



NATIONAL BLACK POLICE ASSOCIATION

Stop Search Review

Merseyside Police



**National Black Police Association
Stop Search Review
Merseyside Police Headquarters
14th - 15th March 2019**

Attendees:

Tola Munro – President National Black Police Association
Janet Hills – Metropolitan Police Black Police Association
Dionne Johnson – Staffordshire Police (NBPA cabinet)
Andrew George – Police Service of Northern Ireland (NBPA cabinet)
Rozila Kana – Lancashire Constabulary (NBPA cabinet)
Katrina Ffrench – StopWatch
Vida Greaux – Gwent Police & BTP IAGs
Gracie Bradley – Liberty Human Rights
Roz Comyn – Liberty Human Rights

Executive Summary

Our pioneering visit was initiated when the Chief Constable of Merseyside, Andy Cooke publically stated that he is against the College of Policing's approved practice on the grounds for a cannabis stop & search. He believes that the smell of cannabis alone is sufficient grounds to conduct a stop & search, however the example he stated was not smell of cannabis alone

Andy Cooke maintains strongly that this does not lead to increased race disproportionality in stop & searches.

After a discussion with our President, Andy Cooke invited the National Black Police Association to attend Merseyside and speak to the communities based on this.

Based on the evidence we have witnessed on this visit we believe that Merseyside is leading on this issue and would recommend other forces look holistically at all the work Merseyside are doing in this area as best practice.



The following statistics are from Merseyside stop search data, which gives some evidence to justify Chief Constable's perspective (the BME population in the force area is 5.5%).

- In 2016-17 the percentage of Black people stop/searched was 2.6% and overall BAME % was 5%
- In 2017-18 the percentage of Black people stop/searched was 2.6% and overall BAME % was 6%

As a result, a team of NBPA cabinet members and representatives from StopWatch and Liberty attend Merseyside in March to get an overall understanding and speak to various groups and organisations.

Methodology

The team was warmly received by Merseyside Police.

Chief Constable Andy Cooke welcomed the contingent and gave a detailed understanding of how stop/search practice was encouraged by him at the highest level to prevent crime.

This was followed by a detailed presentation by Louise Kane, Head of Performance.

Following this, some members of the team visited various community venues and organisations and spoke to community leads and youth workers.



Findings

The community leads that the team spoke to were supportive of Merseyside Police and spoke in favour of stop search practices in the area.

They felt strongly that this legislation when used appropriately and proportionately was a preventative measure and kept their youths safe and off the streets.

They welcomed the police carrying out stop search at any time to ensure that knife crime or any violent crime was kept at a minimum.

The communities also felt that the local police engaged with them proactively and they described a strong relationship between them and the local officers in the area namely Jamaal and Dominique Walker.

The community members reiterated the benefit, local officers who had an in-depth understanding of their communities added to the relationship between police and communities.

To this end, we would like to quote the observation made by Katrina Ffrench, Chief Executive of StopWatch:

“In relation to community policing models, the visit was incredibly insightful. However, I would be keen to visit an area, which is not predominantly BAME and does not have a ‘Jamal’ as I believe what we saw was quite the exception and not the rule. Are there any white working class neighbourhoods that could be added to the tour next time? Only it would be useful to have a real understanding of community and police relations”



Following this community engagement, the team went on to observe the stop search hydra training exercise that Merseyside use to train their officers.

Once again, the interactive methodology used in this exercise was exceptional and prompted debate as well as proved to be very thought provoking. Interactive scenario based learning in this format creates a safe space to open up debate and challenge any perceived misconceptions.

Considerations

There was some learning however from this visit:

- Although in favour of stop search, and whilst the communities appreciated that it was a necessity at times to bring in response police officers from other areas due to resourcing issues; they felt that the local neighbourhood officers needed to be involved in local policing operations such as Section 60's in order to ensure that local intelligence and cultural aspects were taken into account.
- The local community leads also felt that the local officers were key to building relationships during policing operations and should be invited to give a cultural perspective to officers in order to ensure that community relationships did not deteriorate because of policing activity.
- The community members also felt that the training element of stop searches, especially police etiquette needed regular refreshing as sometimes the quality of stop searches varied from officer to officer. This sometimes leads to a breakdown in communication and exacerbates the situation.



- There was some learning for progression and retention of BAME staff. The communities really appreciated the community engagement that their local two officers such as Jamal and Dominique Walker did. However, they felt that the police force did not value their tireless commitment to the local communities and the force did not consider progression or rewarding them for their invaluable work. In fact, one member mentioned how they rarely see senior officers in the area. This does not send the right message to the communities, especially to the young people who see these local officers as their role models.
- Austerity has really hit the youth centres and many diversionary and educational activities with young people has come to a halt. It would be helpful if the police force worked with local partners and the PCC to perhaps divert some proceeds of crime funding or other funding streams back into these community groups where unemployment and crime is high to ensure that early interventions and support mechanisms are in place for young people.
- Merseyside may also want to refresh their stop/search training around ethnicity classification to their police officers, as the data may not be accurate in terms of proportionality. In 2017, 1257 people have been classed as “not stated/unknown” and in 2018, this figure was 869. These figures are relatively high in comparison to other regional forces. This causes a certain amount of ambiguity as to whether the data around ethnicity is totally accurate.

Conclusion

Overall, there seems to be a strong relationship between communities and Merseyside Police and this helps any perceived disproportionality felt by the communities in terms of any legislation.

There needs to be due diligence by the force in terms of ethnic classification auditing locally by the force as stated earlier.