



National Mobile Property Register Searches of Mobile Handsets Completed in Custody Policy (Surrey and Sussex) (1188/2025)

Abstract

This policy and supporting procedure details the service expectation relating to the searching of a mobile phone International Mobile Equipment Identity Number commonly referred to as the IMEI, through the National Mobile Property Register referred to as the NMPR; following the authorised detention of arrested persons in Custody.

Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy standardises the acquisition of the International Mobile Equipment Identity Number (IMEI) from the lawfully seized handset of an arrested person following their authorised detention in custody and the searching of the IMEI against the National Mobile Property Register (NMPR) system operated by Recipero.

The policy adheres to official guidance previously provided by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) (now the College of Policing) having considered the stated case of 'COSTELLO vs Chief Constable of Derbyshire 2001, Lightman J', Section 54 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) and the UK Investigatory Powers Act 2016.

2. Scope

2.1 The procedures associated with this policy detail

- How to obtain the IMEI from the handset following seizure under Section 54 of the PACE.
- Information to be recorded on the detained persons Niche Custody Record.
- Conducting and recording the search using the NMPR.

3. Statement

3.1 Mobile phones are stolen in the course of a variety of crime types including personal robbery and burglaries.

All persons brought into police detention have their mobile phones removed from them whilst in custody to prevent them interfering with evidence, to prevent them from escaping and to prevent damage. This practice is routinely carried out throughout custody suites within Surrey Police, Sussex Police, and police forces throughout the UK supported by Section 54 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 'to ascertain everything which a person has with them when detained'. The section further allows the

custody officer or their nominee to search that person 'to the extent that the custody officer considers necessary for that purpose'.

3.2 With regard to limited 'overt' physical examination of a mobile phone solely to establish the IMEI of detained persons in custody; it is the expectation of Surrey Police and Sussex Police that the default position should be to examine each phone, and this is the responsibility of the arresting / presenting officer. Once that information is lawfully obtained no further authority is required to undertake a check on the NMPR to ensure that the phone is not stolen; reducing the risk of the Service being seen to be returning the proceeds of crime to the criminal.

The 'overt' physical examination will be conducted at the custody bridge in the presence of the detained person and recorded on their custody record. Should it be necessary that the detained person is taken immediately to a cell, they are to be informed that the IMEI has been obtained as soon as is practicable.

3.3 The IMEI number is a coded 15 - 17 digit set of figures that reveals no personal information about any individual. Surrey Police and Sussex Police continue to promote the registering of mobile phones through the Immobilise database to assist the identification of stolen handsets; it is therefore in the public interest that police seek to identify stolen mobile phones and avoid the returning of stolen handsets to the possession of others.

3.4 It must be remembered that such grounds only give rise to the right to establish the IMEI electronically or by physically checking the unit. They do not allow for examination of call data or review of other personal information held upon the handset such as photographs and text messaging. As long as the search of the phone is confined to taking the cover off or calling up the IMEI number using the code *#06# then the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 are not contravened in the circumstances described. These measures only come into operation when a person's right to respect for their private life, home or correspondence is trespassed upon.

Police officers can be assured that if they act reasonably, and in good faith, they will have the support of the Chief Constable and Force Leadership Team. Surrey Police and Sussex Police will indemnify police officers in the event of a challenge to the above instructions.

Procedure

1. Overview

1.1 Each mobile handset has a unique identification number known as an International Mobile Equipment Identity number or more commonly an IMEI. With the IMEI being unique to the individual handset it provides police opportunities to identify and recover stolen property.

1.2 The National Mobile Property Register commonly known as the NMPR is a licenced system of which Surrey Police and Sussex Police are subscribed. THE NMPR system is used by 54 agencies within the UK including 46 police forces; of these a number of the largest police forces including the Metropolitan Police and Greater Manchester Police

routinely search IMEI during the custody booking in process. As well as recovering stolen property the search creates an audit trail attributing a handset to a nominal; over the years this has assisted in serious crime investigations including Murder, Robbery and Aggravated Burglary.

1.3 With the ever-increasing use of mobile phones impacting crime investigations particularly in areas such as County Lines this could provide significant opportunities to recover stolen handsets and identify valuable intelligence and evidence to assist disruption and overt police action. In support of this Surrey Police and Sussex Police has decided that the search of IMEI in the possession of persons arrested will be searched against the system following their arrest.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 Custody officer – On authorising the detention and search of the arrested person the custody officer will ensure they are aware that a search will be conducted against the NMPR and record this fact with the IMEI on the detention log.

2.2 Arresting officer – The arresting officer will be responsible for conducting a search of the IMEI against the NMPR search engine taking appropriate action on any return. Refer to National Mobile Property Register (NMPR) Guidance.

3. Procedure

3.1 All warranted officers will have a registered NMPR account; follow the simple steps using your Force email address. WWW.THENMPR.COM/REGISTER. Alternatively, registration and access can be found through the QUICK LINKS APP on the Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) locating NMPR under JOINT LINKS.

3.2 Where a person is arrested and presented to Custody following their detention being authorised they will be subject of a Section 54 PACE search where their property will be seized into police possession and booked in; this will include any mobile device that is NOT being seized as part of the investigation into the offence for which the person has been arrested.

3.3 Where any handset is being seized as part of the investigation any search will be conducted slow time in order to preserve the forensic integrity of the handset, however the search will be completed prior to the handset being returned. If in doubt DO NOT complete the search until you have sought advice from the Officer in Charge (OIC).

3.4 Whilst present at the Custody Bridge the detained person will be informed that the IMEI will be obtained from the handset and subject to a search against the NMPR. Should it be necessary that the detained person is taken immediately to a cell, they are to be informed that the IMEI has been obtained as soon as is practicable.

3.5 The IMEI will be obtained from the handset. Where available this will be obtained from the physical markings on the handset; where not identified dialling *#06# will provide the IMEI on the screen.

3.6 It must be remembered that such grounds only give rise to the right to establish the IMEI electronically or by a physical check of the unit. They do not allow for examination of call data or review of other personal information held upon the handset such as

photographs and text messaging. Should the handset be security locked, there is no legal power to demand the detained person provide the pin to unlock the handset.

3.7 A record will be made on the detained persons Niche Custody Log of the IMEI number and that they have been made aware a search will be conducted against the NMPR.

3.8 A search of the IMEI will be conducted against the NMPR by the arresting officer; this will take place prior to any release of the detained person.

3.9 The reference of the search within NMPR will be recorded as the detained persons Niche Custody record number.

3.10 The recording on both the detained persons Custody Record and NMPR will provide a clear audit trail of the search and attribution.

3.11 Should a positive result be returned via the NMPR then the appropriate action will be taken. This will be detailed within the result, e.g. Reported Stolen – Seize the Handset and complete relevant enquiries with reporting force area.

3.12 In all cases where the handset is subject to a search of the IMEI an intelligence log should be considered detailing the IMEI, phone number, nominal seized from and any other relevant information.

4. Neurodiversity

4.1 Neurodiversity is an umbrella term used to describe differences in the human brain in relation to a range of mental functions, such as sociability, learning and mood attention. Recognising neurodivergence is key to effective engagement with the individual.

4.2 The removal of a mobile telephone from a detainee may disproportionately affect an individual with neurodivergent conditions, for example, autism, especially where that item provides comfort and security to the individual. Therefore, the removal of a mobile telephone from such a person for the purpose of establishing if it is stolen should only be done with consideration to their risk assessment and custody care plan. Appropriateness of timing, effective communication, and enhanced support must be considered.

Make the process predictable and give context – “I need to have a look at your phone. I need to make sure it does not belong to someone else.”

Explain the whole process clearly and calmly after giving the context. If possible, back this up with a visual aid. Emphasise the phone will be returned if possible. Be precise, honest, and direct. Offer sensory items in the meantime. Also seek further advice from the Disability Support Group if required.

4.3 Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)

If someone presents with a PDA profile this approach will not work. In that case, ask for input from a specialist speech and language therapist / occupational therapist or someone used to working with the individual.

Team: Criminal Justice