

Social media Q&A events on stop and search

A twice-yearly live Q&A event hosted on Surrey Police's Facebook group to encourage the public to learn about stop and search and the use of force.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Community engagement
Organisation	Surrey Police
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Surrey Police
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Region	South East
Partners	Police

Key details

Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2021
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities Families General public

Aim

- to enhance transparency and accountability within Surrey Police on the use of stop and search and use of force
- to monitor and analyse the use of these powers and practices
- to enable open communication between Surrey Police and the community
- to provide key information in accessible formats

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- increase in open discussions and engagement between the police and the public
- improved public trust and confidence in policing methods
- increased public participation towards the stop and search and use of force external scrutiny panel

Description

The Facebook group was created to enhance transparency and accountability within Surrey Police on the use of stop and search and use of force powers and practices. The intention is for the page to encourage the public to engage directly with the senior leads for stop and search and use of force.

Q&A event

Surrey Police host a twice-yearly live Q&A event on the force's official Facebook platform. The live events are scheduled for two hours in the evening, usually around 6pm to 8pm, and take place on a weekday evening between Monday and Thursday.

Facebook as a platform was chosen due to its widespread use, extensive reach, and the ability to facilitate real-time interaction. The group has over 4,000 members, and in conjunction with the linked Instagram account, the force can reach thousands more. One post for the event can have the reach of over 25,000 people and the event is promoted on other force social media platforms to further this reach.

Each live event is led by the following officers and members of police staff:

- chief superintendent strategic lead for stop and search
- superintendent for use of force
- sergeant who is the tactical lead for stop and search and use of force
- officer safety training team leader
- member from the corporate communications team to assist with the running of the event and managing the comments

This dedicated space enables Surrey Police to answer questions from the public and facilitate interactions and engagement. Promotional content for the event is created by the internal corporate communications team and includes posts on the force's website, Facebook group and other social media platforms. The events are advertised in advance to maximise awareness, engagement, and participation. Partner agencies and community leaders are also told in advance about the date of the live event.

Live event

The live event is structured to allow a broad range of questions to be addressed. Surrey Police take questions in advance so answers can be prepared, which helps with the flow of engagement. The force also prepares their own questions or topics for discussion to ensure that the event flows. The number of questions submitted in advance can range from a couple to over 20.

Members of the public also have the opportunity to ask questions during the live event by using the live chat. The force will have the latest data from Power BI to support their answers. Should a question be asked which requires more time to look up the data to provide an accurate answer, the force will find out the information and follow up with a post in the Facebook group.

Senior leaders from the stop and search and use of force portfolios, representatives from learning and development, and corporate communications are essential for the planning of the events. Their roles include providing up to date data and keeping a record of the questions asked and the answers provided.

The events are used to help the public understand police powers, the impact on the public, and the force's processes for monitoring and analysing instances of stop and search and use of force. They provide an opportunity for community engagement and help to build trust and confidence in policing methods. Information about joining the independent scrutiny panel is also provided during the event.

As part of the engagement on Facebook, Surrey Police upload an infographic of headline data for stop and search and use of force, which is updated quarterly.

Overall impact

The live Q&A events have enabled regular interaction and open discussions between Surrey Police and the public. This has improved engagement and interaction with communities, enabling stop and search and use of force practices to be more transparent to the public and Surrey Police to be held accountable.

Engagement has been good during the live events and on the Facebook page between events where Surrey Police can reiterate key messages and provide updates.

The events have shown the value of direct public engagement, providing additional opportunities for community interaction.

Learning

- Each event is reviewed to identify what worked well and what could be improved. Questions asked and answers given are recorded to help inform future sessions.
- By regularly hosting the live Q&A events, the force shows a commitment to maintaining transparency, building community relations, and ensuring accountable policing practices.
- Instagram is currently used to promote the Facebook event and take questions, but these must be shorter questions. Surrey Police are exploring different social media platforms to extend their reach to wider groups, for example exploring which platforms groups of different ages are most likely to use.
- It is important to effectively promote the event beforehand so that engagement and attendance is high. This is also important to give members of the public enough time to think and submit their questions before the event.
- The success of the event relies on multiple teams across Surrey Police being involved and working together. Teams are aware of their individual role and work coherently together so that the live events are planned and run smoothly.
- The dates of the live events are planned are carefully thought out. Consideration is taken for other events or announcements within Surrey Police, but also for the wider policing landscape.
- Transparency is important. If questions are asked which the force need to answer in slower time, it is important to ensure that answers are provided on the Facebook group, and they follow up with the person who asked the question directly.
- A summary of the event is posted within a couple of days using infographics to provide a summary of the topics discussed. This helps recap the discussion if members of the public were unable to attend.

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Tags

Stop and search Community engagement