

Police 'stop and search' policy helps to keep people safe



An increase in the number of positive results of stop and searches for seizing drugs, weapons and alcohol is helping reduce violent crime and keep people safe police claimed today.

Across the country there was a total of 519,213 stop and searches between April and December 2013, a decrease of 0.2 per cent on the same period the previous year, but an increase in positive results from 13.9 per cent to 19.7 per cent.

More than 90 per cent of all searches related to drugs, alcohols and weapons. As a result of stop and search activities undertaken by Police Scotland since April, 37% of all searches undertaken to detect firearms yielded a positive result, with 166 firearms or associated items having been recovered. In addition, 4,273 weapons including knives were seized during stop and search across the country.

Around one third of searches conducted during enquiries into stolen property provided a positive result, with more than 11,000 stolen goods being recovered.

The searches, which provided the highest results were those carried out in relation to alcohol. Almost 37% of alcohol-related searches were positive and 61,541 recoveries were made.

Assistant Chief Constable Wayne Mawson, said: "As these figures demonstrate, Police Scotland is making real progress in building safer communities across the country by reducing

crimes of violence and tackling anti-social behaviour by removing the materials associated with offences of this nature from our streets.

“Stop and search is one of a number of tactics that frontline police officers within our communities are able to apply, if and when they have reasonable grounds to do so. Searches are targeted and intelligence led and often conducted with the consent of those involved.

“The decision to conduct a stop and search can and has in many cases resulted in harmful weapons, dangerous drugs and stolen property being recovered and is vital to ensuring that Police Scotland can continue to keep people safe.”

Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill said: “Police Scotland’s priority is to keep our streets and communities safe. By taking a preventative and proportionate approach, proactively disrupting and deterring criminal behaviour, police can stop crime in its tracks and save dealing with the consequences later.

“Stop and search is one tactic amongst many police use to cut crime, and Police Scotland’s positive results so far suggest this is working. This builds on our most recent crime stats, which show violent crime falling by 47% between 2006/7 and 2012/13 and crimes of handling an offensive weapon at the lowest in 27 years, dropping by 60% in the same period.

“The experience in Fife and elsewhere in the country shows that, working with communities, stop and search can stop criminal behaviour before it happens; take weapons and drugs off the streets, and potentially save lives.”

Each of the 14 local policing divisions within Scotland has responsibility for using stop and search whenever it is deemed necessary to support local community policing priorities.

In Fife, the tactic has been used to great success with

positive searches yielded in almost a quarter of all undertaken.

Chief Superintendent Garry McEwan, Divisional Commander for Fife said: "Serious violence and disorder continues to fall within Fife, and a tactic employed by local officers to achieve this and reinforce public safety is the use of stop and search powers. These are used in the main against known offenders, and in localities identified through crime pattern analysis as having persistent problems of violence or antisocial behaviour.

"These powers can also be used where police officers have reasonable cause to suspect anyone of committing particular crimes or offences.

"These are not random searches, but an integral part of our strategy for keeping people safe and preventing violent crime in Fife.

"Almost 1 in 4 of these searches resulted in the detection of articles that should not have been carried in a public place. Items seized included vicious bladed weapons and other blunt instruments designed or intended for the sole purpose of causing harm to individuals within our communities. Quantities of drugs and alcohol have also been seized during these searches, examples of which are displayed here today.

"This clearly illustrates that the approach we have taken to utilising stop and search within Fife is being effective, and is undoubtedly keeping people safe.

It is not only the public at large who are being protected, but also the people from whom the articles are seized. In this respect our action prevents potential overdose from the use of illicit drugs, stops the commission of offences using the weapons concerned and reduces the likelihood of risk taking behaviours associated with being under the influence of alcohol."