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Dear Caroline,

Thank you for raising these important matters during the Mayor's Question Time session on 23rd March 2023 on behalf of the London Youth Board. The Mayor and I are both very grateful for the Board's engagement and for sharing their views on improving the Metropolitan Police Service's interactions with young people.

The Mayor set out in his Police and Crime Plan 2022-25 his commitment to taking a Child First approach in all of our work with children and young people – that is, treating each young person first and foremost as a person, not as a perpetrator or victim of crime – and we are working with partner agencies to encourage them to do the same. Baroness Casey's Review has reinforced and validates that approach with her call for a new Child Strategy, which would look across the MPS at their entire approach to dealing with children. MOPAC has already appointed an academic consultant to work with partners, including the MPS, to further develop our child first policy position, and the use of police powers and interactions with children are a key area of interest in the development of our child first approach.

You have raised a number of specific questions, which I have addressed below.

Whether the Met's stop and search guidance could be updated to support neurodiverse people.

I am committed to working with the MPS, and the Home Office to ensure changes to PACE (code A) to support more clarification on stop and search guidance for neurodiverse people and children.

Data shows that learning disabilities are more common in the offending population than the general population. Additional to the schemes mentioned to you during the Question Time session, the MPS also have the Autism Support Group and the ADHD Alliance. These support groups were set up in recent years by officers who have the conditions themselves or are the carers or parents of people who do.

New Stop and Search guidance for the autism community has also recently been published, which was developed with autism charity Anna Kenndy. The new guidance aims to help officers communicate effectively with members of the autistic community and inform individuals what powers are available to the police. You can view the guidance here [Stop and Search guidance for autistic people \(met.police.uk\)](#)

In addition, the Met has established a national Neurodiversity Tasking Action Group that aims to develop national guidance and training through expanding partnership working around neurodiversity. The training will be aimed at all police officers and staff to increase awareness around neurodiversity, minimise conflict escalation and offer better support to the public, while also increasing public confidence.

If two rather than one appropriate adult could safeguard children who are strip searched by police.

There are two types of search where this is relevant; a more thorough search exposing intimate parts, which takes place prior to arrest and must be conducted at a police station or out of public view a strip, and a strip search, which can only be conducted post-arrest in police custody. PACE Code C, which sets out the requirements for all forces when conducting such searches, states that there must be two people present, one of whom must be the Appropriate Adult (AA). Requiring two AAs, might provide additional safeguards, although I would be keen to understand more about the difference this might make in any given circumstance before taking a firm view either way. In addition, I would also be mindful of the need to consider the child's privacy during such a search and how such a provision might delay access to an AA for vulnerable detainees. Either way, I take the view that there should be a continued focus on the provision and timeliness of AAs, and on ensuring that they are effectively trained to fully assert young people's rights in such situations.

Proper aftercare to children and their families following a strip or intimate search by police.

This issue has been raised by young people directly to myself and the Mayor and we will be exploring what can be done. There is no specific process for the aftercare of children and their families following a more thorough search exposing intimate parts (MTIP) or following a strip search (carried out in police custody only) by the police. While it may sometimes be necessary for the police to use such powers – and that should be the exception rather than the rule – each situation will be different as will the needs of the child, and I absolutely recognise the impact of such searches on anyone, and particularly for children.

The MPS has recognised that in the past such powers may have been used more frequently than should have been the case, and they have been focusing their efforts on ensuring that all such searches are done in full accordance with the law, and with courtesy and dignity, as well as with particular regard to the vulnerability of children who may be subjected to such powers.

As a result of my interventions both before and after the appalling experiences of Child Q came to light, the Met has introduced a number of additional safeguards, as follows:

- The MTIP Policy, which applies to all officers, has been reviewed and has reinforced the requirement for an appropriate adult (AA) to be present during such searches, and there is now an additional requirement for Inspector authority before one is conducted to ensure appropriate oversight of such an intrusive intervention, as well as the completion of a safeguarding report in each case.
- With regards to strip searching in custody, the Met have introduced a process of internal auditing of all child strip search records to make sure they are in line with policy and to ensure good practice is consistently applied.
- The need to provide a full rationale for the search and authorisation, as well as verification of the age of the detainee (and recording attempts to verify age where it is unclear) has also

been reinforced. In addition, there has been an unrelated change to police practice whereby it is presumed that all children will have access to legal advice, so officers have now also been advised to ensure the AA is also called to the station when the solicitor is called.


- In a welcome improvement to transparency, London wide data on strip searching and more thorough intimate parts searches is now regularly published on the MPS website <https://www.met.police.uk/sd/stats-and-data/>

I have maintained oversight of this work through both the Oversight and Disproportionality Boards and will continue to commission an annual deep dive into the use of more thorough intimate parts searches and strip searching as part of MOPAC's broader oversight of the MPS. In addition, you will be aware that MOPAC will be piloting new community scrutiny mechanisms, which will both work to ensure the voice of young people is better represented in such work and may consider a wider range of powers than just stop and search, including for example, use of force.

Given the importance of youth voice in this work, the London Youth Board may find it helpful to speak further with the team that are leading this work, and I will ask Natasha Plummer, Head of Community Engagement (natasha.plummer@mopac.london.gov.uk) to ensure that contact is made with the Board.

Thank you again to you and the London Youth Board for raising these important questions.

Yours sincerely,



Sophie Linden
Deputy Mayor for Policing And Crime