



POLICE STOP AND SEARCH CHARTER – RIGHTS FOR CITIZENS

Bedfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner –
John Tizard

Table of Contents

Foreword – John Tizard, Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire3

Know your Rights.....4

How does a Stop and Search Work?5

Why is Stop and Search needed?7

Scrutiny Panel.....8

The Charter Commitments:.....9

Complaints13

Foreword – John Tizard, Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire

Stop and Search is an essential tool in preventing and reducing crime and when used appropriately, this can be effective in keeping the communities of Bedfordshire safe.

Nonetheless, it is important that the public understand their rights when they are stopped and searched or when force is used by officers carrying out this action.

As Police and Crime Commissioner, I hold Bedfordshire Police to account for their delivery of Stop and Search.

This charter will provide you with your rights and entitlements when being stopped by Bedfordshire Police.

The charter brings together my commitment to criminal justice, social justice and human rights.

I am introducing this charter to set out with clarity

- the rights of citizens
- my expectations as to when and how the police deploy their powers
- scrutiny arrangements to ensure oversight of police use of these powers
- to understand and address any actual or perceived disproportionality in the use of stop and search powers, seeking to eliminate disproportionality where it cannot be reasonably explained.

When this tool is not used proportionately and carefully, trust and confidence in the police can be seriously eroded, and people's rights are infringed. There are complaint processes available to anyone who feels that they have been subject to inappropriate use of the power.

The powers of the police in these, as in all areas of policing, are defined in law. There is good guidance from national bodies such as the College of Policing, the National Police Chief's Council and the Home Office and organisations such as Liberty.

My aim is to ensure the people in our county are and feel safe on our streets and in our neighbourhoods. I want the police to have all the resources and powers they require to ensure the safety of residents. I also want those who may be the subject to the use of this power also to feel safe and to have their rights protected.

I hope that this Charter will enable us to build on some excellent police practice already in place to make us all feel and be safer, to build trust and confidence in the police, and to guarantee transparency and accountability.

John Tizard

Know your Rights

If you are stopped and searched by the police, you have specified rights that must be adhered to. Every citizen who is subject to a Stop and Search is entitled to a clear explanation of the grounds for suspicion, must be treated in a fair way with clear communication, and must be shown the warrant card of the officer who detains them.

GOWISELYER is an acronym – each letter stands for your rights if you're stopped and searched.

Grounds – A clear explanation from the officer in terms of their reasonable grounds to suspect that you may be in possession of the object being searched for.

Object – What is the object that the officer is searching for i.e. drugs, weapons etc.?

Warrant – did the officer show their warrant card? (*Only if the officer is NOT in uniform*)

Identify – did the officer provide their name and collar number?

Station – did the officer say which station they are attached to?

Entitlement – did the officer inform the person that they are entitled to a copy of the search (*point to note - this is a period of 3 months after the search*).

Legal – What is the legal power that the officer is using to conduct the search. (*Most common are S1 PACE, and S23 misuse of drugs act.*)

You – are detained for the purpose of a search.

Bedfordshire go beyond the statutory requirements of GOWISELY and have added 'E explanation' and 'R respect', as part of a best practice approach.

Explanation – Has the officer explained his actions? Officers should utilise clear language and communicate the elements of GOWISELY, so the person searched understands why they are being searched.

Respect - Were you treated with fairness and communicated in the correct way. Officer should treat the person with respect and courtesy in accordance with the operational circumstances.

How does Stop and Search Work?

- The police can stop and question you at any time.
- A police community support officer (PCSO) must be in uniform when they stop and question you, but a police officer does not always have to be in uniform. If they're not, they must show you their warrant card as proof of their identity.
- A police officer might stop you and ask, what your name is, what you're doing in the area, where you're going. A person does not have to give their name if asked by an officer, unless this is for the purpose of summons for an offence.
- You cannot say no to being searched but an officer must provide you with reasonable grounds.
- Stop and search provides officers with the power to lawfully detain you; this means that you are not free to walk away until the search procedure has been finalised.
- The legislation covering stop and search provides officers with the ability to use force where this is proportionate and necessary to complete the search. This may include placing you in handcuffs, albeit where possible the reason for this should be explained to you.
- The police have a duty and responsibility to carry out stop and search in a fair, professional and legitimate way.
- Whilst using powers available to them, officers are required to act in accordance with the [Codes of Practice](#) and treat people with respect and dignity.
- The use of stop and search as a power does infringe on the rights of those subject of it, specifically article 5 ECHR (right to liberty), article 8 (right to private and family life). However, if in pursuit of a legitimate aim (prevention of crime as an example) the police can use this power in compliance with contemporary law and regulations.
- Respect – The officer should treat the person with respect and courtesy in accordance with the operational circumstances. For example, if a subject became violent during a lawful search, then the officer may need to use force to manage this.

The officer must genuinely suspect that they will find the item they're searching for. This suspicion should be about how likely it is that you have the item. It shouldn't be based on how likely they think it is that you're breaking the law. The test is one of reasonable suspicion.

Reasonable grounds for suspicion

The only way to be certain of treating everyone fairly, irrespective of personal factors, is to apply an objective test as the trigger for exercising stop and search powers.

Unless exercising a specific 'no suspicion' stop and search power, the circumstances of which are strictly limited, the officer must have reasonable grounds for suspicion before they stop and search someone. This means that:

- 1) the officer must **genuinely suspect** that they will find the item searched for
- 2) it must be **objectively reasonable** for them to suspect this, given the information available to them

This is an objective test, in that it expects that a reasonable person given the same information would also suspect that the individual is carrying the item.

The suspicion should relate to the likelihood of the person being in possession of the item, not the likelihood that they are committing an offence. For example, a search may still be justified where a person is in innocent possession of an item or below the age of criminal responsibility.

It must be objectively reasonable for them to suspect this, given the information they had. This means that it is what an ordinary person would think was fair if they had all the information the police officer has.

Unless the police have information, which provides a description of someone carrying an illegal item, the reasonable grounds cannot be based on:

- your physical appearance
- being part of a category of people
- generalisations or stereotypes

In some cases, the police can stop you because of your behaviour or because of where you are at a certain time. If the police believe you are acting suspiciously, they must be able to explain how your behaviour was suspicious.

A hunch or a "vibe" does not count as reasonable grounds unless it can be fully explained to another neutral person who was observing in a way that would allow them to reach the same conclusion.

If the police have no reasonable grounds, you are free to leave, and the police should tell you this.

You have the right to know the grounds for the search when you're being searched, and that you are entitled to a copy of the record of the search once it is complete.

Why is Stop and Search needed?

“The primary purpose of stop and search powers is to enable officers to allay or confirm suspicions about individuals without exercising their power of arrest.”

The police service use Stop and Search powers to search people who they suspect to be in possession of unlawful items, such as illegal drugs, weapons, or stolen property. The power is seen by the police as a valuable tool in the fight against crime, both deterring offenders and preventing further offending.

The police have a range of statutory powers of stop and search available to them, depending on the circumstances. Most, but not all, of these powers require an officer to have reasonable grounds for suspicion that an unlawful item is being carried. The one thing the powers all have in common is that they allow officers to detain a person who is not under arrest to search them or their vehicle for an unlawful item.

A specific power the police can use is called Section 60 which is a legal power under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which allows officers to stop search individuals without reasonable suspicion in a specific area for a limited time. This must be authorised by an Inspector or above and is usually in response to knife crime, gang related activity or public disorder.

Stop and Search is still raised as a significant area of concern by some members of the community, particularly in relation to its disproportionate use and the traumatic effect it can have on young people.

Concerns around Stop and Search and how it is used is not a new phenomenon, and there have been several reports and inquiries completed nationally, to address these issues. There are historical cases where policing has not lived up to the standards expected and acted in a way that has caused shock and fear in communities, which affects their opinion on the effectiveness of policing. It is important that lessons are learnt from past practice to shape contemporary practice.

It is the responsibility of Bedfordshire Police to ensure its officers are properly trained, supported and managed. This charter is an opportunity to reset our expectations and give officers the confidence they need to police Bedfordshire effectively.

Scrutiny Panel

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

is responsible for the Stop and Search and Use of Force Scrutiny Panel meeting and for observation of the meetings.

The Stop and Search and Use of Force Scrutiny Group reviews the Stop and Search and Use of Force data, the outcomes of those searches, and it also reviews Stop and Searches and Use of Force which have been recorded to scrutinise use of the power.

The purpose of the Scrutiny Panel is:

- To provide independent scrutiny of the use of Stop and Search and Use of Force across Bedfordshire.
- To provide learning on Stop and Search and Use of Force practices.
- To provide a voice for community concerns and to influence police actions.
- To achieve greater transparency and community involvement in the use of Stop and Search and Use of Force powers across Bedfordshire.
- To improve public confidence and trust in the way in which Stop and Search is conducted.
- To review and advise on policy, training and tactical considerations.

To find out more about the Scrutiny Panel please visit the PCC [Website](#).

We are recruiting for Stop and Search and Use of Force Panel Members, for further information please read the information leaflet or [contact us](#).

If you would like to complete the application form via Word or an alternative format, please contact us at PCC@beds.police.uk

The Charter Commitments:

Through this charter, the Police and Crime Commissioner makes a clear set of commitments to all citizens in Bedfordshire to ensure that human rights are upheld.

- 1. Bedfordshire Police are committed to ensuring that all stop and search encounters are carried out professionally and respectfully. Officers will be expected to communicate clearly, treat individuals with dignity, and understand the impact that being searched can have. The force will prioritise building trust with the community and will empower officers to challenge and address poor practice when it occurs.**

Comments made by members of the Community Scrutiny Panel:

Bedfordshire Police officers should communicate clearly and calmly, being both in-offensive and non-derogatory, considering differences in individuals, such as neurodiversity.

Bedfordshire Police should commit to creating a safe and comfortable environment and should break the process down to make sure those being searched understand what is happening and prevent escalation.

How officers approach someone is important and should show basic forms of respect, officers shouldn't feel like they are above others and should be aware of what the encounter will feel like to different people depending on race/sex/age.

Officers should be humble, answer questions, understand what it feels like to be stopped and searched in public and realise that if done aggressively, it can escalate a situation.

The PCC is working towards completing a countywide poll to ask the community their experience of Stop and Search and the impact on Trust and Confidence.

- 2. Bedfordshire Police are committed to enhancing and evolving officers training and to the ongoing continuous professional development of staff in relation to stop and search to ensure that its use continues to be effective, efficient, and ethical.**

Comments made by members of the Community Scrutiny Panel: *During our scrutiny meetings, a significant proportion of dip-sampled interactions demonstrate a high standard of policing. However, there is always an opportunity for learning and development. Bedfordshire Police should remain committed to ongoing officer training and ensure regular communication is issued regarding expectations and the use of GOWISELYER principles.*

The panel commends the achievements of the Bedfordshire Police Community Cohesion Team. Nonetheless, it believes that all community officers should adopt a consistent focus on engaging with communities and developing a deep

understanding of the diverse and complex needs within their local areas.

Additionally, the Community Scrutiny Panel operates a dedicated data sub-group that monitors disproportionality and identifies emerging trends or concerns across the county. The panel recommends that Bedfordshire Police place continued emphasis on this area to support fair and equitable policing.

3. Bedfordshire Police are committed to robust internal scrutiny processes

to ensure stop and search is utilised fairly and effectively. Including enhanced dip sampling, analysis of stop and search, providing feedback to the community scrutiny panel of key findings from these activities. This process aims to promote transparency and accountability across all aspects of Stop and Search scrutiny.

Comments made by members of the Community Scrutiny Panel:

The PCC and Panel welcome Bedfordshire Police's commitment to sharing learning both internally and with the community, recognising this as key to building trust and driving improvement.

Quarterly bulletins support this by providing data, trend analysis, and feedback mechanisms that reinforce accountability. Officers are held responsible for their actions—whether through referral to Professional Standards or formal recognition for good practice. All feedback should be recorded and shared with supervisors to ensure appropriate oversight.

Bedfordshire Police should continue robust supervision and dip sampling across both officers and staff to reduce bias and maintain a community-focused approach. These practices strengthen fairness, integrity, and public confidence.

4. Bedfordshire Police are committed to working closely with local

communities to regularly discuss the use of Stop and Search, including when and where it is applied. Bedfordshire Police will actively listen to community concerns, provide clear explanations for their use, and demonstrate that Stop and Search is being carried out fairly, proportionately, and without bias—helping to build trust and reduce concern of misuse of police powers.

Comments made by members of the Community Scrutiny Panel:

The current relationship between the Community Scrutiny Panel and Bedfordshire Police is generally positive and constructive, reflecting a shared commitment to

transparency and continuous improvement.

One area that still requires further development and is actively being addressed is the feedback mechanism. Strengthening this process is essential to ensure that officers clearly understand the role of the Scrutiny Panel not as a source of criticism, but as a supportive and constructive partner, a critical friend, whose purpose is to promote learning, accountability, and best practice across the force.

- 5. Bedfordshire Police is committed to educating all residents of Bedfordshire about their rights, the legal framework surrounding stop and search, and the reasons such powers are used. This will be achieved through a variety of communication channels tailored to different audiences, with the aim of increasing public understanding, promoting transparency, and raising general awareness of the law and policing processes.**

Comments made by members of the Community Scrutiny Panel:

To ensure that analysis of Stop and Search practices is both accurate and meaningful, it is essential that the strategy behind its use is clearly and effectively communicated to the public. Without a solid understanding of how the strategy is designed, its objectives, guiding principles, and operational framework, individuals and communities may struggle to interpret the data or engage in informed discussions.

Improved communication will help build trust, foster transparency, and enable residents to better understand the rationale behind stop and search, ultimately supporting more constructive scrutiny and dialogue.

Bedfordshire Police have adopted a new information flyer provided to those who are stopped. This is aligned to the information flyer provided by the PCC to all members of the community providing opportunity to capture local voices.

- 6. The Police and Crime Commissioner, together with Bedfordshire Police, is committed to ensuring that community involvement in governance and scrutiny processes remains both independent and consistent. This includes actively engaging a diverse range of community voices in oversight activities, maintaining transparency in decision-making, and embedding public participation as a core element of accountability. By fostering regular, impartial, and meaningful community input, the force aims to strengthen trust, improve policing outcomes, and ensure that public concerns are genuinely reflected in how policing is delivered and reviewed.**

Comments made by members of the Community Scrutiny Panel:

The Community Scrutiny Panel operates independently from both the Police and

Crime Commissioner and Bedfordshire Police, and this independence will continue to be upheld as a fundamental principle of its role. The panel is keen to play a more active role in shaping public communications and awareness campaigns, ensuring that community perspectives are reflected in the messaging shared with the wider public. By contributing to communication strategies, the panel aims to help build greater transparency, trust, and understanding between the police and the communities they serve.

Each local authority area in Bedfordshire has its own unique context and lived experiences. To ensure meaningful representation, it is essential that the Scrutiny Panel includes community members from across all areas of Bedfordshire.

Community groups are crucial in maintaining independent oversight and should be more actively involved in the dip sampling of Body Worn Video (BWV). Panel members must reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, with transparent selection processes and regular rotation to promote fairness, inclusivity, and accountability.

Additionally, the community should play a key role in shaping the supervision criteria for Stop and Search practices. A structured review process should be established for individuals who have been stopped, and the supervision criteria must remain flexible, allowing for updates in response to significant incidents or evolving community concerns.

- 7. The Police and Crime Commissioner is committed to ensuring that the Community Scrutiny Panel is representative of Bedfordshire's diverse population. Particular emphasis will be placed on actively recruiting younger members of the community, to ensure that a broad range of perspectives—including those of future generations—are included in the scrutiny and oversight of policing practices.**

Comments made by members of the Community Scrutiny Panel:

Over the past 12 months, the panel has successfully recruited four young individuals to join the Community Scrutiny Panel. In June, a targeted recruitment campaign was launched to further engage younger members of the community. As part of this initiative, all schools, colleges, and universities across Bedfordshire were contacted to raise awareness of the Stop and Search Panel, its purpose, and the valuable opportunities it offers for young people to contribute to local policing oversight.

This recruitment effort is ongoing, with the aim of ensuring sustained youth representation and involvement in shaping fair and accountable policing practices.

8. The Police and Crime Commissioner and Bedfordshire Police are committed to ensuring that the complaints process is clearly communicated, transparent, and accessible to all members of the community.

Comments made by members of the Community Scrutiny Panel:

The Community Scrutiny Panel is kept informed of the complaint-handling procedures undertaken by the Professional Standards Department as well as being provided with outcomes on referrals made to PSD from the panel.

Separately, the Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel may be convened for extraordinary meetings to review relevant stop and search footage when required. The panel has expressed a desire for this practice to continue.

Each quarter the panel's actions and outcomes, along with the data is published on the website.

Complaints

If you feel you have been stopped for no good reason or have been treated unfairly, you can make a police complaint - [Complaints | Bedfordshire Police](#)

Contact the police force you would like to complain or are unhappy with your treatment from police officers:



Call 101



Website

If you're complaining about the treatment of a child under 18, you can also contact the Children's Commissioner for England or the Children's Commissioner for Wales. Police forces must refer to certain types of complaints to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC).