



## COMMISSIONER'S INDEPENDENT SCRUTINY REPORT

### STRIP SEARCH

### 25 October 2023

<b>Scrutiny Panel:</b>	Strip Search
<b>Members:</b>	<p>Barrie Davies Adrian Jobling Amanda Wood Joshua Whitehurst Julie O'Connor Sophie Norrington</p> <p>Also in attendance: Chief Inspector Lucy Maskew Michelle Ryan – SCO Holly Sproston – SCO</p>
<b>Purpose:</b>	<p>To ensure that Strip Search procedures have been followed by officers in respect of both adults and Under 18's, with specific focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reasonable grounds for Stop Search – If relevant.</li><li>• Strip Search Justification.</li><li>• Appropriateness of the location of Strip Search – if not in a custody facility.</li><li>• Gender of conducting officers.</li><li>• Inspector Authorisations for the Strip Search.</li><li>• Presence of an Appropriate Adult &amp; Parent/Guardian notification prior to search if Under 18.</li><li>• Presence of a safeguarding referral to the Local Authority for Under 18's</li><li>• Use of BWV (Audio Recording Only) in line with force policy.</li><li>• Proportionality of any applied Use of Force.</li></ul>
<b>Panel Findings:</b>	<p>During the period from July – September 2023 there were 382 incident of strip search - 17 as a result of Stop Search and 365 undertaken in Custody. The panel selected 6 custody records to scrutinise and 4 Stop Search incidents that resulted in a Strip Search.</p> <p>When undertaking a strip search as a result of a Stop Search, officers are mandated to use their BWV camera to capture the audio only of the search.</p>



Of the 4 strip search incidents as a result of a Stop Search, audio footage was only available on one of those selected even though the Stop Search record indicates that BWV was used. The Force have been asked to explain why audio footage is not available for these three incidents.

Six custody logs, where strip searches were undertaken, were provided for the panel to scrutinise.

**Incident 21230136484**

The body worn video footage of this incident was viewed/ listened to. The panel felt that the officer handled the incident efficiently and followed correct procedure in a calm and effective manner.

**Custody Log C23010008**

It is not clear from the Custody Log what the rationale for the search was other than there was a marker for concealing items. It is also not clear whether the rationale for the strip search was explained to the detainee. The custody log appears to indicate that there is only one officer present when the strip search is undertaken.

**Custody Log C23013724**

The detainee is a young person. The custody log provided does not appear to show that the strip search was authorised. A live check on the custody record indicated that the strip search was authorised but only by a Sergeant. Strip Searches of children and young people should be authorised by an Inspector. The panel noted that the custody log indicated the mental health issues the detainee had, which included autism/ global learning difficulties, and were concerned that four officers were present for the strip search. Chief Inspector Maskew indicated that the detainee had been aggressive and this was noted on the custody log. However, the panel felt that clearer information on why four officers were needed should have been noted. The panel felt that it was not clear whether a safeguarding referral had been made and that information did not seem complete with such a complex young detainee.

**Custody Log C23010313**

The custody log indicated that the grounds and rationale for the search had been given. The custody log provided did not indicate where the strip search was undertaken. A live check on the custody record indicated that the strip search was undertaken in the cell. It was also not clear who undertook the strip search.

**Custody Log C23014375**

The custody log was clear and indicated that processes were followed.

The panel are concerned that the printed custody log does not contain all the relevant details from that on the live custody log. The printed log relies on officers ticking appropriate boxes on the digital record before it is printed out



and reflected in the custody log that is scrutinised. The panel have concerns that this may lead to unfair criticism particularly by other external scrutiny bodies.

**Observations and Recommendations:**

**Observations:**

The panel would like the Force to respond to the following:

- Custody Log C23010008 - why there was only one officer detailed as being on the search.
- Custody Log C23013724 – why authorisation for the strip search is by a Sergeant not an Inspector as per policy. In addition, why the safeguarding referral is not evident.
- Custody Log C23010313 – why no officers details entered on the strip.

**Recommendations:**

- Officers to be reminded that strip searches conducted as part of a Stop Search should be recorded on BWV with the camera averted so that audio is recorded.
- The Force looks to eradicate the issue of the omission of parts of the Live custody log on the printed record.

**Force Lead Response:**

**Comments from Chief Inspector Lucy Maskew – present at Meeting:**

I was present at this meeting from an early stage and it became apparent for effective scrutiny to take place it would need the BWC footage to capture the language used and those present in greater detail. It would also capture language to de-escalate and help to rationalise the fact that 4 people were present in one particular case. On review of the custody record it was apparent to officers the necessity for this but it left unanswered questions for the panel.

The fact that when printing logs it does not capture all detail off the live system has been escalated to Performance Standards Department to ensure this doesn't cause any issues for their enquiries.

The authorisation by a sergeant rather than inspector cannot be justified and guidance will be sent back to staff but this is still in line with national policy. It is local policy to contact an inspector. We have had a high number of new sergeants in custody.

Guidance needs to be recirculated around the use of Body Worn Cameras when carrying out strip search in all circumstances including custody.

**Comments from Chief Inspector Mark Barlow – Force Lead:**

As Force Strip and Search Lead I would like to thank the CISP for their observations and commitment to scrutinising the performance of Staffordshire Police.

Educational products have been circulated to officers reminding them of the requirement to capture audio during searches where intimate parts of the body are exposed. In addition, the Force is also looking to develop other methods of



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ensuring that officers are aware of this requirement. The Force will continue to strive to improve performance in this area and look forward to working with the CISP on future reviews.