

Overview & Scrutiny

Room 118, 2nd Floor
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To:

Jim Gamble, Independent Chair City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership

Mike Hamer, A/Detective Chief Superintendent & BCU Commander,

Kenny Bowie, Director of Strategy & MPS Oversight, MOPAC

Mark Carroll, Chief Executive, Hackney Council

Dear Jim, Mike, Kenny and Mark,

Joint Scrutiny of the Response to Child Q Safeguarding Practice Review

Thank you for attending the joint scrutiny meeting of Living in Hackney and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission on 13th June 2022. This was a helpful meeting that enabled members to further understand the response of statutory partners to the Child Q Safeguarding Practice Review (SPR) and those arrangements put in place to ensure that recommendations set out in that report are implemented.

The [video recording](#) of this scrutiny session alongside the published [minutes](#) together provide a public record of the meeting.

Firstly, the Scrutiny Commissions (the Commission) would like to place on record their thanks to the City & Hackney Safeguarding Partnership (CHSCP) for initiating the Safeguarding Practice Review of Child Q and its determination and rigour in ensuring that the key learning outcomes from the review are both recognised and acted upon across the safeguarding partnership. In particular, the Commission recognised the significance of the finding that racism was likely to have been a contributing factor in the decision to undertake the strip search of Child Q. This clearly underlines the need for a fundamental change in the way that the police engage and involve black and global majority communities to ensure that policing is fair, effective and helps to keep children safe from harm.

The gravity of the recommendations within the Child Q SPR has quite rightly precipitated a number of reviews, some of which remain ongoing, and led to a number of plans to improve local child safeguarding and policing arrangements. The aim of the Commission's inquiry on the 13th June 2022 was to help bring public oversight to these plans and ensure that there are effective accountability and monitoring structures in place to oversee the implementation of recommendations and commitments made within them. This letter summarises key issues arising from the session and our requests for further information to Metropolitan Police and

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MOPAC to guide and inform next steps that the Commission intends to take. Preliminary recommendations of the Commission made to local agencies are also set out at the end of this letter.

Key Findings

Strip Searches of Children

As members of the Commission and indeed other community representatives have clearly and consistently stated, whilst shocking, the incident and circumstances surrounding Child Q was not surprising, as black children in Hackney and across London have consistently endured the disproportionate impact of broader *stop and search* activities of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). More challenging to the Commission however, was the understanding that the case of Child Q was far from an isolated incident, and that *thorough and intimate searches* of black and global majority children, some undertaken without a responsible adult present, reflected a wider, institutional practice across the MPS.

Police representatives at the meeting on 13/6/22 acknowledged that there had been seven other intimate searches conducted on children in Hackney and that this approach was used across London by the MPS. This has been substantiated in subsequent investigations by the [Children's Commissioner](#) who noted that 650 children were strip searched by the MPS over a two-year period to 2022. The Children's Commissioner also noted that no appropriate adult was present in 23% of strip searches of children, that black children were disproportionately impacted and that in over half of all cases no further action was taken. All of this data confirms to the Commission that the assault on Child Q was a part of a systemic pattern of abuse of Black and Global Majority children by the police.

Whilst police representatives at the meeting argued that the use of strip searches remained an operational necessity, particularly where children were felt to be at risk or were being criminally exploited, the case of Child Q is emblematic of the problematic nature of their application, indicative of their being used as a reactive tool of oppression and control. In addition, given the scale of which strip searches of children are now known to be used and the failure of police to consistently apply safeguarding controls (e.g. presence of an appropriate adult, recording the location of searches) this would suggest that the Child Q case reflects much broader concerns for the efficacy of this policy in effectively safeguarding children and ensuring that their dignity and rights are protected.

The traumatic impact that a police strip search can have on a child has been devastatingly exposed by the case of Child Q. From the personal testimonies of her family and Child Q herself, the trauma resulting from the search is all too clear where Child Q has experienced panic attacks and no longer feels safe and is afraid to go out. For Child Q and her family, there is a clear sense of injustice, frustration and anger in the understanding that this strip search would have been unlikely to have taken place if she had not been black. These same sentiments have been echoed from communities across Hackney in reaction to this case.

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Whilst the Commission notes the proposed changes being piloted by the police which would require higher authorisation (by an Inspector) to strip search procedures, the current lack of data, monitoring and oversight of strip searches conducted on children means that there is little or no effective scrutiny of this process and child safeguarding cannot be assured. The Commission expects that this will be addressed in the planned review of strip search arrangements announced by MOPAC and the MPS and it looks forward to receiving the outcomes and recommendations of these.

Safeguarding in schools

Parents entrust their children to schools not only to support their learning and development, but also to ensure that they are kept safe and that their rights are protected and upheld in their absence. Rather than adopting a safeguarding first approach, the school initiated a criminal process and deferred to police officers present and did not question or challenge the decision to conduct an intimate strip search. The school did not act on behalf of or advocate for Child Q's best interests which led to a situation in which her welfare and safeguarding concerns were overridden by policing considerations. To ensure consistent and effective safeguarding of all children, it is imperative that safeguarding partners feel *equally* confident and empowered to question or challenge the decisions and or practices of fellow safeguarding practitioners.

[*Keeping Children Safe in Education*](#) requires all schools to establish and publish their own safeguarding policies and ensure that this is updated annually. Whilst individual schools' safeguarding arrangements are formally inspected by Ofsted, such visits are infrequent. Given the events surrounding Child Q there must be some question as to the efficacy of such arrangements, and whether schools should work more closely still with local designated safeguarding partners to ensure that their safeguarding policies are tested and assured within local safeguarding networks and support systems.

Whilst the Commission was encouraged to note that Hackney Education has audited safeguarding policies and practices of local schools, from the meeting it was not clear what learning had been derived from the Child Q SPR and what practical steps school leadership teams had taken to prevent similar events from happening again in the future. The Commission would welcome further transparency and openness on the process and outcomes of the school safeguarding audits to ensure that there is genuine systems wide learning across the safeguarding partnership from the Child Q SPR. This will help to ensure that safeguarding policies across local schools consistently put children first, are publicised and readily accessible to parents and the broader community.

Members of the Commission were also perplexed as to why the school in question did not seek to engage or involve the parent of Child Q leading up to or during the search, particularly given the nature of the incident and the involvement of police authorities. The Commission is of the view that this relates to a broader narrative concerning the accountability of schools to parents. In our own local scrutiny work, increasing numbers of parents have spoken about the difficulty of engaging meaningfully with schools, getting their voice heard and not feeling sufficiently

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involved in decisions about their children. Sadly this does seem to suggest that in some schools at least, there is a growing accountability gap between schools and parents and the community of which they are a part. As a first step, the Commission is of the view that memberships of local school governing bodies should be reviewed to ensure that these truly reflect and represent the views and interests of parents and the local communities which they serve.

The case of Child Q has generated a broader debate as to the role of policing in schools and Safer Schools Officers, who were involved in this case. This is of particular significance because in 2020, following a legal challenge in relation to concerns around the disproportionate impact of the Safer Schools Partnership (SSP) on children from black and other ethnic backgrounds, the Metropolitan Police Service agreed to review the SSP and the role of the Safer Schools Officer (SSO). Whilst the Commissions were informed that this review was ongoing and would report imminently, at the time of writing no reports have been forthcoming.

The Commission notes and welcomes local collaborations to update the protocols for SSO. It is important however, that the overarching review by MPS is completed together with an impact analysis so that local communities are reassured that policing in schools is fair, proportionate and acting in the best interests of children at all times. The Living in Hackney and Children and Young People Scrutiny Commissions have both declared an interest in investigating the SSP and the role of SSO's locally with the MPS to further support improvements and accountability.

Safeguarding / adultification bias training

The case of Child Q has also exposed the differences in safeguarding practices and principles across those local agencies that work with and support local children, and in particular whether a safeguarding first approach is adopted equally for *all* children. At the heart of the SPR is the assertion that Child Q was treated differently and that she may not have been afforded the range of safeguarding protections because of assumptions based on her ethnicity. Members of the Commission rightly focused their questioning on the nature, delivery and effectiveness of safeguarding and adultification bias training across local agencies where it is clear that an improved understanding of the lived experience and history of local black communities should be central to the local training response to Child Q SPR.

The Commission noted plans to develop and extend adultification bias training within the local Metropolitan Police Service and across the broader safeguarding partnership. Further reassurance was however needed in relation to the consistency of this training across partner agencies and the degree to which this demonstrated a shared understanding of the need for a safeguarding first approach for *all* children across Hackney. Given issues raised by the case of Child Q and the long standing nature of concerns around the disproportionate impact of policing and other agency interventions within our communities, it is clear that there is a need for more robust oversight and monitoring within the safeguarding partnership. In short, local agencies need to be held accountable for delivering this change.

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Trust and confidence of the community in local policing

The case of Child Q has further eroded trust and confidence in policing amongst communities in Hackney. From the work the Commissions have undertaken in recent years, the community response was, unfortunately, anticipated. The Commission therefore sought to explore the role of local communities in policing and the efforts of the Metropolitan Police Service and MOPAC to restore trust in those communities where it is lost.

The Commission recognised the steps taken by the local Metropolitan Police Service and wider safeguarding partnership to meaningfully engage with affected communities in Hackney following the Child Q incident. However, the Commission was keen to see real change in the community engagement structures of the Metropolitan Police Service funded by MOPAC to ensure that they are truly representative of local communities. This is in light of the longstanding concerns around the effectiveness of their community engagement methods, and recognition from both the local Metropolitan Police Service and MOPAC that more needed to be done to ensure their structures were as representative as they should be.

It was also noted that feedback from local community groups had recommended not to hold another public meeting to allow the community time to heal and until further details emerged following the publication of the Independent Office of Police Complaints (IOPC) findings. The Commissions sought reassurance from the local Metropolitan Police Service that it would continue to hold further community engagement events following the publication of the IOPC report to help restore trust and confidence and avert any escalation of community tensions.

Ongoing scrutiny and oversight

From the SPR of Child Q and discussions at the scrutiny session, Members agreed that there were a number of policy areas in relation to statutory functions for the accountability of the crime and disorder partnership and the oversight of education and child safeguarding arrangements which would benefit from further scrutiny by the Living in Hackney (LiH) and Children and Young People (CYP). The following issues have been identified for consideration within forthcoming work programmes, and respective Commissions will look forward to working with partners and local agencies and the local community to support scrutiny of these policy areas:

- Role of policing in schools and role of SSP and SSO's (CYP/LiH)
- School behaviour policies (CYP)
- Anti-racist policies and practices across children services (CYP)
- School accountability to parents and the local community (CYP)
- Trust and confidence in policing (LiH)
- Policing of drugs (LiH)
- Use of stop and search powers (LiH)

From evidence presented and the ensuing discussion at the scrutiny session, members have outlined a number of emerging recommendations from this work which are detailed at the end of this letter. The Commission would welcome a response to these recommendations from respective agencies by **Friday 23rd**

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December 2022, and would like to follow up agreed actions with partners at a future meeting.

Members of the Commission have also agreed that it should meet again in early 2023 with key stakeholders to help maintain public oversight and ensure progress against the recommendations and commitments made by local agencies in relation to Child Q. It is expected that by this time subsequent investigations, reviews and follow-ups by local agencies will have been completed (i.e. Independent Office of Police Complaints) and local action plans to support the local response to Child Q will have been fully developed. This further meeting will provide an opportunity to review action plans and other work undertaken by respective Scrutiny Commissions as a result of the Child Q SPR.

Once again, members of the Commission would like to thank you for your support in the public scrutiny process of the outcomes from the Child Q SPR and the work of your respective organisations across Hackney to ensure such an incident is not repeated in the future. Members of the Commission would welcome a response to the further information requests and the recommendations (which directly impact on the organisations) made that are detailed at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Soraya Adejare
Chair of Living in Hackney Scrutiny
Commission

Cllr Margaret Gordon
Vice Chair, Children and Young People
Scrutiny Commission

Cllr Clare Joseph
Vice Chair of Living in Hackney Scrutiny
Commission

Cc:

- Mayor Phillip Glanville
- Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Deputy Mayor and cabinet member for education, young people and children's social care
- Cllr Susan Fajana-Thomas, Cabinet member for community safety and regulatory services
- Jacquie Burke, Group Director for Children and Education
- Paul Senior, Interim Director of Education
- Rickardo Hyatt, Group Director Climate, Homes and Economy

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Outstanding questions

The Commission has a number of outstanding issues and questions to which it would be helpful to receive a response. We would be grateful if you could provide us with this information by **Friday 23rd December 2022**.

To Metropolitan Police Service and MOPAC

1. Can further data be provided on the outcomes of strip searches (both thorough and intimate) undertaken in Hackney, both for under 18s and adults and ethnicity?
2. Can further information be provided in relation to local stop and search data and the reasons put forward for this to take place:
 - Can video recordings of stop and search incidents routinely be made available via Subject Access Request?
 - Is there any publicly available analysis of stop and search incidents which are not recorded?
3. There has been a relaxation of the Best Use of Stop and Search (BUSS) guidance which means that the police would not need to notify/engage communities ahead of Section 60 being applied. Can the Borough Commander commit to retaining community notification ahead of any Section 60 stop and search notice?
4. It was noted that the MOPAC Disproportionality Board brings criminal justice partners together to tackle disproportionality across the system.
 - How long has the Board been in place, what is its membership and what is its remit?
 - The Child Q case was considered by the Board. What was discussed and what were the outcomes?

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Recommendations to Local Agencies (The Commission would welcome a response to these recommendations from respective agencies by **Friday 23rd December 2022**)

To LBH, CHSCP, Metropolitan Police Service and MOPAC

1. The Commission would welcome the development of a singular partnership wide action plan to coordinate the response to recommendations from Child Q SPR and other commitments stemming from this review. It is hoped that the action plan will clearly set out those priorities for improvement and/or change, together with those agencies who are accountable.

To Metropolitan Police Service and MOPAC

2. Members of the Commission retain strong reservations about the efficacy of the Metropolitan Police Service policy of undertaking strip-searches of children. Whilst additional controls for administering strip searches of children in response to the Child Q SPR have been put in place these do not sufficiently address the need for further protection of children or disproportionate impact on local communities. If this policy is to continue, it is recommended that this is embedded within a safeguarding first approach recognising first and foremost that children being subject to this procedure are children and should be afforded necessary protections to keep them safe, protect their dignity and be effectively safeguarded. In addition, further reassurance will also be required that ongoing use of such an intrusive procedure is appropriately targeted recognising the ethnic disproportionality evident in this data.

To Metropolitan Police Service and MOPAC

3. The Commissions endorse the findings of both CHSCP and the Children's Commissioner in noting that the breadth, consistency and quality of data around the strip searching of children is inadequate. The quality and inconsistency of data available does not befit the intrusive nature of the strip search process and the personal impact it has on children or reflect the safeguarding duties and responsibilities of Metropolitan Police. MOPAC should improve monitoring, oversight and transparency of this data to enhance accountability arrangements for these intrusive and sensitive procedures and to ensure that children are effectively safeguarded.

To CHSCP

4. All local agencies that work with children have an important and *equal* role in the effective safeguarding of children, as it is this broad network of partners which helps to create an environment which maintains oversight of children, promotes their rights, advocates for them and helps keep them safe. The Commission would therefore welcome reassurance from the CHSCP that there is no deference to any agency, and that this local partnership is one of equals in which individual agencies and practitioners are knowledgeable, confident and empowered to challenge and support each other where they see this is in the best interests of children.

To CHSCP and Hackney Education

5. The Commissions recommend that Hackney Education continues to monitor and audit safeguarding policies and practice across local schools to ensure that the

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safeguarding learning from the case of Child Q is reflected in annual reviews and updates of child protection policies which they are obliged to undertake. Alongside many parents, the Commission would like further reassurance that these important policies which help to keep children safe away from home are developed in collaboration and are actively and rigorously tested.

To CHSCP, LBH and Metropolitan Police Service

6. The Commission would like further reassurance that the planned extension of adultification bias training is consistently applied and reflects the values and principles of the safeguarding partnership. The Commission would also like a commitment from the CHSCP that it will fully evaluate this training across the safeguarding partnership to ensure that it is delivering the fundamental but necessary changes to safeguarding practice.

To Metropolitan Police Service and MOPAC

7. The Commissions believe that the Metropolitan Police Service's current arrangements for consultation and community engagement are opaque, where named local community groups involved, the structures through which they are engaged and how the outcomes of consultations are used, remain unclear. The Commission recommends that the Metropolitan Police Service actively works with Hackney Council to review their arrangements and approach to engagement to ensure:
 - There is an agreed understanding between the police, community organisations and other stakeholders on the principles of good local community engagement;
 - Greater clarity on which groups are consulted, in what capacity and how consultation is used to inform policing;
 - That those local groups involved in consultation truly represent the diversity of the community in Hackney.

To LBH and Metropolitan Police Service

8. The Commissions would recommend that Metropolitan Police Service, in collaboration with the London Borough of Hackney, commit to a series of community engagement events after the publication of the IOPC report and work with London Borough of Hackney.

To LBH

9. The Commission recommends that, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, Hackney Education reviews the procedure in which its senior officers are placed on the governing bodies of local schools. If necessary, guidance should be developed to ensure that where appropriate, officers can contribute practically and positively to such educational partnerships yet avoid any conflicts with their duties and responsibilities.

For ALL to note:

10. Members have agreed to convene a follow-up meeting of the Commission to take place in early 2023. The aim of this meeting will be to:

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- To review outcomes of subsequent reviews and investigations (i.e. IOPC and CHSCP)
- To review progress against the emerging partnership action plan;
- To hear from local representatives of local children and young people;
- Update on Living in Hackney and Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission work resulting from Child Q SPR.