

Letter to Diana Luchford on transparency in MOPAC and the Met

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Contents

[Letter to Diana Luchford on transparency in MOPAC and the Met](#)

[Mayor's Questions](#)

[Serious Sexual Offences Problem Profile and other FOI requests](#)

[Safer Schools review](#)

[Legal defences and costs](#)

[References](#)

[Response from Diana Luchford](#)

Letter to Diana Luchford on transparency in MOPAC and the Met

Dear Diana,

Transparency in MOPAC and the Met

I am writing to you with concerns about the transparency of MOPAC and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).

It is important for trust and confidence that the MPS are transparent and do not obstruct the disclosure of information into the public domain.

As Baroness Casey found in her review, “The Met have in the past avoided scrutiny, holding MOPAC at arms-length, and not sharing information and data... Transparency around police actions and incidents is integral to policing by consent.”[1] The Review also highlighted that London MPs felt frustrated by a lack of responsiveness from the MPS. A lack of transparency does a disservice to the work of MOPAC and the MPS, and only heightens suspicion and mistrust in the processes and operations of both organisations.

Mayor's Questions

Mayor's Questions are the one of the principal means by which the London Assembly, as the voice of London, scrutinises MOPAC and accesses information from the MPS on behalf of Londoners. Yet too often Assembly Members are left waiting for months, even over a year, for questions to be answered. These are unacceptable delays.

I currently still have questions without answers from June 2022 on stop and search [2] and July 2022 on police involvement in the Uber trade union protest.[3]

Other recent questions I have submitted that have taken a year or more to get a response include questions about claims made by the MPS on social media [4] , the numbers of Roads and Transport Policing Command (RTPC) officers [5] , the budget of the serious collisions investigations unit [6] , and the quality of strip search data. [7]

In addition, a recent question of mine on the locations of strip search also took 10 months to be answered. [8] The eventual response not only revealed that an answer from a year earlier had provided a figure incorrect by a factor of three, but also that 21 per cent of strip search locations were apparently unknown, simply recorded as 'other'.

I have no doubt that other Assembly Members have also experienced frustration with the length of time it takes to get responses from the MPS.

Can you and MOPAC work with the MPS to ensure that the speed of responses to police related Mayor's Questions from London Assembly Members improves so that Londoners can have more confidence that the MPS is being as transparent as it can be?

Serious Sexual Offences Problem Profile and other FOI requests

I have also been contacted by people who have submitted Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to the MPS and have faced unacceptable delays or blanket rejections to their requests.

A recent FOI from Times journalist George Greenwood regarding the Serious Sexual Offences Problem Profile has been repeatedly denied in a blanket fashion by the MPS. Most other forces have released the report with sensitive data redacted, as is standard practice. The MPS is now the only police service in the UK appealing a decision of the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) instructing it to do the same.

Denying the release of information into the public domain, especially when other police services have released similar data, is not the level of transparency that Londoners expect from the MPS.

Can you and MOPAC work with the MPS to release the Serious Sexual Offences Problem Profile in redacted form, and ensure that their responses to FOI requests are as open and transparent as possible?

Safer Schools review

A review of the role of police officers in schools was first promised in April 2020, following claims that the MPS had failed to take account of the disproportionately negative impact on black and minority ethnic children.

MOPAC said last year the final report was due to be published in autumn 2021, then it was delayed until summer 2022. [9] In February 2023 I was told by the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime that recommendations had been agreed, and that she did not know why the review had not yet been published. [10]

During this time the number of police officers in UK schools has increased, with half of the total based in London, according to the Runnymede Trust. [11] The Deputy Commissioner has acknowledged that the prospect of schools turning to officers for disciplinary matters means “there is a very real risk we criminalise children that we wouldn’t have encountered in the streets”. [12] Such lengthy delays to this review are inexcusable and deny Londoners the information they need to determine the proportionality of placing Met police officers in schools. It is also concerning to see that the London Disproportionality Board, which exists to “maintain transparency and accountability” of the Mayor’s Action Plan to address the over-policing of black Londoners, has not published minutes since January 2023 despite meetings having been scheduled for April and July of this year. [13] That Board received the Terms of Reference of the new Safer Schools Partnership Board, but these do not appear to have been made available publicly.

Will you make the publication of the Safer Schools review and all associated research an urgent priority, to provide maximum transparency about the risks of disproportionality of placing Met police officers in London’s schools?

Will you also publish the Terms of Reference and latest minutes of the London Disproportionality Board, and the Terms of Reference and membership of the Safer Schools Partnership Board?

Legal defences and costs

A lack of transparency goes hand in hand with the “defensiveness and denial” highlighted by Baroness Casey as one of the prevailing cultures the MPS needs to tackle. The failure to accept wrong-doing in response to complaints and legal challenges is a key symptom of this culture. A recent investigation from Liberty Investigates, published in partnership with the Times, says that the MPS has spent at least £138 million on legal battles since 2016. [14]

The investigation found that “the largest portion of the Met’s legal spend was made up of the costs of fighting civil claims brought by members of the public against the force for matters including neglect, wrongdoing, use of force and property damage.”

Despite promises of greater transparency, Andrew Frederick, a lawyer at Scott-Moncrieff & Associates, is quoted by Liberty Investigates as saying that the Met still resists settling cases where its officers are clearly at fault, preferring instead to persist in the hope claimants will abandon the case.

The New Met Plan for London has committed to reducing the time taken to investigate complaints and misconduct.

Will you work with the MPS to address this culture of defensiveness identified by Baroness Casey and improve the transparency of its responses?

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Russell

Green Party Member of the London Assembly

References

- [1] [Baroness Casey Review Final Report](#), March 2023
- [2] [Stop and search seizures \(2\)](#), June 2022
- [3] [Police involvement in Uber trade union protest](#), July 2022
- [4] [Belgravia Square incident](#), May 2022
- [5] [Numbers of Roads and Transport Policing Command \(RTPC\) officers](#), September 2021
- [6] [Serious Collision Investigation Unit](#), November 2021
- [7] [Quality of strip search data](#), May 2022
- [8] [Strip search location details](#), July 2022
- [9] [Safer Schools Officers final report](#), July 2022
- [10] [Police and Crime Committee meeting \[1 hr 43 mins in\]](#), February 2022
- [11] [Over-policed and under-protected](#), January 2023
- [12] [Concerns raised over use of police in London schools](#), February 2023
- [13] [London Disproportionality Board](#), September 2023
- [14] [Met Police Has Spent At Least £138m On Legal Battles Since 2016](#), July 2023

Response from Diana Luchford

08 November 2023

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your letter dated 5 September about Transparency in MOPAC and the Met. I apologise for the delay in responding.

Mayor's Questions

I can assure you that we take Mayoral Questions (MQs) very seriously. MOPAC receives a high volume of MQs and many require a deep dive or obtaining additional information from the MPS. Moreover, the information required to respond to MQs is often contained in data sets and takes time to prepare.

I am conscious of the backlog of unanswered MQs and we are implementing a plan to ensure that outstanding MQs are cleared before the pre election period.

With regard to the MQs you have mentioned in your letter I can update as follows:

MQ 1844 – Stop & Search June 2022 – This MQ is being reviewed by DMPC following a regrettably long delay in the response from the MPS to MOPAC.

MQ – 2586 Uber – This MQ has been submitted to Mayor’s Office but has not yet been published on the website.

MQ 0651 – hit and run prosecutions – This MQ is being led by TfL and I understand it is with the MPS for their input.

Serious Sexual Offences Problem Profile and other FOI requests

In relation to the management of Freedom of Information requests (FOIs), the MPS have full independence in the management of FOIs submitted to them and MOPAC is therefore unable to intervene in any decisions made in the disclosure or non-disclosure of information. However, I agree that the effective management of FOI requests is a vital component in maintaining transparency in policing.

I sought an update from the MPS on the FOI request from George Greenword and have been assured that the original decision to not disclose this information is being reviewed by the ICO as the appropriate authority overseeing the handling of FOI requests and associated issues. As with all FOI requests, authorities must carefully consider the risks associated with the disclosure of information.

Safer Schools Review

The report into the impacts of Safer Schools Officers (SSOs) you refer to has now been published on the MOPAC website [here](#).

The primary conclusion of this report is that the data capture associated with the activity of SSOs is not sufficient to determine robustly if SSOs confer disproportionate impacts on Black school children.

With this in mind, MOPAC has tasked the MPS with clarifying both their activity and timescales to plan, undertake and report on the additional research required to sufficiently respond to the commitment as documented in the Mayor’s Action Plan.

The next Safer Schools Partnership Board is scheduled for Tuesday 14 November. MOPAC agrees that the terms of reference, membership and minutes should be published. MOPAC representatives on this Board will be tabling this as an item at the upcoming Board, requesting the MPS action this, to ensure transparency of activity.

Legal defences and costs

You asked specifically about the MPS commitment to reduce the time taken to investigate complaints and misconduct. MOPAC has been working with the MPS on this issue for some time and since the introduction of the MPS Complaints Resolution Unit in early 2022, we have seen the time taken to record complaints and

conduct reduced significantly.

There has been a significant increase in the volume of complaints and conduct matters over the last 12 months. In the rolling 12 months to August 2023 a total of 11,341 public complaints were received, up 1,799 cases compared to the previous rolling 12 month period. In the same period a total of 1,942 conduct matters were received, up 515 cases compared to the previous rolling 12 month period. However, the time taken to finalise both complaints and conduct cases has remained broadly static in the last 12 months, recognising the impact of resources moved into the Directorate of Professional Standards (DPS) by the MPS.

You asked that MOPAC work with the MPS to improve transparency. The London Policing Board will bring both a wealth of new skills and expertise to MOPAC's oversight, but also will bring much needed transparency and enable Londoners to see oversight in action.

Thank you for writing.

Yours sincerely,

Diana Luchford CB

Chief Executive

Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime

[Back to table of contents](#)