

Stop and search panel - conducting safeguarding reviews for young people

A review process to ensure that appropriate safeguarding measures are considered for young people following a stop and search encounter.

First published

18 November 2025

Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Diversion Prevention
Topic	Operational policing Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	Bedfordshire Police
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Bedfordshire Police
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Key details

Partners	Police Community safety partnership Education Health services Local authority
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	July 2024
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people

Aim

The aim of the panel is to review the immediate and ongoing safeguarding requirements for all young people under the age of 18 who are stopped and searched, and to ensure that officers are safeguarding young people during and after a stop and search encounter.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the stop and search panel are to:

- raise awareness of officers' safeguarding responsibilities
- improve safeguarding actions during and post encounter
- increase the number of children and young people who are referred for multi-agency support

Description

Bedfordshire Police identified a need to review the force's safeguarding responsibilities for stop and search encounters. The review revealed there was a knowledge gap in the recording of encounters and the rationale for officers' decision making.

A digital change request was submitted to modify Tu-Serv (a digital recording platform) for stop and search. The request introduced the following mandatory questions for stop and search records:

- is the person searched a child (marked as yes based on age or date of birth) or a vulnerable person?
- what immediate safeguarding has been considered?
- whether a referral has been submitted to public protection unit (PPU) multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)?

Whilst the digital change was being completed, an interim process was introduced. All stop and search encounters relating to young persons under the age of 18 years were reviewed by the protecting vulnerable persons team. The team assessed whether immediate safeguarding measures had taken place and whether a referral should be submitted to the PPU or MASH.

Where safeguarding measures were missed, such as returning the child to a guardian, the team provided feedback to the officer and supervisor to embed learning. When organisational trends were identified, wider organisational learning was developed and delivered by the learning and development team. A continuing professional development (CPD) training package and safeguarding input for all officers launched in 2024.

The digital change was launched during the summer 2025 and now includes a mandated question on whether a child at risk form or vulnerable adult form has been completed. If the form has not been completed, the PPU conduct a review to determine if a safeguarding referral form should have been submitted. If a safeguarding opportunity has been missed or there is insufficient information, officers are provided with feedback, informing them of the missed opportunity to flag safeguarding concerns. When a safeguarding referral form is received, it is assessed by the protecting vulnerable persons team to ensure that there is sufficient and relevant information.

A further digital change request has been submitted for a mandatory question to be included which captures the initial safeguarding steps officers have completed post search. It is anticipated that this will be launched in early 2026.

An amendment has also been made to the supervisor body-worn video (BWV) review process. Sergeants are required to provide a written assessment as part of their review, outlining whether appropriate initial safeguarding has been delivered. Where immediate safeguarding has not been met, feedback is provided to officers to ensure they receive learning opportunities.

If a young person is identified as being at risk of future harm, they are referred to children and young people's board. The multi-agency board includes representation from:

- Bedfordshire Police
- local authorities
- National Health Service (NHS)
- education
- social services

The aim of the meeting is to reduce the likelihood of young persons coming to harm from crime or exploitation. During the meeting, the board discusses individual cases where young people have been subjected to a stop and search encounter. After the meeting, where appropriate the discussions are shared with the force's stop and search team.

There is no cost for the development and delivery of the reviews of young people stop and search encounters.

Evaluation

An evaluation is being conducted by Bedfordshire Police, which launched in January 2025 and is ongoing.

The evaluation is looking at:

- the volume of safeguarding referrals submitted post stop and search encounters
- whether officers who have received developmental feedback subsequently improve their approach to safeguarding

In April 2025, quantitative and qualitative analysis was undertaken around the number of completed safeguarding referral forms. The analysis also looks at the quality of the information recorded on the forms and whether there has been a reduction in harm towards young people.

Overall impact

During the period of January 2024 to April 2025, the following number of referrals to the children and young people's board were completed by PPU:

- January – February 2024: nine
- March 2024: 21
- April 2024: 24
- January – February 2025: six
- March 2025: eight
- April 2025: nine

During the same period, the following number of officers were provided with feedback:

- January – February 2024: 29
- March 2024: 14
- April 2024: No data
- January 2025: one
- February 2025: one
- March 2025: none
- April 2025: none

Since May 2025, there have been 188 supervisory reviews conducted by sergeants.

The number of feedback issued to officers and referrals completed by PPU has reduced, reflecting a decrease in the number of missed safeguarding opportunities. There has also been an improved understanding of safeguarding responsibilities amongst frontline officers.

The digital change to mandate the question set around immediate safeguarding, and submission of child at risk referral forms is being delivered across Bedfordshire Police, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, and Hertfordshire Constabulary.

Learning

- Timeliness for digital change – it has taken over a year for the change on the digital platform to be implemented. If a digital element is critical to delivery, it must be factored into the planning and delivery time.

- Consulting with subject matter experts – early in the process, staff from the PPU were involved in how the interim solution could be delivered and how staff could be developed to improve force confidence.

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