

Home Office response to Caroline Russell AM

Regarding policing in London

Key information

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Contents

[Letter](#)

1. Letter

6 March 2024

Dear Ms Russell,

Thank you for your letter of 15 November 2023 about policing in London. Your email has been passed to the Police Powers Unit in the Home Office for a response. I apologise about the delay in responding to you.

The Casey Review made for very sobering reading. It is paramount that public trust in the Met is restored, and the Home Secretary will continue to hold the Commissioner and Mayor of London to account to deliver a wholesale change in the force's culture. The government is also driving forward work to improve culture, standards and behaviour across policing, including strengthening vetting and introducing changes to the dismissals process.

Discriminatory attitudes and behaviours have no place in policing and allegations of racism, misogyny and homophobia are deeply disturbing. The police's ability to fulfil their duties is dependent on their ability to secure and maintain public confidence and support for their actions, as part of the model of policing by consent. The public therefore rightly expects every police officer to always act with the highest levels of honesty and integrity.

Whilst the Home Office, Police and Crime Commissioners and the police work closely and in partnership, police forces remain operationally independent. This is a fundamental principle of British policing and it is right that the police are operationally independent of Government. This allows for effective local policing, which best protects local communities. Chief Constables' operational independence is in accordance with the delineation of roles and responsibilities as set out by the Policing Protocol.

On stop and search, the police engage daily with communities who are scared about the safety of their neighbourhoods and want to see more to be done to protect them from knife crime. No one should be searched based on their race or ethnicity, and to ensure this does not happen, extensive safeguards such as statutory codes of practice, effective community scrutiny, and, where appropriate, the use of body worn video or audio recording should be followed.

Stop and search is a vital tool for the police to tackle knife crime and protect individuals and their communities. Around 33% of stop and searches take place in London, where data shows that young black men are disproportionately the victims of knife crime. Although disparities in the use of stop and search remain, it is positive that they have continued to decrease for the last four years.

Search involving the exposure of intimate parts is one of the most intrusive powers available to the police. These powers must only be used where necessary and proportionate and should be conducted in a fair and respectful manner, without unlawful discrimination, and with full regard for the welfare and dignity of the individual being searched.

On the issue of protests, this Government remains fully committed to the right to peacefully protest, whilst maintaining that a balance must be struck between this and the rights of others to go about their lives without disruption or intimidation. The Government fully recognises that the management of protests is an operational matter for the police. However, we expect the police to use all the powers at their disposal to protect vulnerable communities and prevent crime.

Yours sincerely,

Police Powers Unit

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[Back to table of contents](#)