the Training Officer explained that staff will have engaged with him to de-escalate the situation, so the next course of action was to force entry.
- The action of the police brought the situation to a satisfactory conclusion.

PANEL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE WAY WE STOP & SEARCH

VIDEO 3 REVIEW: A stop and search following a report of a robbery

After viewing the video footage, the panel made the following comments:

- There were long pauses in between the interaction with the subject.
- Colloquial use of the language by one of the officers 'where are you stopping' which the subject did not understand.
- The subject was compliant although it would have helped to reassure the subject after establishing that nothing had been found.
- Should the officer(s) have flagged the subject's possible mental health concern?
- Overall, the officers showed good practice and conduct with the subject, they were polite and personable.

In response to the issues raised by panel members, Northumbria Police's Harm Reduction Officer made the following points:

- The officer conducting the search explained the grounds why the subject was stopped although he could have asked if the subject understood the rationale for the search.
- The importance of effective communication forms part of ongoing training for police officers.
- The Harm Reduction Officer agreed that the police officer conducting the search had followed the correct procedures and had been polite in his interaction with the subject.

VIDEO 4 REVIEW: A stop and search following a report of an individual seen carrying a weapon

After viewing the video footage, the panel made the following comments:

- The panel raised concerns that the officers who stopped the subject did not give any explanation for the grounds of the search.
- This could have resulted in the subject, along with his friends confronting the police.
- The subject did not react to being stopped and searched and whilst the police officers did not provide grounds for the search, they were polite.
- A panel member asked if the officers conducting the search were experienced officers as it would have been customary to have provided the grounds for the search.

In response to the issues raised by panel members, Northumbria Police's Harm Reduction Officer made the following points:

- The police officers should have explained the grounds, prior to conducting the search.
- The subject was compliant but the lack of explanation could have resulted in the subject and his friends reacting in an aggressive manner against the police.
- Internal scrutiny of stop and searches highlight opportunities to improve practice so this (not explaining the grounds) was raised with the officers as part of their supervision.
- The search was conducted appropriately, and the officers were polite during the search.