

Stop and Search Powers: Are the police using them effectively and fairly?

PCC Response

HMIC have recently published their findings into the police use of stop and search powers and how effectively and fairly these powers are utilised. I fully support the use of stop and search as a legitimate and vital police tactic. It is particularly key in the policing of serious and organised crime, drug offences and knife crime. As I understand it the public also generally recognise and support the legitimacy of stop and search as a tool available to the police – provided that it is used appropriately, proportionately and that Forces are held to account for its use. It is therefore right that HMIC should focus on this important area of policing.

In a number of ways Dorset was already “ahead of the game” with regard to stop and search having worked closely in recent years with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) in reviewing their processes and minimising disproportionality of stop and search against black and minority ethnic groups.

Indeed, in their recent follow-up report “Stop and Think Again”, EHRC have identified that the number of stop and searches carried out locally have fallen, levels of disproportionality have reduced and the associated arrest level (the ‘hit rate’) remains high. HMIC report that only 8.5% of searches in Dorset did not have reasonable grounds (compared to 27% nationally) and that the Force had an arrest rate of 12% in 2011/12 (9% nationally), rising to 12.4% in 2012/13. They have also highlighted Dorset Police’s “Searchlight” system as a case study within their report as an example of how senior officers are able to clearly understand the pattern of stop and search activity locally and easily assess the effectiveness and fairness of the use of the powers by their officers.

All of this is really encouraging and should provide local communities with reassurance that Dorset Police are acting appropriately, effectively and legitimately in their use of stop and search powers. This is clearly not an area for complacency however and I welcome the recent focus that has been placed on stop and search through the HMIC and EHRC reports, plus the Home Office consultation seeking views on a fresh look at the use of stop and search. Internally, I will also continue to monitor and scrutinise stop and search performance through my role as Joint Chair of the People, Confidence and Equality Board alongside the Chief Constable.

Martyn Underhill
Police & Crime Commissioner for Dorset

