

Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner
Use of Force Scrutiny Panel
Tuesday 14 May 2019

Attendees

- Adam Harrold – AH Operations Director, Dorset OPCC (in the Chair)
- Andy Taylor - AT Independent Panel Member (to part of item 3)
- Steve Plant – SP Independent Panel Member
- Jane Moir - JM Independent Panel Member
- Paul Cashmore – PC Independent Panel Member
- Stan Sadler – SS Dorset Healthcare
- Supt Pete Windle – PW Professional Standards Department, Dorset Police
- CI Stewart Dipple – SD Chief Inspector, Alliance Operational Support Command, Operational Support Dorset Police
- Supt Tracey Baker – TB Dorset Territorial Police
- PC Rich Shirley – RS Alliance Resourcing & Development, Personal Safety Unit
- Tom Smith – TS Scrutiny Manager, Dorset OPCC
- Conrad Astley – CA Comms & Engagement Officer, Dorset OPCC (*part of meeting*)
- Julia Harrison - JH PA to SMT, Dorset OPCC

Apologies

Apologies were received from PCC Martyn Underhill, Emma Knipe, Dorset Police, Michelle Booth, HMICFRS Liaison Lead and Claire Seymour, Independent Panel Member.

Summary of Meeting

Matters Arising

Following some amendments, the minutes and public facing summary from the previous meeting were agreed.

Reference was made to the action carried forward from the last meeting as to whether there was disproportionate use of force on females in the 18 to 34 age group, it was advised that the most up to date figures show that 16%-17% of arrests involve females and the use of force recorded was 20% for females and 80% for males. Although 20% of the use of force forms completed relate to females, there can be multiple use of force forms completed per arrest/subject. Women, in the context of an incident, can be very challenging and opposed to use of force because of previous experiences of abuse, domestic violence, etc.

Performance Report

The panel considered the performance report on Dorset Police Use of Force for the period April 2018 to March 2019.

It was noted that there had been a 14% increase in the number of use of force incidents recorded, due to an actual increase and also to improved compliance.

An increase of 22% was recorded for officers who have received minor injuries; 14% of assaults on police were by subjects. There were also increases in the number of officers threatened by or assaulted with a pointed weapon or object.

The largest number of subjects where force is used is aged between 18-34. 16% of interactions involve a subject who has a physical or mental health condition which represents an increase from last year, but both categories have increased significantly so no conclusions can be drawn.

The main contributory factors for using force were alcohol, drugs and mental health. The most common reason for using force is for officers to protect themselves or to prevent harm to others.

The number of officers declaring they have been spat at remains consistent. Any deployment of Spit and Bite Guards (SBGs) and any deployment of batons is reviewed as a 'red flag' incident.

Taser usage increased 150%, but this was largely due to the number of officers who are now Taser equipped and trained; the majority of uses did not result in Taser fire.

During the financial year 2018/19, less than 1% of recorded Uses of Force had resulted in a complaint from the public relating to excessive use of force (out of 6,826 recorded uses of force there were 53 complaints).

Dip Sampling of Cases

Out of a total of six cases selected at random of use of force on hospital settings and use of force involving the application of SBGs, the panel considered four of the cases in detail.

The panel was given a brief summary of each of the cases as follows:

Case 1: Police were called to a report of a male who had slashed his own neck and wrists with a broken bottle. It was reported that he had a knife hidden up his sleeve. On police arrival, the male was located, but refused to stop for officers. PAVA was pointed at the male who stopped and was handcuffed. A knife was located up his sleeve and the male was holding the handle.

Due to his self-inflicted injuries, he was taken by ambulance to hospital, escorted by officers in the back of the ambulance. During the journey, the male kicked out and tried to bite officers so limb restraints and pain compliance was applied.

Case 2: Police were called to a report of a 13 year old missing person who had been taken into A&E after an overdose of Zanex, cannabis and speed. He ran away from the hospital and was subsequently located by police. When he was located, he was resistant and aggressive towards officers and had to be restrained to prevent him from harming himself. Handcuffs and limb restraints were used. When returned to the hospital, he had to be restrained to allow hospital staff to administer a sedative.

Case 3: Officers were sent to a report of a domestic disturbance where one party had phoned the police to state that the subject had been trying to get into a property, was banging the front door and hitting the windows. The caller stated the subject was drunk. Police arrived, located the subject in the back garden. He was drunk, volatile and abusive. The subject threatened to assault officers and was subsequently arrested to prevent a breach of the peace. The subject was restrained and handcuffed. He began to spit so a spit and bite guard was used. Whilst the subject was being restrained he kicked a police officer causing them to stumble backwards. The subject continued the abuse towards officers, but was threatening to kill and shoot them. He showed particular dislike towards female officers.

Case 4: Police were called to a report of a non-compliant shoplifter at a supermarket. After being detained by members of staff at the store, the subject became aggressive so was restrained on the ground by staff who were assisted by members of the public. On police arrival, the subject was arrested. Officers believed he was drunk. A number of officers assisted in restraining the subject and limb restraints and FLACS were applied. The subject attempted to bang his head against the floor and later against the cell in the police van. The subject spat on the floor and also attempted to bite officers so a spit and bite guard was applied. The subject refused to supply any details, but when their identity was established it was found that he had a number of arrest warrants for previously failing to appear in court.

In all the cases the panel agreed that the behaviour of officers, and the use of force used, was reasonable and appropriate.

The panel considered an additional case that had been brought to the attention of the PCC. As the case presented data protection issues, no papers were circulated in advance of the meeting and the facts were relayed to the panel by SD. Following discussion, the Panel agreed that in this case the officers' actions were appropriate and proportionate.

Annual Report

Comments were invited from the panel on the Panel's Use of Force Annual Report by the end of May. The aim would be to publish the Annual Report on the PCC's website once finalised.

Theme for Dip Sampling

The panel agreed to review two severe injury cases and two cases of the five officers who most frequently use force.

Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 3 September 2019 at 10 am.