

Safeguarding reviews for young people's stop and search encounters

A process to review every stop and search encounter involving a child in West Yorkshire to identify any missed risks and ensure that appropriate safeguarding interventions are implemented, leading to the best outcome for the child.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Diversion Prevention
Topic	Crime prevention Operational policing Vulnerability and safeguarding
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Key details

Partners	Police Education Local authority Private sector Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	April 2025
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people

Aim

The review process aims to:

- establish a consistent approach to safeguarding young people following stop and search encounters
- ensure no safeguarding concerns are missed by conducting post-encounter reviews of all young people-related stop and search incidents by specialist departments such as early action (EA) teams
- facilitate interventions at the earliest opportunity by signposting young people and families to the most appropriate support services
- enhance frontline activities by providing officers with feedback and development opportunities to improve their ability to identify young people at risk

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- increase the number of safeguarding interventions following stop and search encounters involving young people to ensure timely support and mitigate risks
- enhance EA engagement with more intervention work offered to young people and families identified through stop and search reviews
- improve the communication with parents and guardians to ensure that they are informed and involved following a young person's stop and search encounter
- increase the use of public protection notices (PPNs) where appropriate, enhancing information sharing with police and partner agencies
- provide a long-term reduction in repeat police contact with young people, as a result of effective early intervention and multi-agency support

Description

West Yorkshire Police were keen to improve the safeguarding of young people who came into contact with police through stop and search encounters. The commitment to safeguarding young people was prompted by:

- internal recognition of inconsistent safeguarding practices following young people's stop and search incidents
- findings from the 2024 Children's Commissioner's report - Strip Searching of Children in England and Wales, which highlighted national concerns around safeguarding standards
- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)'s focus on safeguarding interventions of young people during stop and search encounters

While the force does not mandate a PPN for every stop and search, it is required in the following specific circumstances:

- if a child under the age of 10 years is searched
- if a child is subject to an exposure of intimate part (EIP) search

During all other young person stop and search encounters, officers are expected to apply a risk-based approach, using their judgment to determine whether to use a PPN or another safeguarding action.

West Yorkshire Police recognised that opportunities to safeguard children were being missed because of inconsistent decision-making and recording.

They also recognised that a mandatory approach for PPNs after each encounter would be counterproductive and potentially:

- dilute the value of PPNs with low-risk or irrelevant submissions
- overburden partner agencies, causing strained relationships
- discourage officers from using stop and search powers because of the added bureaucracy

The initiative to strengthen safeguarding measures for young people was led by the chief inspector responsible for stop and search.

The first phase of the review process focused on identifying the most effective and proportionate approach to improving safeguarding outcomes. Three options were considered:

- mandating the submission of PPNs for every young person stop and search encounter
- maintaining the existing process that relied on officer discretion and a risk-based approach
- the EA team developing a triage process for all young person stop and search encounters

Following a consultation with the local policing team, safeguarding governance and district leadership teams, it was decided that the EA teams would develop a triage process.

EA teams are embedded within in each of West Yorkshire's five policing districts. These teams specialise in identifying and supporting young people at risk of criminal exploitation, inappropriate associations, or emerging harmful behaviours.

The first step of the implementation process involved an analysis of West Yorkshire Police's stop and search data, to understand the volume and distribution of child encounters. Two districts were selected for the pilot based on contrasting levels of stop and search activity:

- Bradford (high volume)
- Wakefield (lower volume)

Partnership leads in both districts were responsible for the oversight and governance of the EA teams.

A daily export of young people stop and search data was generated using a Power BI dashboard and shared with the EA teams to review and triage. This enabled timely assessment of each encounter and the identification of any safeguarding concerns requiring a follow-up.

The pilot was delivered over a four-month period, using a phased approach with Bradford launching in April 2025 and Wakefield in June 2025. The phased rollout allowed for a comparative analysis and learning across different the operational contexts.

A daily review process was developed to ensure safeguarding opportunities were maximised following young people's stop and search encounters. The review process included the following steps.

- Review all young people's stop and search encounters – the EA Teams reviewed every young person's stop and search encounter within their district. The frequency of reviews was tailored to local demand, daily in high-volume areas and on an ad-hoc basis in lower-volume districts.
- Contextual risk assessment - each case was assessed holistically, considering intelligence, prior police contact, the circumstances of the stop, and the outcome.
- Determining appropriate interventions - this involved:
 - issuing parental notification based on risk and allowing the family or guardian an opportunity to engage with the EA teams
 - offering support to parents and guardians through EA or partner agencies
 - offering bespoke interventions, including one-to-one work with the child and family, this work varies on a case-by-case basis, dependent on the needs of the individual
 - referral to social care via a PPN where safeguarding thresholds were met
- Officer notification and learning – when a PPN was required, the searching officer and their supervisor were informed via email. As part of this response, EA teams provided tailored feedback to support learning and improve future risk identification.
- Audit and impact monitoring – an action tracker ensured accountability, monitored PPN submissions, and enabled the force to assess the impact on young people's families, as well as service demand.

After the four-month pilot, the initiative was rolled out force-wide in September 2025, with no additional funding required.

Evaluation

West Yorkshire Police conducted an evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the pilot in improving safeguarding outcomes for children following stop and search encounters.

The evaluation criteria included:

- whether the searching officer submitted a PPN
- whether the child was suitable for an EA intervention
- whether a PPN was required based on the circumstances
- whether feedback or development was provided to the searching officer

The methodology included:

- determining if each child stop and search encounter was reviewed by an EA officer
- reviewing stop and search decisions using a decision-making flowchart
- tracking actions and feedback loops, particularly where PPNs were required and learning was shared with officers

The evaluation findings were presented as a verbal briefing to the chief officer team (COT) lead and senior leadership stakeholders.

The presentation included:

- quantitative data collected throughout the pilot period
- qualitative case studies highlighting the impact of EA interventions
- operational insights from the pilot districts (Bradford and Wakefield)

This presentation enabled the COT lead to make an informed decision regarding the future of the process. Following the evaluation, the process was embedded force-wide from September 2025, ensuring a consistent and effective safeguarding response across all districts.

Overall impact

During the pilot phase in Bradford and Wakefield:

- 444 child stop and search encounters have been reviewed
- 208 additional PPNs were identified as necessary but not submitted at the time of the incident

- multiple one-to-one interventions were delivered by EA teams, which have provided positive outcomes for individual children and families
- 139 child stop and search encounters have been reviewed

82 cases have been identified as requiring a PPN:

- 30 PPNs had already been submitted by officers at the time of the incident
- 52 PPNs of those have been identified retrospectively and requested, 26 of the 52 have since been completed by officers

Main outcomes

- Frontline officers and supervisors have received tailored feedback and learning to improve future safeguarding practice.
- Positive feedback has been received from both EA teams and frontline officers, highlighting the alignment with existing workstreams.
- The stop and search review process is receiving support from the Stop and Search and EA portfolios.

Learning

What went well

- Process integration - the safeguarding review process aligned naturally with the remit and skillset of EA teams. This has ensured the straightforward implementation of the review process.
- Consistency achieved - a consistent approach to reviewing child stop and search encounters has been established across districts with relative ease.

Challenges

- EA team capacity – the varying demands across the districts have impacted the frequency and speed of reviews.
- Officer compliance with PPN submissions - initially, there were delays in officers completing PPNs when requested by EA teams. This has been resolved by implementing an automated system to improve compliance and accountability. The local policing portfolio is responsible for overseeing and running the system.

- Balancing flexibility and standardisation - flexibility has been built into the process to allow districts to operate within their capacity while maintaining core standards.

Identified challenges

- Resource limitations - the capacity of EA teams remains a limiting factor. To mitigate the issue, a working group has been established to provide clear communication and a flexible delivery model to manage workload.

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