

Literature Review: Effective Communication

Approaches Used in UK Policing

Introduction

Communication is important for police officers in the UK. They often have to talk to people in stressful, emotional, or even dangerous situations. The way officers talk, listen can decide if things stay calm or get worse.

This essay looks at different ways police communicate. These include active listening, building trust, empathy, what they say and how they act, and calming people down. It also talks about how alcohol, drugs, mental health problems, and stress can make communicating harder.

Active Listening

(College of Policing, 2020) mentions Active listening is when someone really pays attention and shows they understand. Officers are told to ask questions, repeat what people say, and not interrupt.

When officers listen properly, people feel respected and are more likely to cooperate. The College of Policing (2020) also says it helps officers get accurate information and avoid complaints. But it's not easy. In fast or dangerous situations, listening can be really hard. People might be drunk, on drugs, or stressed, and then officers might miss important details. For example, if someone is drunk and shouting, officers have to be patient but also act quickly. It's a tricky balance.

Building Rapport

According to (National Police Chiefs Council, 2019). Rapport means officers make people feel like they can trust them. This can happen in interviews, community visits, or just normal routine stops.

If people trust the officer, they are more likely to share information. Respectful communication can also make the public feel confident in the police, therefore they are gaining trust. (Home Office, 2021).

Rapport takes time, so it doesn't always work in emergencies. People who are drunk, on drugs, or having a mental health crisis may not respond well. Officers must make sure their attempts to build trust seem real.

In real life, this could be as simple as greeting someone calmly, explaining what they are doing, and listening carefully to their answers.

Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is what officers say. Non-verbal communication is tone, body language, and facial expressions (College of Policing, 2021).

(HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2022) says Clear instructions and calm body language can help people stay calm. It can also mean officers don't have to use force.

Non-verbal signals can be misunderstood, especially with people from different cultures and backgrounds in life. Stress can make officers accidentally show frustration or anger, which can make things worse. Another example could be what the officer is wearing. Making sure the uniform is correct.

For example, if an officer isn't wearing the correct gear it can give a bad impression to the public, also if an officer frowns or rolls their eyes when someone doesn't understand instructions, it could make them panic instead of cooperating.

Empathy

Empathy is when someone tries to understand how someone else feels. It's really important for talking to victims or vulnerable people (College of Policing, 2018).

Being empathetic can calm situations and make people trust the police. It also fits with procedural justice, where people feel they are treated fairly (Home Office, 2020).

But officers must be careful. Feeling too much for people can make decisions harder and can be emotionally tiring. This is worse if someone is aggressive, drunk, on drugs, or mentally unwell.

De-Escalation

De-escalation is when officers try to calm things down. This can be speaking slowly, showing empathy, or giving people time to follow instructions (College of Policing, 2022).

According to (HMICFRS, 2022) Good de-escalation lowers the chances of injuries, complaints, and the need for force. But it doesn't always work. People under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or experiencing mental health problems, may not

respond. Officers also sometimes need to act fast, so they don't always have time to use these methods fully.

Factors Affecting Communication

Alcohol isn't the only thing that makes communication hard. Drugs like cannabis, cocaine, or MDMA can make people unpredictable and hard to deal with (College of Policing, 2020). Mental health issues like anxiety, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder can also make people misunderstand officers or react aggressively. Stress, tiredness, and the environment around the person can make things harder too.

The Home Office and College of Policing say officers need training for all these situations, not just alcohol. Understanding these things helps officers communicate better in many different situations.

For example, officers might use different approaches if someone is tired or under the influence, instead of using the same method for everyone, as everyone is different.

Conclusion

Communication within the police force in the UK is super important. Active listening, building trust, empathy, verbal and non-verbal communication, and de-escalation all help officers keep people safe and do their jobs properly.

These strategies aren't perfect, especially in fast, stressful, or in situations involving, Alcohol, drugs, mental health problems, and tiredness all make things harder. Officers need ongoing training and guidance so they can communicate well in all situations.

Reference List

The Truth About Alcohol, Alcohol, 23:15 16/10/2019, BBC1 London, 60 mins.<https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/0C9AF943?bcast=130493375> (Accessed: 19 December 2025).

College of Policing, 2023 Vulnerability-related risks: communication. College of Policing. Available at: <https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/vulnerability-related-risks/communication> (Accessed: 27 December 2025).

College of Policing, 2020 Alcohol intoxication. College of Policing. Available at: <https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/obtaining-initial->

[accounts/alcohol-intoxication](#) (Accessed: 27 December 2025).

College of Policing, 2021 Conflict management: communication skills.

College of Policing. Available at:

<https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/conflict-management/conflict-management-skills> (Accessed: 20 December 2025).

College of Policing, 2020 Conflict management: how to use de-escalation, communication and negotiation to safely resolve conflict. College of

Policing. Available at: <https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/conflict-management> (Accessed: 27 December 2025).

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, 2023 State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2022.

Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-policing-2022> (Accessed: 23 December 2025).

Home Office, 2023 Police-led alcohol intervention checklist and toolkit.

Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-led-alcohol-intervention-checklist-and-toolkit/police-led-alcohol-intervention-checklist-and-toolkit-accessible> (Accessed: 29 December 2025).

Home Office, 2023 Public perceptions of policing: a review of research and literature. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-perceptions-of-policing-a-review-of-research-and-literature/public-perceptions-of-policing-a-review-of-research-and-literature> (Accessed: 27 December 2025).

Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2025 Perception and experience of police and criminal justice system, England and Wales: year ending March 2025. Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/perceptionandexperienceofpoliceandcriminaljusticesystemenglandandwales> (Accessed: 29 December 2025).

National Police Chiefs' Council, Overview of the NPCC. Available at: <https://www.met.police.uk/police-forces/metropolitan-police/areas/c/careers/police-staff-roles/NPCC/overview> (Accessed: 21 December 2025).

Ministry of Justice, 2025 Surveying victims on their experiences of the criminal justice system: feasibility study. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/surveying-victims-on-their-experiences-of-the-criminal-justice-system-feasibility-study> (Accessed: 21 December 2025).

Alcohol Change UK, 2025 Alcohol statistics. Available at: <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/alcohol-facts/fact-sheets/alcohol-statistics> (Accessed: 21 December 2025).