

Case 1 | Issue 38 – Roads policing

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THE LESSONS**✉ learning@policeconduct.gov.uk🌐 www.policeconduct.gov.uk/learning-the-lessons**High speed cross-border pursuit***Pursuit covering three force areas on a motorway, raising issues about:*

- *Authorising pursuits*
- *Driving in a manner which mitigates risk*
- *Patching radio channels and handing over control of a pursuit*

This case is relevant to the following areas:

Roads policing**Overview of incident**

Ms A was a police operator working in the force control room at Force A. Ms A received a 999 call reporting an attempted burglary. Ms A started an incident report which was subsequently updated by radio agent Ms B, who described her role as speaking to officers on the ground and updating the incident log accordingly.

PC C and PC D responded to the 999 call. PC C described that when they arrived at the scene, the break in was in progress and a dark coloured Transit van was parked outside. Soon after the officers arrived, the Transit van drove off at speed. Ms B called other units for assistance. PC E responded to the call, activating his blue lights in the presence of the Transit van, which failed to stop. PC E stated over the radio the Transit van was travelling at around 100mph. At this point, a suitable advance driver was requested.

Mr F was acting in the role of Oscar 2 during the incident. His role was to review incidents in relation to risk, threat and harm. Mr F confirmed he gave authority to pursue in the Force A area. He said all the criteria had been met to authorise a pursuit and he had assessed the risk as 'medium'. The rationale for this was the pursuit was taking place in the early hours of the morning, the road traffic (which was light), and the weather conditions (which were dry). Mr F was satisfied PC E was suitably trained and driving a vehicle fit for purpose. Mr F also explained in his statement that neighbouring forces often collaborate on such incidents and would call on officers who work in those forces for support. However, he said the control rooms do not collaborate, so when a pursuit goes into the territory of a different force, that force takes full responsibility for it.

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T/Chief Inspector (T/C Insp) G was Oscar 1 in this incident. She decided the pursuit needed to be on the dedicated pursuit channel (Interop1). This had been adopted for vehicle pursuits with the potential to cross force boundaries. She explained this channel gave forces the ability to converse with one another and take control of the pursuit by maintaining communications. She said two forces are patched together by the force that the pursuit is entering.

PC H, PC I and PS J were crewed in an armed response vehicle when they responded to a call to assist in this incident. They caught up with the Transit van and took up a position directly behind it. PC H was an advanced driver and initial phase pursuit trained, but was not a Tactical Pursuit and Containment (TPAC) driver. This meant he could not assist in any tactical resolution of the pursuit.

Around 30 minutes after the initial call, Force B's control room became involved because of the collaborative approach taken by neighbouring forces. It was asked whether any stinger units were available. PC K and his in-car operator PC L responded to the call.

PC K was an advanced TPAC trained driver, driving a marked police vehicle. He had been given the approximate location of the Transit van. PC K moved to a location ahead of where the Transit van was expected to be between the exit and entrance slip road of an A road. PC L stated their initial intention was to deploy a stinger device. However, he acknowledged they did not have time to do this and so decided to feed the Transit van onto the motorway. They thought it would be safer to pursue there than on rural roads where the danger to pedestrians and other road users would be greater.

Around this time, T/C Inspector G notified Force B's control room it was likely this pursuit would cross into their force area and would 'come under their command'. PS M, the Oscar 2 at Force B, explained Force A had difficulties linking the channels so the two forces' dedicated pursuit channels could be patched together. This would allow Force B to take control of all pursuit communications. Eventually this happened but it took around 10 minutes.

At this stage PC O joined the pursuit in a single crewed vehicle and became the ground commander. PC O was an experienced advanced police driver trained in pursuit management tactics. PC O said he began to consider a tactical end to the pursuit such as 'boxing'.

Inspector P, the Oscar 1 at Force B, explained the pursuit was fast approaching Force Cs. He asked PS M to make contact with Force C's control room to inform them of the pursuit.

PS M contacted Force C via a designated radio channel. This was used by the other force to contact Force C's control room to warn it the pursuit was soon to enter the force area, as well as the need to operate a patch between the channels. However, Force A and Force B were still linked on the dedicated pursuit channel. PS M explained that as Force B had put this patch on, it meant only Force B would be able to disconnect Force A from the channel and patch onto Force C. PS M said he was informed by Force C they were still having issues patching so they asked for Force B to patch onto them. PS M accepted this was unusual practice but due to the issues so far he agreed to do this. Mr Q, Force C's control room supervisor, said when this happened it quickly became apparent Force C could hear some transmissions from pursuing units but were unable to hear the dispatcher at their end. Units also seemed to be talking at the same time.

PC R and PC S were Force C officers crewed together during the time of the incident. They were at a petrol station with PC T, who was crewed with PC U. They became aware of the

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incident when a call-through on their radio advised a Force B led pursuit was heading towards their district. They were also made aware of issues with communication between the two forces.

PC R became aware the Transit van had passed junction two of the motorway. It would therefore have to exit the motorway at junction one onto suburban roads. She said this raised threat levels to high in her mind and she considered the need to slow the vehicle, reduce the risk to others, and arrest the offenders. Force C selected a stinger location at junction one of the motorway. The stinger was carried by PC R.

Throughout this, several officers accepted there were issues with communication on the radio channel. Several officers involved in the pursuit accepted they were aware the pursuit had been authorised in both Force A and Force B areas, but it was unclear whether the force had been authorised in Force C's area. Force C's policy stated an authorised driver should ask for authority to continue a pursuit in the Force C area, and authority should be granted by authorised personnel only.

PC T stated he was not concentrating on radio communications, insisting it was his operator's job to do this. PC T stated he had heard the two control rooms arguing.

MR Q stated he did not give permission to pursue in the Force C area as they could not establish communication with the lead vehicle in the pursuit. He said this was broadcast by the dispatcher but he was unable to say if any units had heard this or whether it was relayed by the Force B dispatcher. PS M denied being told or receiving any information from Force C that the pursuit was not authorised.

PC U stated as the Transit van passed junction two he heard the Force C controller say "this pursuit is not authorised in yet" several times. However, PC T said he did not hear this despite the volume being at maximum.

PC R, PC S, PC T and PC U arrived at junction one of the motorway and deployed the stinger. PC T positioned his vehicle in lane one of the junction. Other officers staggered their vehicle to cover lane two to form a road block.

PC S said he saw the Transit van approaching the junction at approximately 70mph and informed the pursuing officers the stinger had been deployed. The Transit van drove through lane one and over the stinger, deflating the front tyres. All of the officers said they were aware the stinger had been successful apart from PC T. He admitted the stinger would have made a noise but said his windows were up and the radio was turned up to maximum. He said he did not recall PC U telling him the vehicle had been stung.

Several officers said when the Transit van had been stung it immediately began to slow down. However, PC T said during his interview the vehicle did not slow down and he found this to be unusual, which is why he assumed the stinger had failed.

The other officers said they began to slow down in preparation to exit their vehicles and arrest the occupant of the Transit van. However, PC T overtook them at speeds "over 60mph". This was corroborated by incident data recorder data from PC T's vehicle. This showed the vehicle reaching speeds of 66mph after the sting before colliding with the Transit van. There was no evidence PC T had discussed or agreed this tactic of manoeuvring towards the Transit van at speed with any of his colleagues or the Force C control room. This was in contradiction to Force C pursuit policy.

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A collision report was produced which indicated PC T drove too fast and too close to the Transit van. As a result, he was not able to stop on time when the Transit van stopped. Force C policy stated: "Whilst pursuing a vehicle, drivers must remember to keep an adequate distance from the vehicle being pursued to give them sufficient time to react to any circumstances that may develop." PC T accepted he was "manic" and was "probably going a bit quicker" than the Force B vehicle because he was trying to get around them.

Type of investigation

IOPC independent investigation.

Action taken by this police force

1. The force suspended PC T from driving until he was able to re-take some of his training modules to a satisfactory level.

Outcomes for officers and staff

PC T

1. The IOPC investigation found PC T had a case to answer for misconduct in relation to the allegations he may have pursued the Transit van when it was not clear he was authorised to do so, and when engaged in the pursuit he drove in such a manner which led to the collision with the Transit van. PC T attended a misconduct meeting where the conduct level was not proven. It was recommended he undertake additional training.

Questions to consider

Questions for policy makers and managers

1. What steps has your force taken to identify potential barriers to communicating or working effectively with other forces during cross-border pursuits?
2. Does your force give officers clear guidance and training on patching with other force channels? Does this cover any possible workarounds for frequently encountered issues?
3. Does your force give officers clear advice on how to respond when clear authorisation to continue pursuits which cross borders has not been heard?
4. How has your force worked with neighbouring forces to ensure the smooth transfer of command and control from one force to another where a pursuit crosses into another force area?

Questions for police officers and police staff

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5. As one of the police drivers in this incident, would you have ended the pursuit when you were not able to communicate with the control room?
6. What action would you have taken if you were unsure whether the stinger had been successful or not?