

27 March 2026

Marina Ahmad AM  
Chair, Police and Crime Committee  
London Assembly

Sent by email

**Commander Neerav Patel**  
**Front Line Policing**

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Dear Marina,

Thank you for sharing the Committee's report and its recommendations. I am replying as the Met's lead for Neighbourhood Policing.

We have carefully reviewed each recommendation relevant to the Met and our detailed response is set out in the annex for ease of reference.

I would, however, like to make a few broader points in response to the report.

First, despite our previous engagement on this issue, there remains some misunderstanding about the decision to remove Safer Schools Officers. For clarity, that decision predates the Tough Choices programme. The principal driver was to improve the way we police children and young people across London. While many Safer Schools Officers delivered excellent work, the model operated with significant inconsistency across boroughs. In addition, warranted officers were routinely undertaking functions that sat outside core policing responsibilities and were more appropriately led by schools or other safeguarding partners. The change was, therefore, about creating a more consistent and appropriate model of support, not simply about resources.

Analysis undertaken by the Met's Strategic Insights Unit ahead of these changes also reinforced the need to change the model. Looking at six months of crime data across four London boroughs, the analysis found that roughly a third of all reports generated by Safer Schools Officers did not require recording in the public interest. This reflects long-standing concerns raised by organisations, such as Liberty, that traditional approaches have, at times, unintentionally contributed to the unnecessary criminalisation of young people.

It is also relevant that, in May 2024, MOPAC commissioned the London Policing Ethics Panel to undertake an independent review of policing in schools, published as *Policing London's Schools: supporting children to flourish?* That report identified a number of ethical risks associated with traditional safer schools models, including dual-loyalty tensions for warranted officers, the potential for over-criminalisation of children, officers undertaking educational roles without the appropriate skillset and limited evidence that a police presence within school grounds improves safety outcomes. The report also highlighted that children are statistically more likely to be victims of crime in the areas around schools rather than within school premises themselves.

The policing model the Met has since adopted aligns closely with those findings. Our approach places greater emphasis on safeguarding, prevention and partnership working, seeks to avoid unnecessary criminalisation, ensures officers do not step into educational delivery without the appropriate training or expertise and prioritises proportionate policing in the areas around schools where children and young people are at greatest risk of harm.

More broadly, we are concerned that the report underplays the shared responsibility for keeping children and young people safe. The police have a vital role, but safeguarding is not, and cannot be, the sole responsibility of policing. Schools, local authorities, social services and wider partners all have clear statutory and professional duties. A balanced assessment must recognise this collective responsibility.

We also believe the report would have benefitted from more direct engagement with the relevant Met leads on our Children's Strategy. Had we understood the level of interest from Members, we would have ensured appropriate representation at the Committee's thematic session in September and would have welcomed the opportunity to address any subsequent questions. The Met is the first force to introduce an overarching Children's Strategy, and this includes significant work already under way, including the rollout of training and embedding a Child First approach. As you will see from the annex, a number of the Committee's recommendations are already in progress, while others reflect activity that is already established. Earlier dialogue may have helped to clarify this.

Finally, a copy of the Youth-Based Community Policing Handbook, which includes the DWO-CYP role description, was provided to the Committee at its request following the session on 3 September. This is the most up-to-date version of the handbook, and the role description remains unchanged from when it was issued. We are aware that the word "DRAFT" appears on page 2. This is an error, and we apologise for any confusion it may have caused.

We remain committed to constructive engagement with the Committee and to continuing to improve the service we provide to children and young people across London.

Thank you again for sharing the report.

Yours sincerely,



Commander Neerav Patel  
**Frontline Policing**  
**Metropolitan Police Service**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Met response</b>
<p><i>Recommendation 2: The Met, with the support of MOPAC, should produce a charter on how it will conduct its interactions with children and young people. This should include consultation and co-production with young people, including schools and youth groups, to understand how young people want the police to interact with them.</i></p>	<p>The recommendation for a charter appears to stem from a perceived gap between the commitments set out in the Children’s Strategy and the lived experiences of some young people. We note that the evidence underpinning this recommendation is largely anecdotal and was gathered less than a year into a five-year strategy. It is, therefore, too early to draw firm conclusions about whether a separate charter is required.</p> <p>More broadly, engagement with young people is already embedded in our practice. This takes place in targeted and thematic ways, with recent examples including the development of the London Race Action Plan and the Stop and Search Charter, where we actively sought views from young people on how they want to be policed.</p> <p>On policing young people specifically, we have recently completed scoping work to understand the level and type of youth engagement taking place across each BCU. This varies according to local demographics and operating models, and we recognise there is scope to improve consistency. This will be discussed at the next Children’s Strategy Delivery Board to determine whether a corporate approach is required or whether a locally tailored model remains more appropriate. In either case, any engagement must have a clear policing purpose and deliver meaningful outcomes.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 3: In 2026-27, the Met, working with young people and specialist youth organisations, should codesign and co-deliver parts of police training on child first and youth engagement. This should involve real experiences and perspectives from young Londoners.</i></p>	<p>The Child First training programme was deliberately developed and delivered with expert input to ensure the voices and experiences of young people were embedded throughout. Much of the content was shaped by extensive consultation undertaken during the development of the Children’s Strategy.</p> <p>Specifically, we worked with Jahnine Davies to address adultification bias, drawing on her research and national safeguarding work, and with Dr Jessica Taylor to ensure the trauma-informed elements were grounded in child-specific expertise. The case studies used in training are drawn from real incidents, including Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Child First training also covered empathy, and improved communication and listening skills.</p> <p>For completeness, we have explored co-delivery with youth organisations. However, delivering training to</p>

	<p>approximately 23,000 frontline officers within a seven-month period, across multiple sites daily, made co-delivery operationally and financially prohibitive.</p> <p>Our training arrangements are kept under review and the effectiveness of the current programme will be evaluated at the appropriate point.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 4: By September 2026, the Met should commission an independent evaluation of the delivery of its Child First training to monitor its effectiveness and impact in improving the Met's policing and interactions with young people.</i></p>	<p>We are actively considering how best to evaluate the Children's Strategy, including the Child First training programme. We anticipate use of both MPS and independently collected data, and the expert input of the Met's Strategic Insight Unit and MOPAC's Evidence and Insight team..</p> <p>As noted above, timing is important. It would not be meaningful to evaluate impact while delivery of training is still underway. Evaluation must take place once sufficient time has elapsed for behavioural and cultural changes to embed.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 5: When the Met publishes its Children's Strategy dashboard, it should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Outline progress made one year on</i></li> <li>• <i>Provide details of the progress against each commitment</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The dashboard should be updated quarterly.</i></p>	<p>The Met recently presented a report to the London Policing Board outlining progress made in the first year of the Children's Strategy. We are currently in dialogue with MOPAC and the LPB regarding what information is published publicly and at what frequency.</p> <p>Progress against each commitment is likely to be made available. However, quarterly publication would not align with the governance and oversight arrangements of the Delivery Board.</p> <p>An outline of progress against the first year of the Strategy has already been <a href="#">published</a>.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 6: Within the next six months, the Met should publish further details of how the work previously carried out by Youth Engagement and Diversion Officers is being taken forward as part of its wider neighbourhood policing approach.</i></p>	<p>The decision to remove the Youth Engagement and Diversion Officer role was deliberate. It was intended to return police officers to functions aligned with warranted powers and core policing responsibilities.</p> <p>As we have made clear previously to the Committee, YEDOs were undertaking activities more appropriately delivered by partner agencies. The diversionary and individual intervention functions were consciously discontinued, with the expectation that existing referral pathways would be used</p>

	<p>to identify vulnerable young people and direct them to appropriate services.</p> <p>There was also an expectation that partner agencies would resume responsibilities that had shifted towards policing. The former YEDO functions have, therefore, not been absorbed into neighbourhood policing. This position has been clearly communicated to Members and partners.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 7: Within the next 12 months, each neighbourhood policing team should develop a Neighbourhood Policing Youth Engagement Action Plan that includes clear objectives and timelines, named policing leads and key partner organisations. Annual progress updates should be published.</i></p>	<p>We are happy to look at this recommendation in more detail, including how workable it is within current neighbourhood policing teams.</p> <p>It is important to reiterate that recent changes to our youth policing model, including the removal of SSOs and YEDOs, was a deliberate move to make neighbourhood policing more operational. We do not want warranted officers pulled back into work that sits outside core policing.</p> <p>If the purpose of youth engagement is to reduce harm to children and young people and improve life chances, then any plan needs to be genuinely multi-agency. Partners have clear responsibilities in this space, and they should lead where they are best placed to do so. That allows police officers to stay focused on core policing, with any engagement we do being clearly linked to a policing purpose.</p> <p>We will keep these principles in mind as we consider the recommendation further.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 8: The Met should re-evaluate the efficacy of the CONNECT system, particularly as it relates to issues with children and young people. The CONNECT system should make inclusion of school mandatory.</i></p>	<p>Work to review and improve CONNECT is ongoing. A central board is in place specifically to oversee system enhancement and performance.</p> <p>Inclusion of school data within the relevant fields will become mandatory following planned CONNECT updates later this year. This has been communicated to partners.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 9: In May 2026, the Met should commission a 12-month evaluation of the impact of the Dedicated Ward Officer – Children and Young People role, setting out:</i></p>	<p>We are supportive of this recommendation and are considering how best to take it forward. The Dedicated Ward Officer – Children and Young People model only became operational in December 2025, so we need enough time for the role to bed in before any meaningful evaluation can take place.</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How the work previously carried out by Safer Schools Officers has been absorbed into the Dedicated Ward Officer role</i></li> <li>• <i>How the Dedicated Ward Officer role operates in practice</i></li> <li>• <i>How the Dedicated Ward Officer role works with professionals in and beyond education</i></li> <li>• <i>How the Dedicated Ward Officer role supports wider neighbourhood policing teams in their engagement with young people and schools</i></li> </ul> <p><i>This should include clear metrics for assessing the effectiveness of the role.</i></p>	<p>As we have already set out, some of the work previously carried out by Safer Schools Officers and Youth Engagement and Diversion Officers sat outside core policing responsibilities. As part of our deliberate move to place neighbourhood policing on a more operational footing, not all of that activity has been absorbed into the new DWO–CYP role. This is intentional, to ensure these officers remain focused on core policing tasks.</p> <p>We are currently working to identify what relevant data can be captured and analysed to support any future evaluation. Any evaluation would need to involve partners, including MOPAC, and require both qualitative and quantitative data. This will have resource implications.</p>
<p><i>Recommendation 10: The Met should establish neighbourhood policing teams as the hub of youth engagement for local policing, including new guidance on how these teams will engage with local young people in and out of schools.</i></p>	<p>Please refer to our response to Recommendation 7. More broadly, youth engagement does form part of neighbourhood policing, where it aligns with core policing responsibilities.</p>