

Quick reference guide - supervisors

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

First published 8 March 2017 Updated 8 March 2017

Written by College of Policing

5 mins read

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 (Code A [paragraph 1.4](#)). A stop and search where no illegal item is found may still be a legitimate outcome if it is conducted in a fair, lawful, professional and transparent way.

Supervisors should:

- focus on the lawfulness of search activity (in basis and in application), its effectiveness, and its compliance with professional and procedural requirements
- recognise and support good stop and search practices by officers, even where nothing is found
- be guided by the [Code of Ethics](#) and the [National Decision Model](#) in their decision making

Enable

Establish a supportive environment

Supervisors should seek to establish a supportive environment in which open and effective challenge can take place.

- Officers should be confident they will be supported in their use of stop and search, provided their decisions and conduct are lawful, fair, professional and transparent.
- Supervisors should acknowledge that searches can be legitimate even where nothing is found, recognise and share promising and compliant practices, highlight positive encounters and support officer development where it is needed.
- Supervisors should not use volumetric performance targets to assess stop and search, and should not use the number of searches as a measure of officer productivity. If quantitative frameworks are used, they should be accompanied by measures to mitigate the risk of unintended outcomes.

Facilitate and support training

Supervising officers are responsible for ensuring that their officers complete stop and search training as required by force policy.

- They should allocate training time and monitor completion levels.
- They should ensure that officers' learning is kept up to date as appropriate, and that additional learning is undertaken where there is a development need.
- Supervisors should also consider what additional action may be required at a local level to support the training, in order to maximise its impact.

Encourage promising practice and highlight development needs

Supervisors should aim to use monitoring and more proactive supervision to:

- identify and encourage promising practices
- highlight development needs
- identify where additional or closer supervisory support may be required

Monitor

Supervisors must monitor stop and search to ensure its use is appropriate, is lawful and complies fully with Code A. This should enable them to account for its use. The supervision of stop and search should not be viewed as a 'tick box exercise'. The nature, extent and frequency of this monitoring should be proportionate to local or force concerns.

Scrutinise stop and search records of all those supervised

Supervisors should scrutinise stop and search records to ensure:

- compliance with the recording requirements (is the record complete and are the grounds made out?)
- compliance, where applicable, with the BUSSS requirement to record whether or not anything was found, if it was linked to the reason for the stop and search, and the outcome of the stop and search

- accurate transfer of the record onto the relevant force data system
- that the written grounds are sufficiently detailed and reasonable (forces may require supervisors to check every stop and search form)
- compliance with Code A and other procedural requirements (for example, sex of search officer, appropriate referrals and safeguarding notifications being made for children and young people)
- consideration is given to whether there is any evidence that powers may have been used on the basis of stereotyped images or inappropriate generalisations

Analyse team and officer-level data

Supervisors should examine team- and officer-level data to understand trends and patterns in stop and search use, for example:

- the number of repeat (unsuccessful) searches of the same person
- the proportion of searches resulting in an arrest or other criminal justice outcome
- the proportion of searches based on information and intelligence, focused on force or local priorities, targeted towards active prolific offenders and/or carried out in recognised crime hot spots

Be proactive

Options for more proactive supervision that supervisors should consider include:

- reviewing body-worn video (BWV) footage of stop and search encounters (where available)
- directly observing stop and search encounters while on patrol
- listening into stop and search encounters over the radio
- debriefing stop and search encounters in person with individual officers while reviewing the stop and search record
- exploring complaints, or any other evidence of dissatisfaction, related to stop and search
- keeping their own records of search exposing intimate parts of the body (EIP) consultations – who, when and what the outcome of the consultation was (reasons and whether EIP search went ahead) – so that these can be cross-referenced to officer records

Respond

Supervisors must take timely and appropriate action if any concerns come to light about a team's or an officer's use of stop and search – for example, if an officer does not respond positively to additional support or breaches professional standards of behaviour.

- The appropriateness of the response will depend on the circumstances of each case.
- It may also be appropriate for supervisors to escalate concerns to a more senior officer, to take formal management action or to liaise with professional standards for them to consider disciplinary action.
- Supervisors should refer to the Code of Ethics, employment law and human resources policies and guidance when developing their response.

Record

Supervisors should also record:

- their monitoring activities
- any proactive supervision and associated follow-up in relation to team and officer use of stop and search
- any relevant outcomes of these activities

Tags

Stop and search