

Letter to Commissioner: concerns about stop and search charter survey from Caroline Russell AM

Image of Caroline Russell AM

Key information

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Letter Commissioner about the stop and search charter survey from Caroline Russell AM

Dear Commissioner,

Concerns about stop and search charter survey

I am writing to you to express the serious concerns I have regarding the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) survey on your proposal to create a Stop and Search charter. My points are detailed below, and I hope these issues are considered before any decisions based on the survey responses are taken.

My primary concern regarding the survey is the inherent assumption that stop and search is an inevitable fact of policing. You have spoken convincingly on the need to ‘fix the foundations’ of the MPS so this assumption is disappointing. Many Londoners don’t believe that stop and search is either a useful or effective tool – but the survey contains no space for this view to be expressed by participants.

The format of this survey with its limited options for response and lack of space to record further comments, will not accurately capture the wide and nuanced range of opinions held by Londoners on this tactic, including people and organisations who strongly disagree with its routine use.

A participant who strongly opposes stop and search cannot answer a question regarding how the police should conduct themselves during a stop and search, or how often they should be trained about it, or the utility of a

charter. They are likely to either choose one of the multiple-choice options that do not capture their real opinion, such as ‘don’t know’ or abandon the survey in frustration, leading to their data not being used. In this way, the results of this survey are skewed towards those who support stop and search.

I am therefore worried about the quality of the evidence that you are gathering through this survey and that any actions you intend to take, or new policies introduced based on it, will not have the support or consent of all Londoners.

I am therefore writing to you to highlight some of the issues that I do not believe are adequately addressed by the questions, or answer options, in the survey.

I have strong objections to widespread use of stop and search as a tool, as it can irreparably damage relationships between communities and the police, can be harmful and affect the wellbeing of those it is used against, and isn’t as effective as a tool for tackling violent crime. Met officers told me on a London Assembly Police and Crime Committee (PCC) visit to Bethnal Green police station to learn about Project ADDER that stop and search is ‘a blunt tool, like taking a bulldozer to an archaeological dig’.

We know that the vast majority of what police officers find during stop and search operations are small amounts of drugs for personal use. As drug policy is rightly pivoting to harm reduction, rather than tackling personal possession, stop and search is no longer an appropriate tool for drugs policing and isn’t effective enough against violent crime.

Stop and search has also historically been deployed disproportionately against Black Londoners, something I have raised repeatedly through the PCC. Today I shared data that the number of Black Londoners stopped and searched at Notting Hill Carnival in 2023 was nearly five times as many as for the number of white Londoners – and there was a significant failure to even record ethnicity, with nearly half of stop and searches during Carnival left as ‘unknown’. In my attempt to respond to your survey there was no option to record my concerns over disproportionality. **The stop and search charter must address the need for consistent data collection and full transparency on the use of stop and search so that Londoners and their elected representatives can hold the Met accountable.**

I am also worried about a question regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in stop and searches, ‘using algorithms of body worn video footage, to assess the quality of a Stop and Search encounter’. **I would appreciate you writing to me with more information about the proposed use of AI in stop and searches, including if there is also a live element, if this will be used for training and if it is proposed that facial recognition technology will also be deployed through this system.**

I previously provided you with Liberty’s report, Holding Our Own: A guide to non-policing solutions to serious youth violence, which warned against use of stop and search, and should also be considered while gathering evidence for the Stop and Search charter. In my work on the PCC I have repeatedly heard from young people talking to me about their concerns and lived experiences, and the consensus that stop and search doesn’t work as intended is growing. The Met needs to be able to hear those opinions accurately, to engage with them and act on them.

Could you write to me to tell me what other work are you doing to gather information from a range of Londoners with range of opinions so that your new stop and search charter genuinely has the consent of Londoners before it is introduced?

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Russell

Green Party Member of the London Assembly

Response from the MPS about the stop and search charter survey

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your letter on March 18th regarding the Stop and Search Charter, and for raising your concerns which I hope to address in this letter. As the senior officer in responsible for the development of the Charter, I am responding on behalf of the Commissioner.

Stop and search is a vital tactic in tackling violent crime, in 2023 stop and search resulted in 4650 weapons being seized, these included machetes, rambo knives and firearms. These are serious seizures and without police intervention could have been used to seriously harm or injure others.

We also recognise that if it is not used professionally, stop and search can have a significant impact on the community. To address this as part of New Met for London we set out our commitment to deliver a Stop and Search Charter as a way to build trust and confidence in stop and search amongst Londoners by listening to their concerns and by making a clear and transparent commitment to change.

To develop the Charter we have carried out an extensive programme of engagement consulting with a diverse cross section of London. We have carried out a series of engagement events both in New Scotland Yard and across the 32 Boroughs inviting participants with a broad range of backgrounds and with a particular focus on young people and those with direct experience of stop and search. Several hundred people attended events and contributed their views on how stop and search should be used. These events were supported by open online events hosted by the MPS in order to reach as many Londoners as possible. These views were analysed and we identified the following eight key themes as priority areas for change:

- Quality of the encounter
- Improved supervision
- Improved training
- Improved complaints handling
- Better use of technology
- Enhanced independent governance and scrutiny
- Community involvement in where, when and why stop and search is being used
- Better public understanding of stop and search

In order to test these themes with a broader cross section of London we have carried out a series of surveys. The three surveys and their roles are as follows:

1. A representative sample of London – working in conjunction with YouGov, a survey was sent to a representative sample of 1000 people. This survey aimed to give a systematic indication of how much support each of the questions would have compared to wider London.

2. Those with an interest in stop and search – using a survey platform called ‘ZenCity’, respondents were able to nominate themselves to complete the survey by indicating an interest in this field.
3. The London-wide survey – Using ‘Smart Survey’, we wanted the opportunity to hear from all of London and so this survey was created in an attempt to reach as many people as possible. To boost participation, the survey was shared with all MP’s, alongside significant media interviews and public engagement events. The survey has had over 7000 respondents.

We are now in the process of analysing data from the three surveys and as we have set out, whilst important, the London-wide survey, is just one aspect of our engagement.

Data collection and transparency are, as you rightly suggest integral to how we use Stop and Search going forward. Last year we piloted a new approach ‘precision stop and search’ targeting our resources in the areas of highest harm, we are currently evaluating the pilot.

We are looking at other ways we can innovate to improve our service and the proposal to use artificial intelligence is being considered as a way of reducing pressure on frontline supervisors, this tactic has been mentioned in the survey to assess public support, there are no plans at present to use this technology in stop and search. We are also committed to looking at how we can use non-policing solutions in order to tackle violent crime and through the work on the Charter we are considering how to strengthen partnership working.

I hope I have gone some way to addressing your concerns and providing some reassurance that the development of the Charter is an ongoing process with significant community engagement. We look forward to working with you in the future to continue to improve the service we give to the public whilst still reducing crime.

Kind Regards,

Ade Adelekan MVO

Deputy Assistant Commissioner

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