

Response to Mayor's draft Police and Crime Plan 2025-29 - Zoë Garbett AM

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Introduction

The police have become the fallback service in areas where public spending has been cut such as our schools, youth clubs and mental health services - bringing the looming presence of the law and the criminal justice system to places that simply don't need it. If we created things from scratch, we wouldn't have the police attending mental health call outs, mentoring kids in schools, arresting drug users and harassing homeless people.[1]

The Mayor goes some way to recognising this in the draft Police and Crime Plan by stating that taking a public health approach to tackling the causes of violence is one of his top priorities. We've seen this approach led by London's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) which needs continued support from the Mayor and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to achieve its aims.[2]

I also recognise the preventative approach that the Mayor has taken to housing - the Plan states that "homelessness and the lack of safe and secure housing are key factors linked to increased risk of offending and victimisation". From my work, I have seen the importance of this link and I hope that this recognition is followed with serious work to address London's housing need.

But to truly take a public health approach rooted in prevention, the Mayor must go further and embed this approach into all aspects of policing.

My response to the Mayor's draft Police and Crime Plan focuses on six specific areas that should be addressed in the final version.

My six recommendations for the Mayor's Police and Crime plan are:

- 1. Embed a public health approach across all areas of policing.**
- 2. Publish the London Drugs Commission so it can inform the final Police and Crime Plan.**
- 3. Protect the right to protest, call for a review of the Public Order Act and increase scrutiny of the MPS use of protest powers.**
- 4. Conduct an evidence-based review of stop and search.**
- 5. Co-produce a Disability Hate Crime action plan.**
- 6. Change data retention practices so women and people in sex work are not criminalised and stigmatised for the rest of their lives.**

Embed a public health approach across all areas of policing.

Taking a public health approach should not sit separately to the activities of the police. To achieve the benefits of the approach it needs to be the basis of everything that the police and other public facing services do. To take a public health approach means looking at evidence and using it to take early interventions that keep people safe and healthy.

The police have taken a preventative approach before, recognising that health should be the first responder to mental health crisis in the case of Right Care, Right Person. It was encouraging to hear from senior MPS officers recently at a London Assembly Police and Crime committee meeting talk about where else they need others to step in so policing can step back.[3]

Taking steps to make sure that all aspects of policing start from the position of protecting health and reducing harm would be a radical change – and would enable us to identify where another response would be more appropriate.

It is important to note that the Plan mentions an upcoming Violence Against Women and Girls strategy that the Mayor will publish in 2025 – which will take a public health approach. Violence Against Women and Girls is at epidemic levels and should be prioritised. I know that women's safety, ensuring appropriate services are available for women, recognising the experiences of migrant women as well as addressing misogyny which drives violence are very important to many Londoners and the Mayor must listen to women and organisations that represent them. I look forward to scrutinising the Mayor's Violence Against Women and Girls strategy when it is released.

A public health approach should also be taken in areas such as road danger reduction. By looking at evidence, as well as taking early interventions, the harm that people on your roads experience can be reduced. Designing both roads and vehicles in a way that reduces the harm they can cause to other road users, would significantly reduce harm on London's roads. It should be neither inevitable nor acceptable that so many people are killed and seriously injured on London's roads. Every Londoner should be able to pick up their child from school, pop out to the shops and get home safely. It will require us to work together and taking a public health approach to truly address road danger.

The Plan mentions multiple times how violence is linked to deprivation. It is unfortunate that despite acknowledging this link, the Plan doesn't mention how it would aim to solve these structural factors to reduce the harm that occur across the city. It could start with the police not criminalising poverty, and the Mayor working with the Met and the government to get rid of the Vagrancy Act which criminalises homeless people, disproportionately criminalising Black Londoners.[4]

Partnership across agencies is essential in taking a public health approach but given the size of the MPS and the power that the police have, any changes in the way they act will have a big impact.

The Mayor must also listen to public health experts. In the UK decriminalisation of personal use of drugs is now widely endorsed by The Royal Society for Public Health[5], The Royal College of Physicians[6], The Faculty of Public Health[7], the Advisory Council for the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD)[8], amongst many others. This approach would also support the police core operational duty of 'protecting life and property'. [9] Taking a public health approach to drugs and deciding to no longer treat drug users as criminals would be a transformational step in reducing the harm Londoners experience from drugs.

The experts agree we need to take a public health approach; from the way drugs are policed, to sex work, to tackling the causes of crime and violence, a public health approach needs to be the way forward.

The Mayor must embed a public health approach across all areas of policing.

Publish the findings from the London Drugs Commission as soon as possible.

In his 2021 manifesto, the Mayor announced a London Drugs Commission to look at the effectiveness of drugs laws, with a particular focus on cannabis. The policing of cannabis is widely reported as disproportionately impacting Black young boys – this injustice needs to be urgently addressed.

The previous Police and Crime Plan told us again that the Mayor would establish a London Drugs Commission with text lifted word for word from his manifesto, providing us with no new information about who would participate and what the terms of reference would be. The Commission was established in 2022 with its findings now long overdue.

This draft Police and Crime Plan tells us that during the period of this Plan (2025-29), the London Drugs Commission will finally publish their findings.

While this seems like progress, this means that the London Drugs Commission could potentially not be published until 2029, nearly eight years after it was first included in the Mayor's manifesto.

This would be an unacceptable delay in publishing this research, especially after commitments to publish this were featured in multiple manifestos from the Mayor and the need for change is urgent.

The Mayor needs to publish the London Drugs Commission so it can inform the final Police and Crime Plan.

I've asked the Mayor multiple times about the progress of his London Drugs Commission since I was elected last year. I asked at Mayor's Question Time meetings in July and December and also asked in January as part of

the budget process.[10,11,12]

The London Drugs Commission will hopefully make recommendations to change the approach to cannabis policing, so it is essential that it is published and included in this Plan.

The Mayor needs to publish the London Drugs Commission so it can inform the final Police and Crime Plan.

Protect the right to protest.

There is very little mentioned in this draft Police and Crime Plan about the policing of protest. The MPS continue to tell us that policing protest is taking up an increasing proportion of their time, while the Commissioner and the Mayor both use it as a reason to call for more funding to allow the MPS to continue to police what are largely peaceful protests with the same level of enforcement as they have previously. Its absence from this draft Police and Crime Plan given its importance as well as the resources the MPS decides to dedicate to it is notable.

At Police and Crime Committee meetings, I was told by a former inspector at His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) that the police felt they already had sufficient powers to deal with cases of disruption to national infrastructure which we have seen used to arrest people who are participating in workshops or planning sessions, just particularly around environmental protests. A barrister at that same meeting also told us: "It is not working well, and it has given more powers to the police, which the police were not seeking in the first place, and unfortunately, when there are more powers, then inevitably they start to be used and perhaps not used appropriately." [13]

As with all things policing related, the MPS are choosing to police protests in this way. It is at the discretion of the MPS Commissioner to the extent the MPS employs the powers available to them. The MPS could choose to police protests in a way that would require fewer policing resources, but they don't.

I recently wrote to the MPS Commissioner sharing concerns raised with me by constituents following the way the MPS policed the 18 January 2025 Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) protest.[14] All of the instances reported to me are very concerning, they undermine people's right to protest and have caused distress. They also undermine the faith and trust that protesters and Londoners more generally place in the MPS.

The MPS and MOPAC need to ensure that the right to protest remains protected by allowing the long tradition of protests taking place regularly in London to continue.

The Mayor must protect the right to protest, call for a review of the Public Order Act and increase scrutiny of the MPS use of protest powers.

Evidence based review of stop & search.

Many Londoners, particularly younger and Black Londoners, have been over-policed and under-protected by the MPS for far too long.

One common way Londoners interact with the police is via stop and search. This draft Police and Crime Plan says: “The Mayor will continue to use his position to support and oversee the MPS in tackling the most harmful offenders using all of the tactics at its disposal in an effective way that commands the trust and confidence of Londoners. This includes supporting the intelligence-led and professionally conducted use of stop and search powers by officers...”.

A recent guest at a London Assembly Police and Crime committee meeting told us about how a study shows that stop and search-like practices are minimally effective. They said stop and search needs huge increases in volume to have small decreases on targeted crimes, but that there is very strong evidence that it damages trust and damages the mental health and sometimes physical health of the targeted communities.[15]

Other studies have found that the effect of stop and search on crime is likely to be marginal at best and that ‘stop and search is a tool of social control’.[16] The evidence is telling us that the widespread use of stop and search is not working and the Mayor and MPS should reconsider their use of this tactic.

Greens on the Assembly have previously asked questions about comparing the effectiveness of stop and search to other techniques such as weapon sweeps, knife amnesties, and searches requiring a warrant.[17] The MPS said that the data is ‘not recorded in an immediately retrievable format’ but without this we are unable to compare how effective stop and search is to other tools the police have access too.

The Mayor should work with the MPS to conduct an evidence based review of stop and search as a tactic to evaluate its effectiveness and the impact it is having on Londoners.

Co-produce a Disability Hate Crime action plan.

Inclusion London, the advocacy organisation for deaf and disabled people, recently conducted research into the experience of deaf and disabled Londoners of hate crime, and they found that half of the victims did not want police involvement.[18]

I have been asking questions about the progress the MPS has made in tackling disablism within the service. Unfortunately, I have not been reassured by the response which doesn’t show a deep understanding of the issues or a recognition of the overwhelming evidence from the Casey Review about discrimination against disabled officers.[19]

At the London Assembly Policing Plenary meeting, I asked the MPS Commissioner if he would carry out a root and branch review, co-produced with disabled people, deaf and disabled people’s organisations, and the disabled staff network, to ensure that the complex reasons of disability discrimination are addressed as part of an action plan. The MPS Commissioner stated that there is an action plan, but it is not under a formal strategy.[20]

Having a co-produced action plan is an important step in making sure that the concerns of disabled people are addressed and that the solutions are devised with their support and expertise. Its only by working with communities and involving them can we solve the issues that matter to them most.

The Mayor and MOPAC should work with the MPS to co-produce a Disability Hate Crime action plan.

Bringing ‘prostitute’s cautions’ in line with other cautions.

Many sex workers call London home. Sex workers, who are predominantly women, migrants, people of Global Majority and LGBTIQ+ people, face unique challenges, but to listen to sex workers is to hear problems that are familiar to so many Londoners. Sex workers do what they do to get enough money to survive, to pay rent, to put food on the table and to care for loved ones. Sex workers are also extremely likely to experience abuse or violence.

A survey of sex workers found that more than 80 per cent had experienced at least one form of crime in the past 5 years.[21] And yet, despite this, sex workers are extremely unlikely to turn to the police for help, this, no doubt, has been caused in large part by the way that police have approached sex workers. Findings from a cohort study in London highlighted that 42 per cent of outdoor sex workers have experienced police violence.[22]

From the police raiding brothels to posting photos and names of sex workers online, it is understandable that so many sex workers are sceptical that the police have their best interests at heart. This treatment often pushes sex work into the shadows, where workers often face even more abuse and exploitation.

If we are serious about reducing harm for every Londoner, we need to create the conditions in our city for sex workers to be safe, and supported in making the decisions they want to make in their own best interests. A key element of reducing harm to people involved in sex work is the full decriminalisation of sex work as supported by many other organisations, including most importantly organisations that represent sex workers themselves. This starts with a change in ‘prostitute’s cautions’.

By ceasing to caution, arrest or prosecute for sex work, we’ll bring police practice into line with existing police guidance.

This specific ‘caution’ is an extraordinary legal one-off. Unlike any other caution in our legal system, it requires no admission of guilt, it demands no evidence of a criminal offense, yet, its consequences still last a lifetime.

Behind each of these cautions is a person, a Londoner, whose life is being permanently restricted by an out-of-date, discriminatory practice. This is not justice. This is not protection. This is the systematic stigmatisation of a group of Londoners, predominantly women and marginalised people, which in turn creates barriers to employment and opportunities for decades to come.

After the London Assembly passed a motion to end the ‘prostitute’s caution’,[23] the Mayor told The Standard that he was supporting of the idea.[24] So now is the time for action on this issue.

The Mayor should work with the MPS to change data retention practices, so women and people in sex work are not criminalised and stigmatised for the rest of their lives.

Responding to the draft Police and Crime Plan yourself.

It's important that you respond to the Plan so your voice is heard by the Mayor and the MPS. The public consultation is open and will run until 23:59 on Wednesday 12 February 2025. The draft Plan is [available](#) along with an [easy read](#) version.

There is a Talk London [survey](#) about the Plan and I encourage you to respond to it.

You can also share your views via email to consultation@mopac.london.gov.uk or by post, with no stamp required to Freepost MOPACPCP.

I hope you respond to the consultation in whatever way works best for you, because it's important that the Mayor and MPS hear your views.

- [1] [New Data from Zoë Garbett AM: 175 Londoners arrested under Vagrancy law since government pledged to repeal it | London City Hall](#)
- [2] [Building a Safer London | London City Hall](#)
- [3] [Agenda for Police and Crime Committee on Wednesday 29 January 2025, 10.00 am | London City Hall](#)
- [4] [New Data from Zoë Garbett AM: 175 Londoners arrested under Vagrancy law since government pledged to repeal it | London City Hall](#)
- [5] [b80ade25-a31d-44d3-b740219e413db79a.pdf](#)
- [6] [RCP supports Royal Society for Public Health report on drug policy | RCP London](#)
- [7] [RSPH | Royal College of Physicians backs RSPH calls on drug reform](#)
- [8] [UK drug advisers recommended decriminalising possession in 2016, leak reveals | Drugs policy | The Guardian](#)
- [9] [Core planning principles | College of Policing](#)
- [10] [Legalising drugs in London](#)
- [11] [Learning from Europe about drug harm reduction \(london.gov.uk\)](#)
- [12] [Agenda for London Assembly \(Plenary\) on Thursday 23 January 2025, 10.00 am | London City Hall](#)
- [13] [Agenda for Police and Crime Committee on Wednesday 9 October 2024, 10.00 am | London City Hall](#)
- [14] [Letter to Commissioner about 18 January 2025 Palestine Solidarity Campaign protest | London City Hall](#)
- [15] [Agenda for Police and Crime Committee on Wednesday 15 January 2025, 10.00 am | London City Hall](#)

- [16] [Does Stop and Search Deter Crime? Evidence From Ten Years of London-wide Data | The British Journal of Criminology | Oxford Academic](#)
- [17] [Stop and search seizures](#), [Stop and search seizures \(2\)](#), [Stop and search seizures \(3\)](#)
- [18] [Neighbours are most frequent disability hate crime offenders, report suggests – Disability News Service](#)
- [19] [Disablism within the MPS \(london.gov.uk\)](#)
- [20] [Agenda for London Assembly \(Plenary\) on Thursday 7 November 2024, 10.00 am | London City Hall](#)
- [21] [Sex-Work-and-Prostitution-Guidance-Jan-2019.pdf](#)
- [22] [Effect of police enforcement and extreme social inequalities on violence and mental health among women who sell sex: findings from a cohort study in London, UK - PMC](#)
- [23] [‘Prostitute’s cautions’ need reform, Assembly says | London City Hall](#)
- [24] ['Prostitute's cautions leaves sex workers stigmatized for the rest of their lives' | The Standard](#)

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