

Hertfordshire Independent Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel

Annual Report 2025/26

Police and Crime Commissioner's foreword

As Police and Crime Commissioner, it is my role to scrutinise police performance and represent the views of the public. Independent scrutiny plays an important role in supporting me in this duty, while also maintaining public confidence in the fair and appropriate use of police powers.

Stop and search is an important policing tool. Used effectively, it prevents and disrupts crime, removes weapons and drugs from our communities, and keeps people safe. However, it is also an intrusive power and must always be used in a fair, justified and proportionate way.

Nationally, the use of stop and search has been declining and so I welcome the fact that Hertfordshire Constabulary has increased the use of this important power by 15% over the last year. Importantly, that increase has not come at the cost of quality of searches and the positive outcome rate has increased, demonstrating the increasing effectiveness of the use of the powers.

The Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel provide valuable assurance that these powers are being used appropriately across Hertfordshire. During 2025/26, this work has continued, and I am pleased that the Panel remains confident in the use of stop and search powers by police officers. Most of the records reviewed by the Panel were assessed as demonstrating good or excellent practice.

The Panel's work also plays an important role in promoting transparency and openness of policing activity. The involvement of independent community members ensures that a range of perspectives are reflected, helping to build trust between the public and the police.

Where the Panel identifies areas for improvement, this feedback is consistently shared with the Constabulary. A well-established feedback process is in place, ensuring that the Panel's insights support continuous improvement in police practice, training and standards. As such the Panel is recognised as a trusted and constructive voice within the Constabulary.

I would like to thank all Panel members for their time and commitment to this important work. In the year ahead, I look forward to continuing to work with them to maintain a strong focus on fairness and community confidence, as they support me in my role as Police and Crime Commissioner.

Jonathan Ash-Edwards

Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire

Chair's foreword

It is my privilege once again to present the Annual Report of the Hertfordshire Independent Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel to the people of Hertfordshire. This has been another important year for independent scrutiny in Hertfordshire. National conversations about trust, fairness and confidence in policing continue to shape public expectations, and in that context visible, credible and community-rooted scrutiny remains essential. Stop and search remains a valuable policing tool, but it is also an intrusive power and must always be used lawfully, fairly and proportionately. That is why strong independent oversight matters.

The Panel provides independent community oversight on behalf of the public. Members review stop and search records, body-worn video footage, disproportionality data and wider trends to assess whether powers are being used fairly, ethically and proportionately. Through this work, the Panel identifies good practice, challenges areas for improvement, and supports accountability and public confidence.

Alongside targeted thematic reviews, the Panel continues to use random dip-sampling of records and body-worn video footage to help ensure scrutiny remains impartial, representative and free from selective filtering.

The Panel has continued to mature as a body of scrutiny. Stability in membership has enabled volunteers to develop confidence, expertise and consistency in their approach. I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to all Panel members for the commitment, professionalism and diligence they continue to demonstrate. The work is detailed, demanding and entirely voluntary. The integrity and quality of the Panel's work continue to receive wider recognition. Senior officers from Hertfordshire Constabulary attend meetings regularly and engage positively and professionally with scrutiny, reinforcing the value of meaningful independent oversight.

The relationship between the Panel and the Constabulary has continued to develop positively. Independent scrutiny should never be confused with hostility towards policing. Our role is to act as a constructive critical friend. The Constabulary's willingness to engage openly with scrutiny and feedback has helped strengthen both accountability and professional standards across the force.

At the same time, significant challenges remain. Disproportionality in stop and search continues to be a serious issue both locally and nationally. Research by the University of Hertfordshire found that Black people in Hertfordshire remain more than three times as likely to be stopped and searched as White people, with people from mixed ethnicity backgrounds also disproportionately affected. The research also identified areas where continued scrutiny is needed in relation to outcomes, perceptions and possible discrimination. These issues must continue to be examined carefully and objectively.

The Panel continues to work closely with the OPCC and Constabulary through scrutiny and data subgroup processes to better understand the drivers of disproportionality. This remains a complex issue, shaped by factors including demographics, vulnerability, criminal exploitation, social conditions, policing demand and community trust. That is why scrutiny must remain rigorous, evidence-led and independent.

Whilst longstanding concerns around ethnic disproportionality, particularly affecting Black communities, rightly remain a major focus, the Panel has also begun reflecting on whether wider socio-economic disadvantage and social exclusion may shape stop and search encounters across a broader range of communities.

Another ongoing challenge is public awareness and participation. Despite the significance of this work, independent scrutiny remains relatively unknown to many residents across Hertfordshire. As I have said previously, it remains one of Hertfordshire's best-kept secrets. Too few people are aware that ordinary members of the public are directly involved in scrutinising police powers in this way.

We continue to encourage broader participation, particularly from younger people and communities whose voices are often underrepresented. The challenge for the future is to widen participation whilst preserving the quality, professionalism and credibility of scrutiny.

During 2025/26, the Panel scrutinised fewer records than in the previous reporting year, reflecting the reduction in scrutiny meetings and the reduced opportunities for review. Effective scrutiny must remain visibly independent, community-rooted and capable of providing robust challenge where necessary. Ultimately, policing in the United Kingdom depends not simply upon powers, but upon legitimacy. Legitimacy, in turn, depends upon public trust. Independent scrutiny plays an important role in sustaining that trust.

On behalf of the Panel, I would like to thank the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for their continued support, Hertfordshire Constabulary for their openness and professionalism, and most importantly the volunteer Panel members who continue to give their time in service of the wider community.

I would also encourage any resident with an interest in accountability, fairness, policing, or public service to find out more about the work of the Panel and consider getting involved. Independent scrutiny works best when it genuinely reflects the communities it serves.

Demitrius Nurse

Chair

Hertfordshire Independent Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel

Hertfordshire Constabulary foreword

As the senior officer responsible for overseeing how police officers in Hertfordshire use their stop and search powers, I am delighted to take on this role and to build on the strong work already delivered. It is fantastic to see the positive partnership between the Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel and the Constabulary continue to develop over the last 12 months.

Stop and search remains an important power. It takes weapons off the street, tackles crime and helps keep the people of Hertfordshire safe. I am also pleased to highlight our strong and improving conversion rate for stop and search, demonstrating that our use of the power is increasingly targeted and effective. However, we recognise that policing has not always used these powers fairly or appropriately, which can undermine both their legitimacy and public confidence, particularly where disproportionality exists and is not clearly explained.

To ensure we are addressing this, all stop searches involving members of Black communities in areas of disproportionality are now subject to additional scrutiny, with oversight from Hertfordshire's Black and Asian Police Association and our Positive Action Team. This provides a further layer of independent and informed review, helping us to continuously challenge and improve our approach. We are also exploring opportunities to work with academic partners to strengthen our understanding, bring external insight, and support our ongoing focus on fairness and legitimacy.

In addition, we continue to expand the role of the public in scrutinising our use of powers. Community members are now invited to review our use of Section 60 authorities, and we are offering opportunities for them to observe, and in some cases participate in officer training. This openness is an important step in building trust, improving understanding, and ensuring our officers are using these powers in a way that is both effective and fair.

It remains encouraging that the Panel is broadly confident in our use of the power based on the searches and body-worn video it has reviewed. Where concerns are identified, we work closely with the Panel, officers and supervisors to improve performance and make changes to training, policy and processes where required.

As in previous years, I have continued to encourage frontline officers and supervisors to attend Panel meetings. This provides valuable operational context for Panel members, whilst also ensuring that officers understand the Panel's role and can share that insight with colleagues.

I am also pleased that the Panel Chair and Vice Chair continue to attend the Police Powers Board, where strategic decisions on police powers are made. Their presence

ensures the Panel's voice is heard at the highest level and contributes directly to improving our overall approach.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone involved in making the Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel such a success. I am sincerely grateful to the volunteers who give their time as critical friends and help hold us to account. I look forward to continuing this important work together over the coming year.

Chief Superintendent Luke Mooney
Chair of Hertfordshire Constabulary's Police Powers Board

Contents

Executive summary	7
Introduction	7
Panel membership and leadership	8
Stop and searches in Hertfordshire	10
Independent scrutiny of stop searches	12
Conclusion	16

Executive summary

This report sets out the work of the Hertfordshire Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel between April 2025 and March 2026.

- Hertfordshire Constabulary conducted 7,735 stop and searches, a 15% increase on the previous year. The arrest rate was 19.4% and the overall positive outcome rate was 40%.
- Of the stop and searches conducted in 2025/26, the object of the search in over half of cases (55%) was drug-related.
- Young people aged 15 to 24 and males continue to make up the largest proportion of those stopped. Whilst white individuals account for the highest number of stop and searches overall, Black individuals are stopped at the highest rate per 1,000 population. These patterns align with national trends.
- In 2025/26, the Panel scrutinised 182 records, including written records, body-worn video, strip searches and Section 60s.
- Of the records scrutinised, 79% of cases were graded as good or excellent practice. The Panel noted improvements in the quality of written grounds, with clearer links between intelligence and officer decision making.
- A smaller proportion of records scrutinised (21%) raised concerns for the Panel. This was due to unclear grounds, insufficient detail, and the use of generic or copied text in a small number of cases.

Looking ahead, the Panel will strengthen its data-led and focused approach to scrutiny, with a continued emphasis on fairness and transparency. In 2026/27, the Panel will prioritise improving efficiency, increasing representation, and ensuring that young people's voices are reflected in oversight. This will be supported by re-establishing a data subgroup, delivering targeted youth scrutiny sessions, rebalancing meeting structures to prioritise scrutiny, and enhancing communications to broaden participation.

Introduction

Hertfordshire's Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel was established by the Police and Crime Commissioner in 2015 to provide an independent view on the use of stop and search powers across the county. For more than a decade, the Panel has played an important role in supporting the Commissioner to fulfil statutory responsibilities and to hold the Chief Constable to account.

The Panel reviews a sample of stop and search cases from across Hertfordshire to assess whether these powers are being used fairly, proportionately and lawfully. This scrutiny helps to identify good practice, highlight areas where improvements can be made, and provide assurance to the public that stop and search powers are being applied appropriately. The Panel is made up of a dedicated group of volunteers who live, work, or study in Hertfordshire, ensuring that community perspectives are represented in the scrutiny process.

The Panel's work forms part of a wider framework of oversight of stop and search. The Constabulary's Police Powers Board provides strategic oversight of the use of police powers and is attended by the Chairs of the scrutiny panels. In addition, the Constabulary's Operational Strategy Team undertakes internal dip-sampling of stop and search records, while supervisors regularly review officers' encounters, including body-worn video and recorded grounds for searches. Together, these arrangements provide a comprehensive and robust approach to the scrutiny of stop and search in Hertfordshire.

This report summarises the work of the Panel between April 2025 and March 2026, reflecting on progress made over the year and identifying areas where further improvement is needed. The report aims to provide transparency on the use of stop and search powers, highlight trends over the year, and support ongoing improvement in policing practice.

Panel membership and leadership

The Panel's work has continued to benefit from consistency in leadership and membership this year. Demitrius Nurse has served as Chair of the Panel for three years, with Mohammad Islam Ruman as Vice Chair.

As of May 2026, the Panel has a total membership of 21 members, all of whom live, work or study in Hertfordshire. Over the course of the year, two members have left the Panel, and two new members have joined. The Panel's diversity by ethnicity has improved since last year, but there is more progress to be made:

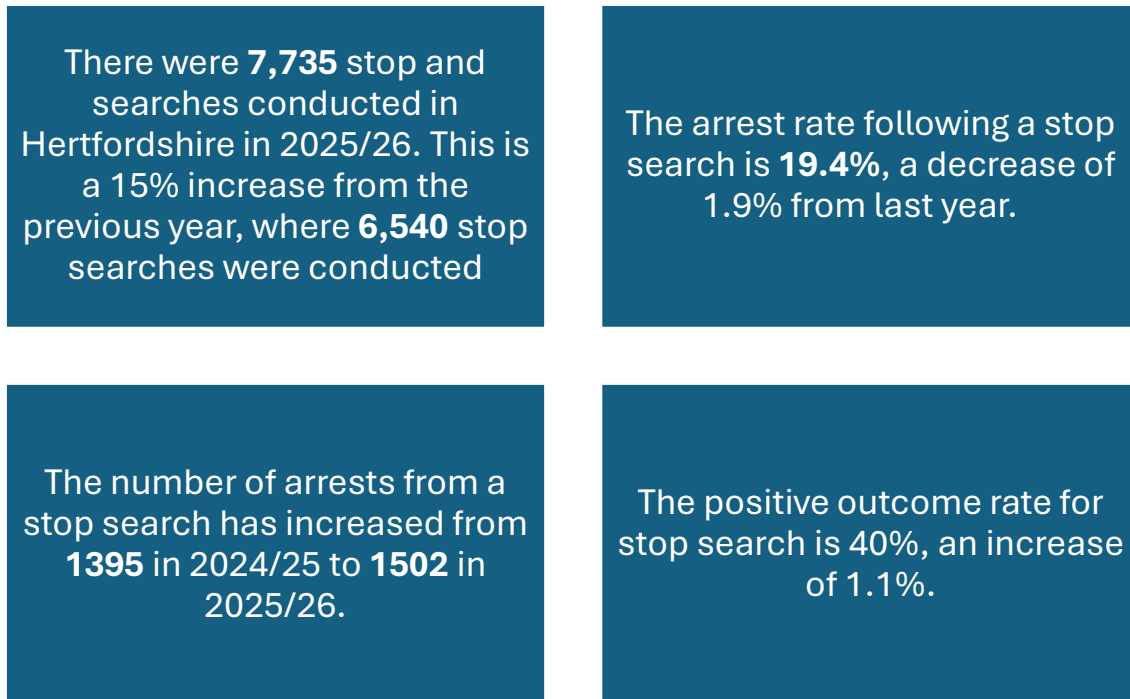
Category	Panel Membership
Gender	
Female	28.6%
Male	71.4%
Age	
18-24	0%
25-39	0%
40-54	23.8%
55-70	38.1%
70+	38.1%
Self-defined Ethnicity	
White	71.43%
Asian/Asian British	9.5%
Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups	9.5%
Black, Black British, Caribbean, or African	9.5%
Other Ethnic Group	0%

The OPCC has continued to strengthen its level of engagement with the Constabulary's Race Inclusion Board (RIB), which scrutinises the Constabulary's implementation of the Police Race Action Plan. As part of this, a workshop was delivered for RIB members to support greater diversity within the Panel. This year, to promote engagement with young people, members of the police cadets also attended Panel meetings.

Stop and searches in Hertfordshire

This year, Hertfordshire Constabulary conducted 7,735 stop and searches. The arrest rate was 19.4%, a decrease of 1.9% from the previous year. This decrease is attributed to the increased use of out of court resolutions across the force.

Figure 1: Stop and search in numbers



Of the stop and searches conducted in 2025/26, the object of the search in over half of cases (55%) was drug-related. A further 22% of stop and searches related to individuals carrying items with the intent to use them to commit crime or cause harm, and 16% related to offensive weapons.

Stop and searches by district

In 2025/26, St Albans district recorded the highest number of stop searches, followed by Watford and Stevenage. Three Rivers recorded the lowest number of stop searches.

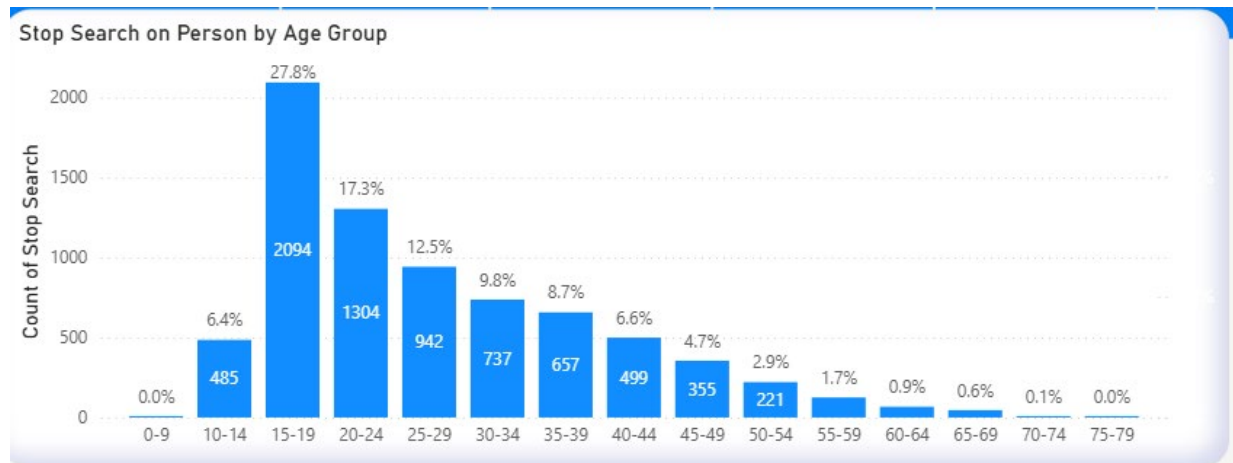
Figure 2: Stop and search by CSP (2025/26)



Stop and search by age, gender and ethnicity

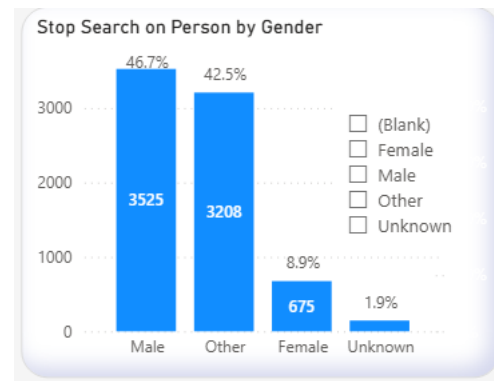
Young people aged 15 to 24 account for the largest proportion of stop and searches in Hertfordshire, representing 45% of all records.

Figure 2: Stop and Search by age (2025-26)



Males account for the largest recorded proportion of stop and searches at 46.7%, while the high 'Other' category is likely to reflect a recording issue.

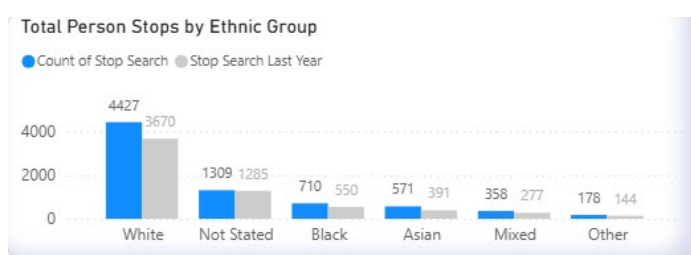
Figure 4: Stop and Search by gender (2025-26)



Data shows that the highest number of stop and searches in Hertfordshire are carried out on White individuals, with **4,427 searches** involving White people during 2025/26.

However, when the figures are adjusted for population size, a different pattern emerges. Black individuals have the highest stop and search rate at **15.8 per 1,000 population**, which shows that they are more likely to be stopped and searched than other groups.

Figure 5: Stop and search by ethnic group (2025/26)



These patterns are consistent with wider national trends across England and Wales, where stop and search is more commonly used on younger males and where Black individuals are disproportionately more likely to be stopped.

As stop and search is concentrated among younger age groups, further age-based analysis would provide a more detailed understanding of disproportionality. The Panel will continue to monitor this closely as part of its ongoing scrutiny work.

Independent scrutiny of stop searches

When scrutinising stop and search, the Panel reviews a representative sample of cases to assess the lawfulness, proportionality and quality of police practice. At each meeting, the Panel reviews:

- A sample of written stop and search records
- A sample of body-worn video footage
- All records relating to strip searches involving under 18s
- A review of any Section 60s

Panel members are responsible for reviewing the records to identify any areas of concern or risk, as well as examples of good practice. Following discussion, panel members reach a collective judgement on each case, assigning a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating, which reflects the overall quality of the encounter. This grading ranges from:

- Green (excellent/good practice)
- Amber (Not confident with areas for improvement)
- Red (serious concerns identified)

The Panel's assessment of records is then shared with the appropriate District Inspector as feedback to their officers. A copy of the feedback loop can be found in Appendix A.

During 2025/26, changes were introduced to how feedback from panel members is recorded. This involved moving to a more automated system, enabling feedback to be captured more efficiently and shared directly with the Constabulary. This change has streamlined the process, improved the timeliness of feedback, and strengthened the ability to support organisational learning and continuous improvement in stop and search practice.

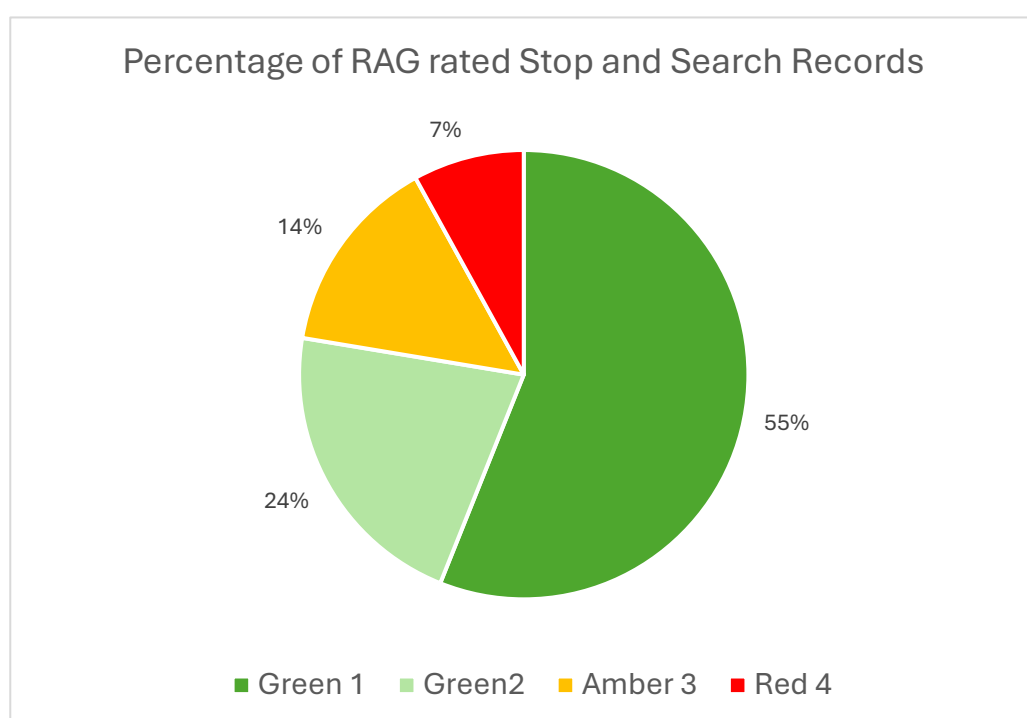
Findings from scrutiny

In 2025/26, the Panel scrutinised **182** stop and search records in Hertfordshire. This includes written records, body-worn video, strip searches and Section 60s. Of the records scrutinised, 4 related to a strip search of an under 18 and 2 related to a Section 60.

The number of records scrutinised has reduced compared with the previous year, when 496 records were reviewed. This decrease is primarily due to the change in frequency from monthly meetings to meetings held every two months. During the year, six scrutiny Panel meetings were held, each lasting three hours, compared with twelve in the previous year. While there were fewer meetings, each session included a broader agenda with more items to cover. As a result, less time was available for detailed scrutiny of individual records. This approach is currently under review, and work is underway to improve efficiency and increase the number of records that can be scrutinised within the available time.

Record type	Total number of records scrutinised in 2025/26	% of total records scrutinised
Written record	154	85%
body-worn video footage	28	15%

Overall, **79%** of records scrutinised received a 'green' grading meaning that the record demonstrated excellent or good practice.



Over half of records (55%) scrutinised by the Panel in 2025/26 were rated as excellent, and 24% were rated as satisfactory.

Feedback from the Panel indicates that there has been a noticeable improvement in the articulation of reasonable grounds, with many written records demonstrating a clear link between intelligence, observed behaviour and the decision to conduct a search. The Panel continues to recognise and highlight examples of good practice as part of its scrutiny.

Case study of a record that was graded as excellent (written record)

Reason for Stop: Police were made aware of three teenagers entering an abandoned building by a private security company who were watching on CCTV. On police arrival, three females were seen to attempt to run away from this building. Females were stuck inside the fenced area of abandoned building, aided over the fence by police and detained under S1 PACE.

Description: Only description given was youth / teenager, DP matched this description as appeared approx. 16yrs old

Grounds: DP was matching description given by security, in an abandoned building which clearly stated no access for public. DP also attempted to run away from police.

Group Association: All youths in the group detained.

Suspected Item: Object of search was any articles relating to or to facilitate burglary / theft

Panel grading: Green 1 – Excellent

Panel feedback: Clear, well described and justified stop

A smaller proportion of records scrutinised (21%) raised concerns for the Panel, with **14% graded Amber** and **7% graded Red**, indicating more serious issues.

The key themes within these cases remain broadly consistent with those identified previously. The Panel found that some records did not clearly justify the reason for the search, with decisions sometimes based on limited information or without sufficient supporting detail. There were also instances where records lacked clarity or detail, and where assumptions appeared to be made rather than evidence clearly set out.

In addition, the Panel continued to identify concerns around the use of generic or copied text within records, which reduces clarity and confidence.

A further theme identified this year was the lack of clear explanation in cases involving multiple individuals, where it was not always clear why each person was searched or who in a group was subject to the search. This issue was particularly evident in cases involving young people under the age of 18.

Case study of a record that was graded as a serious concern (written record)

Mobile patrol. Secluded car park in darkness with little light...in a known hotspot for drug taking and supply. One male and female sat in darkness on the floor near to a large fallen tree. Neither person stood up or verbally engaged with officers as approached and despite lights being shone in their direction from a marked police vehicle. There was a faint smell of cannabis near to where the couple were sat and both persons pupils were dilated when spoken to raising the suspicion that they may have been smoking cannabis and still be in possession of.

Panel grading: Red 4 – serious concern

Panel feedback: Location is stated unknown- why? Grounds appear to be based on 'faint' smell of cannabis- insufficient grounds for stop.

Strip searches

In 2025/26, the Panel scrutinised **4** records that involved a strip search of an under 18-year-old. Only one record was flagged as a serious concern. In this case, the Panel felt that the justification for escalating to a strip search was not clearly articulated. An officer present in the meeting set out the rationale for the strip search, which the Panel accepted but stated that this needed to be more clearly set out in the written record.

Whilst the number of strip searches recorded in Hertfordshire is low, the Panel will continue to provide scrutiny over these cases to ensure clear justification and robust safeguarding in every case.

Section 60

In 2018, the Panel began reviewing Section 60 authorisations. Officers searching under Section 60 are not required to provide reasonable grounds for individual searches and therefore, there is no requirement for the Panel to scrutinise individual grounds.

Across the records reviewed by the Panel this year, the use of Section 60 powers was limited, with only **2** recorded cases. Both cases were graded as excellent. The Panel noted that the records reviewed demonstrated that authorisations were supported by an identifiable operational context, and that the rationale for using Section 60 powers was clearly articulated and aligned with the legislative threshold.

Conclusion

This report demonstrates that the Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel continue to play an important role in supporting transparency, accountability and public confidence in Hertfordshire.

The Panel remains broadly confident that stop and search powers in Hertfordshire are being used appropriately and fairly in the majority of cases. Evidence of improved practice, particularly in written grounds, reflects the positive impact of ongoing scrutiny and feedback. At the same time, the Panel has identified clear areas for improvement, including the need for more consistent detail and clearer justification.

Disproportionality remains an important issue. While the patterns seen in Hertfordshire reflect national trends, continued scrutiny and analysis will be essential to understand and address these differences.

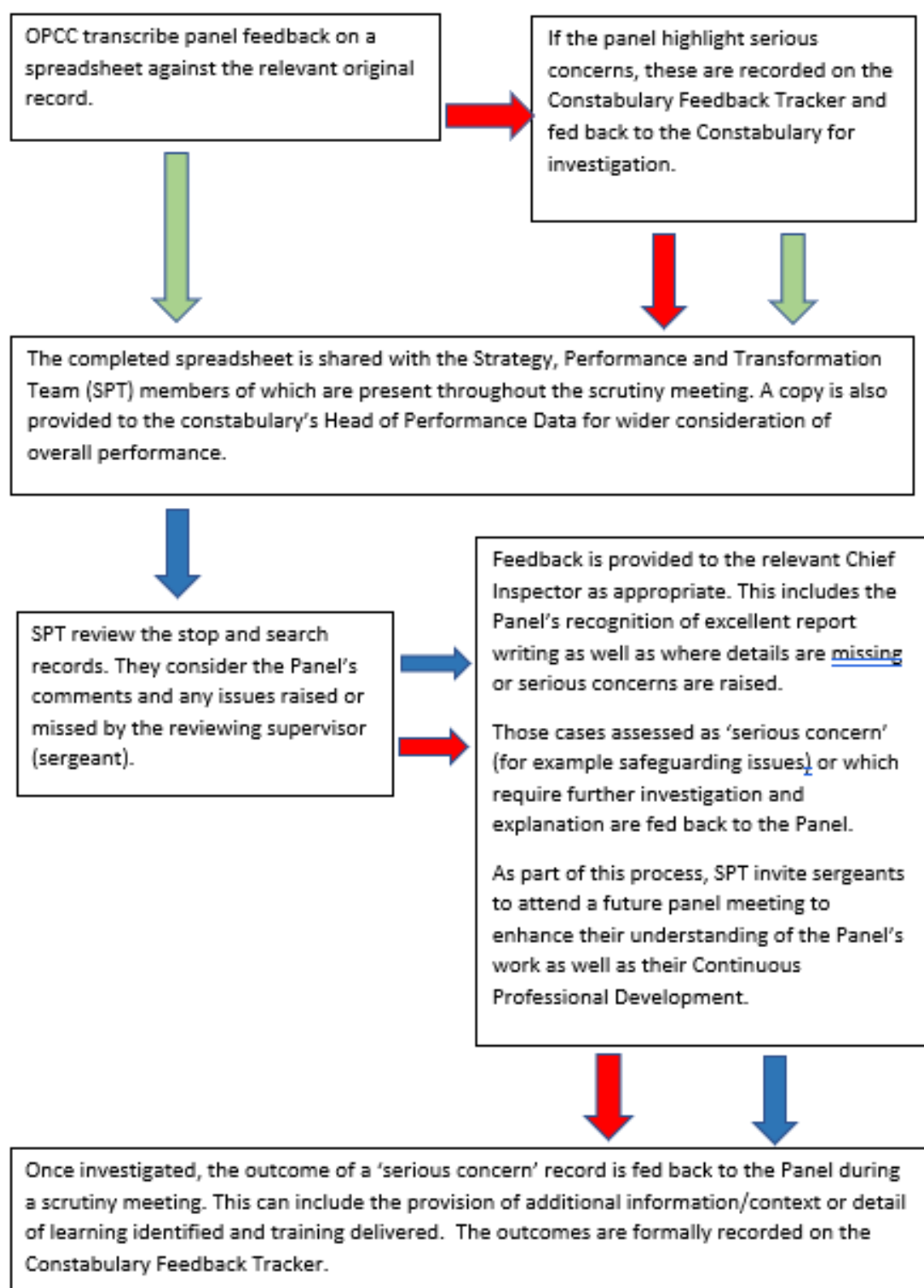
The strength of the Panel lies in its independence and its ability to provide constructive challenge. Through a well-established feedback process, its work continues to influence policing practice and support continuous improvement.

Looking ahead, the Panel will continue to strengthen its data-led approach to scrutiny, maintain a focus on fairness, proportionality and transparency, and support efforts to improve community confidence and engagement in the use of police powers. To achieve this, we will prioritise the following actions in 2026/27:

- Re-establish a data subgroup working across both panels to identify trends and support more targeted, focused scrutiny.
- Work with the PCC's Youth Commission and the Constabulary's Youth Race Inclusion Board to deliver youth-focused scrutiny sessions, ensuring young people's voices inform the process.
- Rebalance meeting structures to prioritise scrutiny time, including introducing a more formal cycle of meetings covering the data subgroup, Panel meetings and joint sessions to share updates more efficiently.
- Develop more targeted communications to increase both the diversity and number of volunteers on scrutiny panels.

Appendix A – Feedback loop

Scrutiny Feedback Loop



Appendix B – RAG grading systems for written records and body worn video

Written Record	
EXCELLENT <i>The grounds for the stop and search were evidenced and clear.</i>	Panel members were able to make a straightforward judgement. The written report evidenced the grounds and the officer's decision making and justification were clear.
SATISFACTORY <i>The grounds for the stop and search were correctly applied. However, the report would benefit from clarification.</i>	The correct use of stop and search has been applied but the report would benefit from minor clarification*. Panel members should note what this is on the feedback form. * For example, timeline of events, descriptions of the person searched, proximity of people stopped to location
NOT CONFIDENT <i>Panel members understand why stop and search was used but the report does not fully justify the search.</i>	Panel members were unclear how the report related to the individual who has been stopped and searched and/or key information is missing*. Panel members should note the missing information on the feedback form. * For example, how the detained person matches the intelligence received
SERIOUS CONCERNS <i>There were no clear grounds for the stop and search.</i>	The written report does not contain the justification required for the stop and search.

Body Worn Video	
EXCELLENT <i>The officer issued GOWISELY clearly and appropriately. They always acted with professionalism. The footage reflects the written grounds.</i>	Panel members were able to make a straightforward judgement. The officer acted with professionalism and always treated the detained person with dignity. The footage reflects the written grounds.
SATISFACTORY <i>The officer issued GOWISELY appropriately. They acted with professionalism. The footage reflects the written grounds. However, the interaction could have been improved.</i>	The footage reflects the written grounds. The officer has behaved professionally but would benefit from minor improvement*. Panel members should note what this is on the feedback form. * For example, they rushed through GOWISELY or one part of GOWISELY was not clearly heard.
NOT CONFIDENT <i>Panel members understand why stop and search was used but the written record only partially reflects the footage.</i>	The footage only partially reflects the written grounds. Panel members agreed that the interaction would have been satisfactory but have minor concerns around the language* or behaviour used by the officer. Panel members should note this on the feedback form. *For example, unnecessary swearing.
SERIOUS CONCERNS <i>There were no clear grounds for the stop search and/or the officer's professionalism was of serious concern.</i>	The footage does not reflect the written grounds. Panel members have serious concerns about the search and/or the officer's professionalism.