



Bedfordshire
Police & Crime
Commissioner



Bedfordshire Stop and Search and Use of Force Scrutiny Panel

Annual Report 2025/26

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Who are we?

The Independent Stop and Search & Use of Force Scrutiny Panel is made up of local residents and community representatives from across Bedfordshire. Panel members reflect the diversity of the community and bring an independent public perspective to the scrutiny of police activity.

What do we do?

The Panel reviews records, data and body-worn video relating to stop and search encounters, use of force interactions, and Section 163 (vehicle stops) to assess whether police encounters are lawful, fair, proportionate and respectful.

The panel provides constructive feedback to the police, highlighting good practice and identifying areas for improvement, particularly around communication, decision-making and professionalism.

What is our purpose?

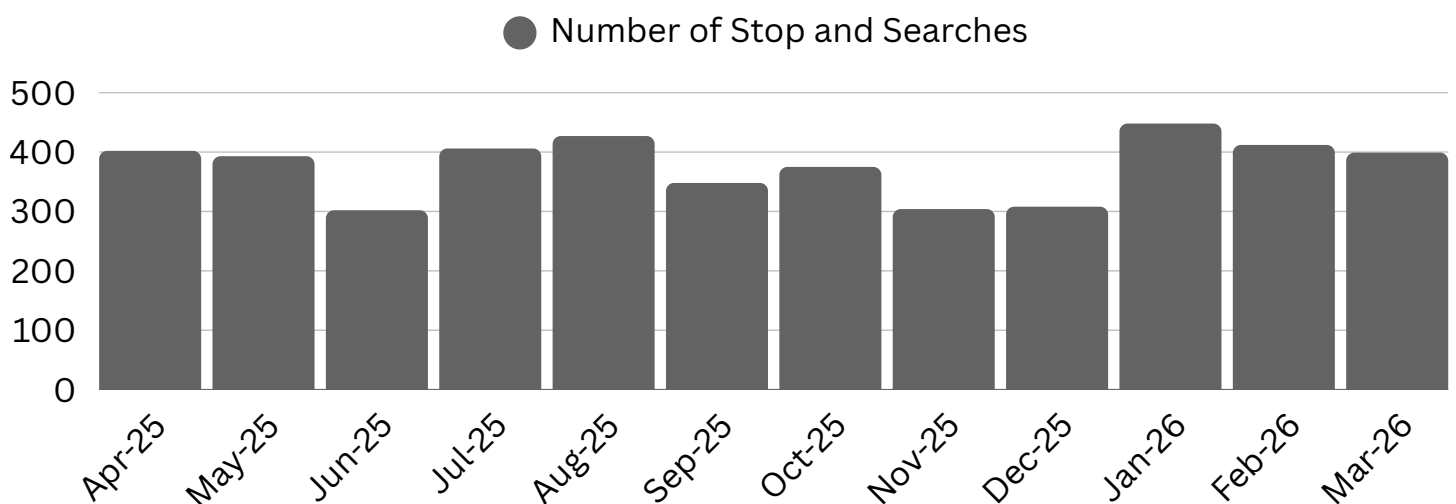
The Panel's purpose is to promote transparency, accountability and public confidence in the use of stop and search, use of force and Section 163 powers. By offering independent oversight and community insight, the panel supports learning within the police service and helps ensure these powers are used appropriately, consistently and without discrimination.

Stop & Search Data

Between April 2025 and March 2026, there were a total of 4,556 stop and search encounters conducted across Bedfordshire.

The graph below illustrates a month-by-month analysis of stop and search activity throughout the year, showcasing fluctuations in volume for each reporting period. The data indicates that the highest number of stop and searches occurred in January 2026, whereas the lowest number was noted in June 2025.

The largest proportion of stop and search activity related to drug-related offences, with possession with intent to supply accounting for 1,602 stop and searches. This was closely followed by drug possession offences, which accounted for 1,508 stop and searches. These figures demonstrate that drugs remain a key driver of stop and search activity and a significant priority for proactive policing. Across all stop and searches, a total of 1,133 drugs and 132 weapons were seized.

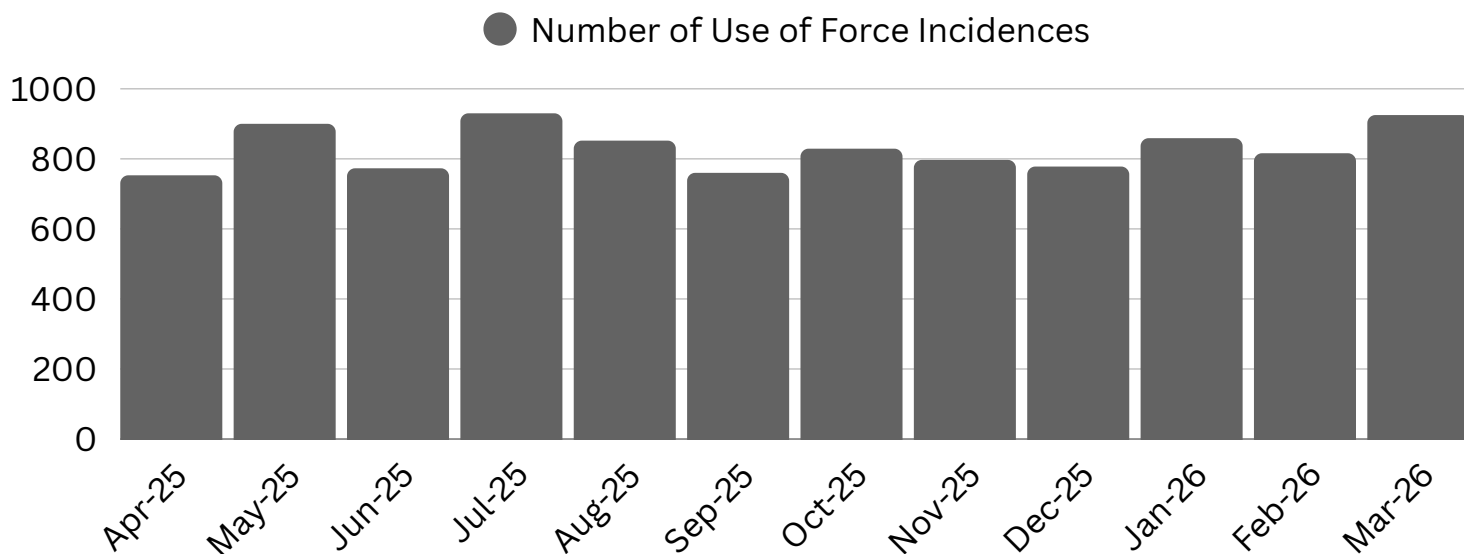


Use of Force Data

Between April 2025 and March 2026, a total of 9,838 use of force incidents were recorded across Bedfordshire, of which 6,124 were unique incidents.

The graph below provides a month-by-month breakdown of these incidents, illustrating fluctuations in Use of Force across the year. The data shows that the highest number of incidents occurred in July, with 930 recorded cases, while the lowest number was recorded in April, with 753 incidents.

Overall, the figures indicate a consistent level of Use of Force activity throughout the year, with some seasonal variation. The peak in July may reflect increased demand on policing resources during the summer months, while the lower figure in April suggests a comparatively reduced level of operational activity during that period.



Data Panel Recap

Over the last 12 months, a total of four Data Panel meetings were held. These meetings brought together force leads for Stop and Search and Use of Force, who attended to present performance data covering the preceding three-month period.

The purpose of the Data Panel is to provide structured, independent scrutiny of stop and search and use of force activity through the detailed review of data. By examining quantitative data alongside contextual information, the panel is able to challenge, support, and influence policing practice by ensuring that police powers are being applied lawfully, proportionately, and fairly. The Data Panel uses this information to support focused, evidence-based scrutiny and to facilitate constructive and transparent dialogue with Bedfordshire Police. It enables members to examine trends over time, understand operational pressures, and assess how disproportionality, vulnerability, and outcomes are being managed. This process strengthens accountability and helps to build public confidence by ensuring that concerns raised through data are actively considered and addressed.

Throughout the year, the panel identified a number of key trends and emerging patterns that required closer attention. These included areas of disproportionality, repeat encounters, the use of force by specific officer cohorts, and outcomes linked to age, ethnicity, and vulnerability. Insights gained from the data have directly influenced the panel's work by informing quarterly priorities and shaping the selection of body-worn video footage for review. This targeted approach has allowed the panel to focus on areas of highest impact and risk, ensuring that learning opportunities are maximised and that appropriate challenge and assurance are provided where required.

Outlined below are some of the key trends identified by the panel, along with the thematic focus areas that informed the selection of body-worn video footage for review.

Stop and Search - common areas of focus:

- Encounters involving individuals from minority ethnic groups
- Stop and searches conducted within CPS areas showing higher levels of disproportionality
- Stop and searches involving individuals aged 16–24
- Stop and searches that resulted in a strip search
- Individuals who were stopped and searched on multiple occasions
- Top searching officers

Use of Force – common areas of focus:

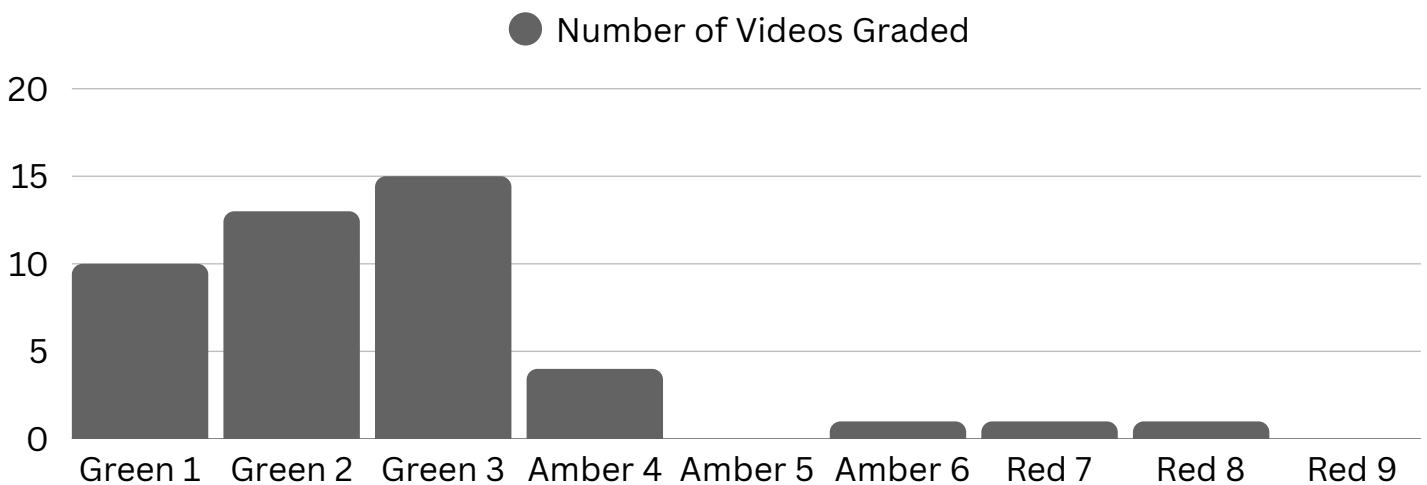
- Incidents involving individuals from minority ethnic groups
- Incidents involving young people
- Use of force incidents resulting in injury
- Officers with a higher number of recorded use of force incidents
- Incidents involving vulnerable adults
- Specific types of force that have shown an increase over the reporting period

Stop and Search Panel

This volunteer panel provides independent scrutiny of stop and search powers by reviewing body-worn video and relevant police records. Its role is to assess whether encounters are lawful, necessary, and proportionate, while promoting transparency, accountability, and continuous learning within policing.

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Over the past 12 months, the Stop and Search Panel reviewed a total of 45 stop and search encounters as part of its independent scrutiny work. These reviews focused on assessing the lawfulness, fairness, proportionality and quality of officer interactions. This figure does not include Section 163 vehicle stops, which are reviewed separately.



The graph above shows the grades assigned by panel members for the 45 stop and search encounters reviewed. The majority of body-worn video footage was graded green, accounting for 85% of encounters. A green grading indicates that the stop and search was conducted appropriately, with only minor points noted for consideration.

A further 11% of encounters were graded amber, where panel members identified areas for learning and development for officers. Finally, 4% of encounters were graded red, reflecting serious concerns raised by the panel regarding how the stop and search was conducted.



Stop and Search Panel

Key areas of learning

Following the review of stop and search body-worn video footage, the panel provides feedback to officers on areas where practice can be improved. Below are some of the key themes and learning points that the panel has regularly identified and fed back to officers:

- The need for officers to activate BWV earlier during stop and search encounters and ensure that the camera is positioned correctly.
- Ensuring officers' written grounds accurately reflect the grounds communicated to the subject. Grounds provided should be more detailed and less vague.
- Officer safety during searches – officers should wear gloves when searching and avoid conducting searches on the road or between vehicles.
- Inappropriate or unprofessional language used by officers.
- Ensuring members of the public understand GOWISLEY – panel members noted that officers often deliver this too quickly. Officers should slow down their delivery and allow one officer to take the lead to avoid speaking over each other.
- Increasing verbal communication from officers throughout the search process.
- Some officers not using earpieces and instead listening to the radio out loud – this raises GDPR concerns due to sensitive information being audible to the public.
- Dress code issues involving female officers, particularly the wearing of long false nails and excess jewellery.

Stop and Search Panel

Panel Impact

Following the panel's feedback, officers and supervisors will provide a response to panel members addressing their feedback and outlining the actions they will take as a result. Below are examples of the actions implemented by officers and supervisors in response to this feedback.

- Officers will be more mindful about activating their BWV earlier to ensure fuller context is captured for the panel and for any subsequent review.
- Officers will take greater control of encounters by designating a single lead officer to reduce confusion and improve communication.
- Officers will slow down the delivery of GOWISLEY and the search grounds to ensure subjects fully understand the information being provided.
- Officers will ensure handcuffs are removed at the earliest appropriate opportunity.
- Supervisors will increase dip sampling of BWV and stop and search records to ensure compliance with the panel's feedback.

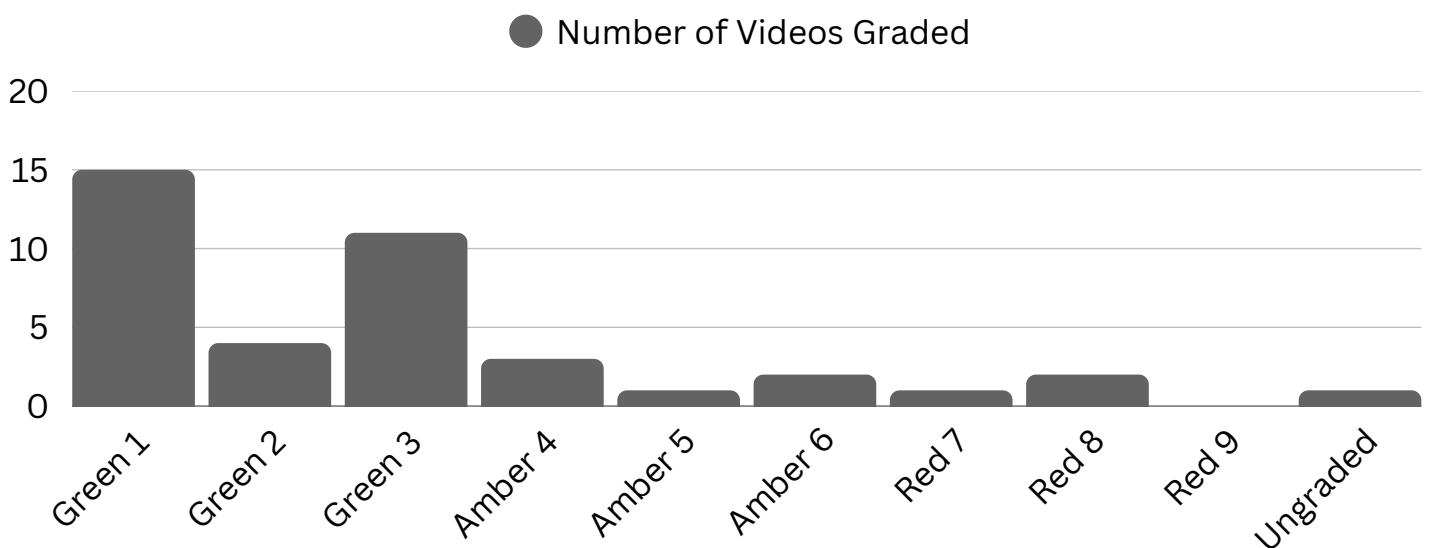


Use of Force Panel

The Use of Force Panel provides independent scrutiny of police use of force incidents by reviewing body-worn video footage and supporting records. The panel assesses whether force was applied lawfully, proportionately, and appropriately in the circumstances, while identifying good practice and areas for learning. This scrutiny supports transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in the use of force by Bedfordshire Police.

40

During the last 12-month period, the panel independently scrutinised 40 incidents involving police use of force. Each case was examined to consider whether the force used was lawful, necessary and proportionate, as well as to assess the standard of officer conduct and communication.



The graph above shows the grades assigned by panel members for the 40 use of force incidents reviewed. The majority of body-worn video footage was graded green, accounting for 75% of encounters. A green grading indicates that the use of force was necessary and carried out appropriately, with only minor points identified for consideration.

A further 15% of encounters were graded amber, where panel members highlighted areas for learning and development for officers. Finally, 4% of encounters were graded red, reflecting serious concerns raised by the panel regarding how the use of force was conducted. One video was recorded as ungraded, as panel members felt there was insufficient information available to accurately assign a grade.

Use of Force Panel

Key areas of learning

Following the review of use of force body-worn video footage, the panel provides feedback to officers on areas where practice can be improved. Below are some of the key themes and learning points that the panel has regularly identified and fed back to officers:

- Organisational learning for the force to provide enhanced training to officers on engaging with individuals experiencing mental health issues or learning difficulties, as well as those with disabilities such as autism.
- Safety risks for officers were highlighted – for example, ensuring members of the public do not hold items such as glasses or cigarettes that could potentially cause harm during an encounter.
- Officers should prioritise de-escalation where appropriate and make greater use of verbal communication techniques to manage situations more effectively.
- Panel members expressed concern that hospitals do not always provide adequate support to officers. They noted that some incidents fall outside typical police responsibilities and should instead be handled by mental health specialists. The panel recommended enhanced training to help officers better recognise when to escalate matters and seek assistance from appropriate services. They also emphasised the importance of stronger collaborative working practices between police and hospital staff to ensure more effective and coordinated responses in future incidents.
- Handcuffs were applied for longer periods than necessary.

Panel Impact

Below are examples of the actions implemented by officers and supervisors in response to this feedback.

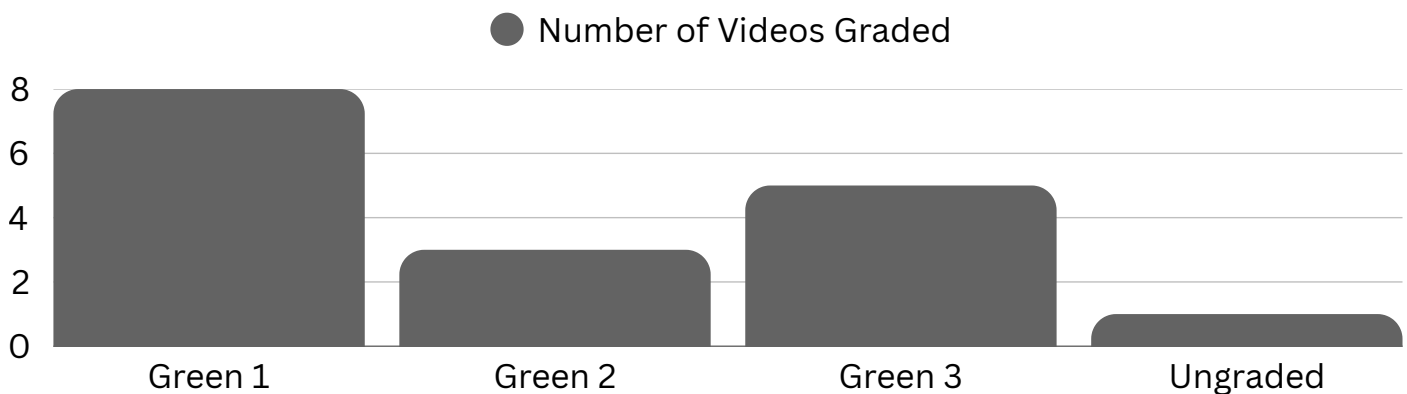
- Officers will take into consideration and include more detail in their use of force grounds, ensuring their actions are fully justifiable.
- BWV will be activated earlier by officers.

Section 163 Panel

The Section 163 (S163) Panel provides independent scrutiny of police vehicle stops carried out under Section 163 of the Road Traffic Act.

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Over the past 12 months, the Section 163 Panel reviewed a total of 17 vehicle stops carried out under Section 163 of the Road Traffic Act as part of its independent scrutiny work. These reviews focused on assessing the lawfulness, proportionality and quality of officer decision-making and interactions with members of the public.



All S163 videos viewed were graded a Green, meaning that the section 163 stop was conducted professionally, appropriately and compliant with organisational policy and legislation. There were some minor points for consideration including:

- Officers should ensure that the caution is delivered in a clear and understandable way for members of the public.
- The panel suggested that officers would benefit from additional training on how to effectively communicate with members of the public who have disabilities.
- Body-worn video should be activated at an earlier stage.
- Officers should use earpieces to ensure that sensitive information cannot be heard aloud.
- Officers should ensure that both themselves and subjects are not positioned on the road, in the interest of health and safety.

One video was ungraded due to a lack of time constraints.

Panel Achievements

Improvements in Policing

The Panel has observed a significant and sustained improvement in the quality of police officers' interactions with members of the public over the reporting period. Officers are increasingly demonstrating professionalism, respect, and clear communication, reflecting a positive response to panel scrutiny and feedback. One notable example is an officer who was previously graded Red following panel review of body-worn video footage, where concerns were raised around tone, explanation of grounds, and engagement. After receiving structured feedback and guidance from the Panel, subsequent dip-sampling of this officer's footage shows a positive transformation. The officer now consistently delivers clear and lawful grounds, treats individuals with dignity, and models best practice in stop and search encounters. The Panel considers this officer's performance to be exemplary and a clear example of learning and improvement in action, and therefore wishes to recognise this progress through a formal award.

Learning, Improving, and Leading by Example

The Panel has continued to develop and strengthen its approach to scrutiny, consistently seeking innovative ways to progress and improve its effectiveness. As a result, the Panel's work has been recognised by other Police and Crime Commissioners and external organisations as best practice, with scrutiny panels from across the country engaging with us to understand our operating model and explore how it can be adopted locally. This recognition has also extended to national platforms, including coverage in professional and oversight publications such as articles produced by the IOPC.

HMICFRS

Ahead of the PEEL inspection, HMICFRS attended the panels in an observational capacity. Meetings were also organised to discuss the operation of the panels and to provide insight into how independent scrutiny is conducted and fed back into the force.

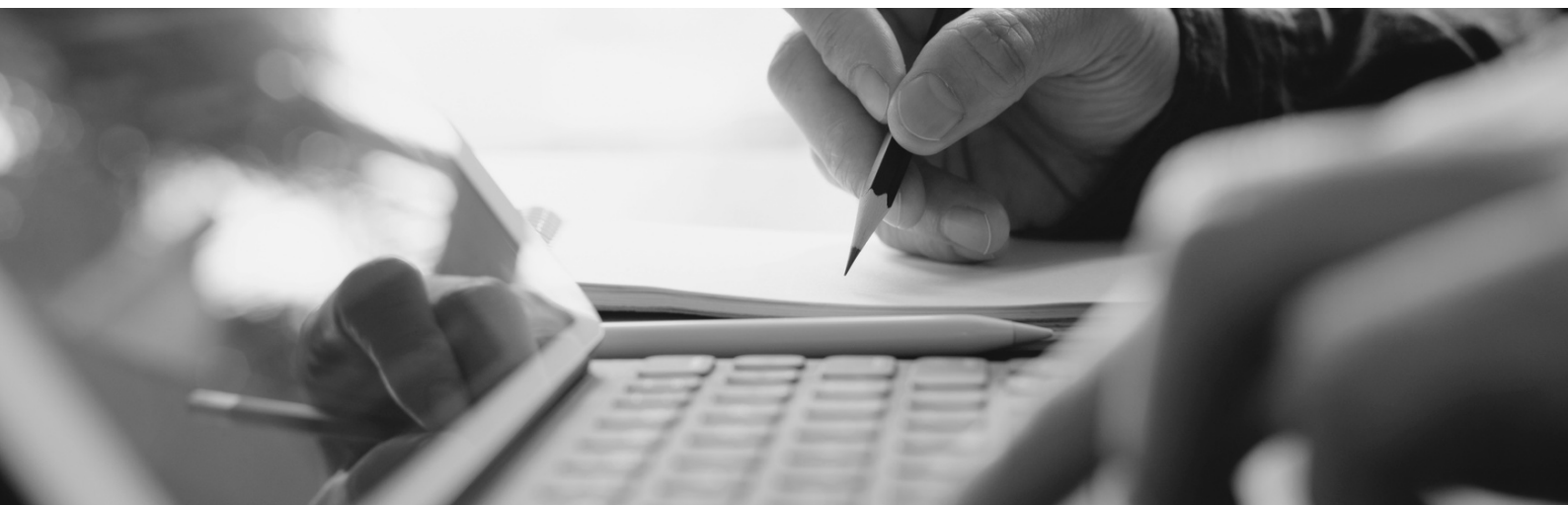
Panel Achievements

Strengthening Youth Representation

One area identified for further improvement was the need to strengthen representation from younger demographics and ensure younger voices and perspectives are better reflected in panel discussions. In response, the Panel took proactive steps to raise awareness of its work by increasing community engagement, attending local events, and visiting schools, colleges, and universities to promote the role and impact of the Panel. These efforts have led to a 27% increase in young membership, meaning that one-third (33%) of the Panel is now aged between 17 and 24, significantly enhancing the diversity of perspectives informing our scrutiny work.

Increased panel Training

The Panel has actively identified areas for learning and development to strengthen its effectiveness and ensure high-quality scrutiny. In response, a range of targeted training sessions have been organised in partnership with relevant organisations to build the Panel's knowledge and understanding and support members in carrying out their role with confidence. This has included training on IOPC complaints and police accountability processes, Acute Behavioural Disturbance (ABD), the use and understanding of intelligence, Right Care, Right Person, and mental health in policing. These sessions have equipped Panel members with deeper insight into policing practices and vulnerabilities, enhancing the robustness and informed nature of Panel discussions and feedback.



Panel Achievements

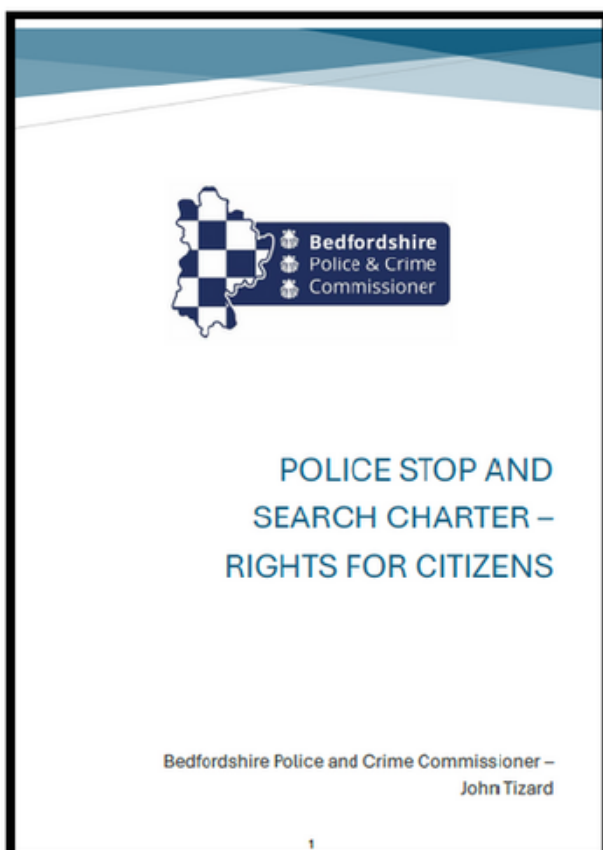
The Launch of the Stop and Search Charter

This year, the Police and Crime Commissioner, John Tizard, launched a new Stop and Search Charter to strengthen public trust in policing and ensure the fair, proportionate and precise use of police powers.

The charter sets out the rights of citizens, how and when police powers should be applied, the oversight processes in place, and how to raise concerns if anyone feels those powers have been used inappropriately.

The launch follows discussion with the Stop and Search Panel. The PCC is determined to lead by example and ensure that Stop and Search, along with Use of Force powers, are deployed appropriately, without discrimination, and with full transparency.

The initiative builds on national best practice, but is tailored to reflect the needs, concerns, and priorities of Bedfordshire communities.



[Click here to view the full press release announcing the launch of the Stop and Search Panel.](#)

[Click here to view the Stop and Search Charter.](#)

Looking Forward

Our panel is committed to continuous improvement and development. Over the past year, we have achieved a great deal and will continue to build on these successes. Looking ahead to 2026/27, the panel has identified several key areas for further improvement. A selection of our priorities is outlined below.

Recruitment of a Vice Chair

This year, we said goodbye to our previous Vice Chair, who stepped down to progress in her personal career. As a result, we aim to recruit a new Vice Chair to work alongside and support the current Chair and Vice Chair. This role will be essential in helping to strengthen leadership and further develop the panel.

Enhanced Training

The panel remains keen to develop its knowledge and skills to ensure members are well equipped to provide informed, constructive feedback to the force. During the coming year, we will focus on enhancing training opportunities for our volunteers, including sessions on specialist areas such as the dog unit, firearms units, and the police complaints process.

Increasing Awareness

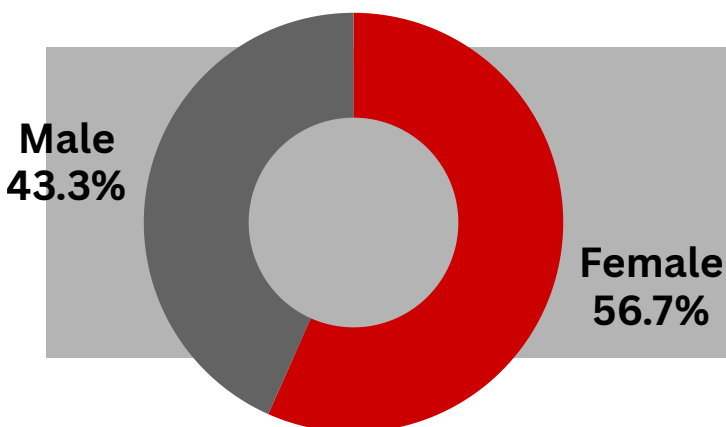
Raising awareness of the panel's work remains a key ambition. We plan to attend a wide range of local events and conferences across Bedfordshire to promote the panel's role and purpose. Through this, we hope to improve public understanding of our work and encourage greater diversity within the panel.

Strengthening the panel's structure

We also aim to review and strengthen how the panel operates. This will include a detailed review of processes such as grading, officer feedback, and the Terms of Reference. The aim is to ensure these areas continue to meet the needs of the panel and support effective, consistent working practices.

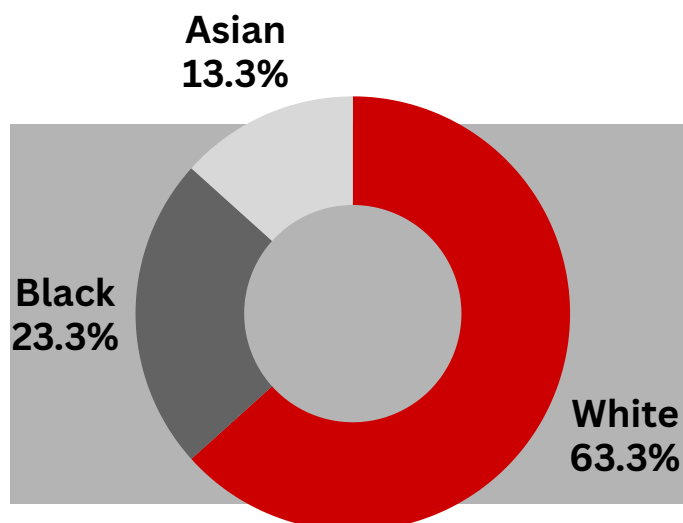
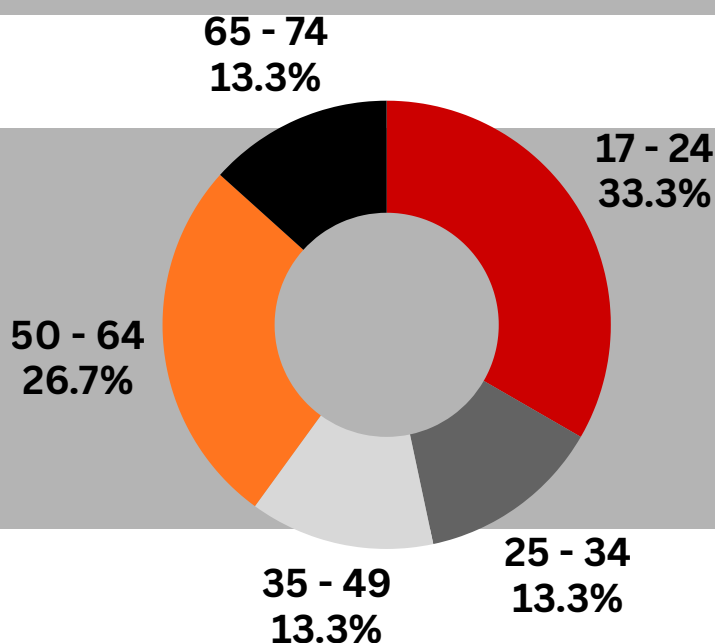
Our Volunteers

The current volunteer cohort for the Stop and Search Panel and Use of Force Panel consists of 30 panel members. Below is a breakdown of the panel by age, ethnicity, and sex. Maintaining a diverse and representative panel is essential to reflect a range of ethnic backgrounds and age groups. This diversity helps ensure that police powers, such as stop and search and the use of force, are monitored effectively and applied appropriately.



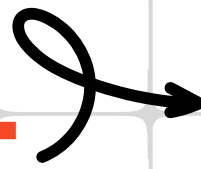
The panel has a higher proportion of female members, with women making up 57% of the cohort and men accounting for the remaining 43%, contributing to a balanced and inclusive gender representation.

The panel includes a broad range of age groups, with strong representation from younger members aged 17–24 (33%) alongside significant participation from those aged 50–64 (27%), supporting a balance of lived experience and diverse perspectives in panel discussions.



The panel demonstrates a good level of ethnic diversity, with members from Black and Asian backgrounds comprising 37% of the cohort, helping to ensure that a range of perspectives from minority ethnic communities are reflected in the panel's scrutiny work.

CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS!



Bedfordshire Stop and Search and Use of Force Scrutiny Panel



Can you spare some time for your community?

WHO ARE WE?

- We are an independent panel formed to consider the way that Bedfordshire Police use stop and search, to ensure it is being used appropriately.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

- We aim to ensure accountability, through openness and transparency with the police service, provide learning and increase public confidence in the police.

WHAT DO WE DO?

- We assess individual cases to identify areas of concern and good practice using a RAG (red, amber, green) traffic light system.

Interested in joining us or would you like to find out more information?

Contact us: PCC@beds.police.uk

