

Embargoed: 28 October 2020

Review identifies eleven opportunities for the Met to improve on stop and search

Eleven opportunities for the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to improve the way it exercises stop and search powers and consider disproportionality have been recommended by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) following a review of recent stop and search cases.

The IOPC recently completed five investigations involving the stop and search of Black men by MPS officers and reviewed the collective evidence gathered to consider disproportionality, legitimacy and how force was used.

We found the legitimacy of stop and searches was being undermined by:

- a lack of understanding about the impact of disproportionality
- poor communication
- consistent use of force over seeking cooperation
- the failure to use body-worn video from the outset of contact and
- continuing to seek further evidence after the initial grounds for the stop and search were unfounded.

IOPC London Regional Director Sal Naseem said:

“Stop and search is a necessary policing tool, but it must be used in the right circumstances and with care. We are concerned that confidence in the MPS particularly with Black communities across London is being affected by how officers undertake stop and search.

“An important part of our role is to help improve public confidence and to use the learning from our work to prevent the same issues from happening again.

“The review mirrors concerns expressed to us by communities across London. We saw a lack of understanding from officers about why their actions were perceived to be discriminatory. We recommended the MPS takes steps to ensure that assumptions, stereotypes and bias (conscious or unconscious) are not informing or affecting their officer’s decision making on stop and search.

“For example, our review included scenarios where two Black men fist-bumping were suspected of exchanging drugs and also where a Black man in possession of someone else’s credit card was suspected of having stolen it even after providing a credible explanation.

“In two investigations, the smell of cannabis formed the sole grounds given for the stop. Not only is this counter to policing practice, it undermines the legitimacy of the stop and search.

“Handcuffs were also used in nearly all instances where the use of other tactics could have de-escalated the encounter,” he said.

In several of these investigations, although the initial search was negative, rather than ending the encounter, officers found new grounds to continue the search.

The review also found body-worn video was not being used consistently from initial contact. Used properly, it can provide a clear and impartial record of an interaction and provide a speedy resolution as part of the complaints process.

“The review highlights the need for the Met to reflect on the impact this kind of decision making is having. There is also a need to better support officers on the frontline to do their jobs effectively with the right training and supervision so they aren’t subjected to further complaints and investigation. There is clearly much room for improvement.”

In making these learning recommendations a consultation exercise was undertaken to listen to, and where appropriate, incorporate feedback from organisations and people who are most affected by stop and search and with lived experience such as Y-Stop and Stopwatch, our own IOPC Youth Panel, and a range of stop and search Scrutiny Panel Chairs including the Pan-London Chair.

Recommendations made to the Met included:

- taking steps to ensure that their officers better understand how their use of stop and search powers impacts individuals from groups that are disproportionately affected by those powers
- ensuring there is a structure in place so leaders and supervisors are proactively monitoring and supervising the use of stop and search powers and addressing any concerning trends or patterns/ sharing any identified good practice at; individual, unit or organisational level
- taking steps to ensure that assumptions, stereotypes and bias (conscious or unconscious) are not informing or affecting officer’s decision making when carrying out stop and searches, especially when using these powers on people from Black communities
- ensuring officers are not relying on the smell of cannabis alone when deciding to stop and search someone and use grounds based upon multiple objective factors
- ensuring officers carrying out stop and searches always use the principles of GOWISELY and engage in respectful, meaningful conversations with the persons being stopped
- ensuring stop and search training incorporates a section on de-escalation, including the roles of supervisors and colleagues in controlling the situation and providing effective challenge
- ensuring officers exercising stop and search powers are ending the encounters once their suspicion has been allayed, in a manner that minimises impact and dissatisfaction, unless there are further genuine and reasonable grounds for continued suspicion

- ensuring officers exercising stop and search powers are not using restraint/handcuffs as a matter of routine and are only using these tools when reasonable, proportionate and necessary
- amending stop and search records to include a question about whether any kind of force has been used. The records should also state where information about the kind of force will be recorded
- ensuring officers are following APP and MPS policy and switching on their body-worn video camera early enough to capture the entirety of a stop and search interaction
- supervisors taking a proactive role in monitoring and ensuring compliance with body-worn video APP and MPS policy.

The Met has [accepted all the recommendations in their response](#) to the IOPC.

More information on police guidance on stop and search, including the use of GOWISELY can be found on the [College of Policing website](#): The guidance on stop and search says:

If the person understands the reasons for an officer's action, they are more likely to accept it and not see it as arbitrary or unfair. To maximise the person's understanding before starting the search, officers exercising stop and search powers must adopt the following steps in accordance with GOWISELY:

- identify themselves to the person
- show their warrant card if not in uniform
- identify their police station
- tell the person that they are being detained for the purpose of a search
- explain the grounds for the search (or authorisation in the case of section 60 searches)
- explain the object and purpose of the search
- state the legal power they are using
- inform the person that they are entitled to a copy of the search record and explain how this may be obtained.

ENDS