



Public of Hackney & Tower Hamlets

Central East BCU  
Bethnal Green Police Station

[www.met.police.uk](http://www.met.police.uk)

20 June 2023

Dear residents of Hackney & Tower Hamlets,

**Open letter and apology following the Child Q Update Report.**

As your local policing commander, with responsibility for Hackney and Tower Hamlets, I am writing to you in response to the Child Q Update Report, published today by the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children's Partnership. This report assesses the steps taken, whilst also recommending further steps which might be taken, by the police, schools and other local services, following the strip search of a Black child of secondary school age, in a school in Hackney in 2020. The child concerned, for the purpose of protecting their identity, has been known as Child Q.

I welcome the update report and the detailed work by the authors to understand the progress which has been made. I also commend the prominent position which the voice of children has within the findings. The Metropolitan Police accepted the recommendations in the original Child Safeguarding Practice Review in March 2022 and we will need some time to consider the additional recommendations made in the new report. We are also still awaiting the outcome of the investigation into the search by the Independent Office for Police Conduct, which restricts some public comments on aspects of the incident.

Nevertheless, this doesn't prevent me addressing some central issues and placing several important points on record. First and foremost, I am sorry for the trauma that we caused a child and I reiterate that their experience should never have happened.

I am also sorry that it took an event such as this to highlight that we were overusing this type of strip search on children. The report correctly identifies the need for a child centred approach and the crucial need for the police to be proportionate in the use of all of our powers. The use of search is an important tactic for the police, especially when used alongside other approaches to address violence and the use of weapons. However, we have to be particularly careful and proportionate when using intrusive searches, such as strip searches, with children. We should not have needed an event such as this to check our approach.

While we have made notable practical improvements, such as requiring more senior levels of authorisation and ensuring the involvement of an appropriate adult, this event illustrates why public scrutiny is so important in checking how we use our powers – we should never tire of testing that we are policing with the consent of the public. Our work with the Mayor's

Office for Policing and Crime and Hackney Council in piloting a new way for the public to scrutinise our activity is an important demonstration of this.

I also recognise that too many people in our communities feel that this incident compounded feelings of being over policed and under protected. This was a feature in Dame Louise Casey's recent report and has been outlined to me in numerous recent meetings with community groups and young leaders. Addressing this is a priority for us as we seek to rebuild trust and confidence. The update report notes that lessons have been learnt and progress continues to be made, through genuine engagement and consultation with our communities and I am pleased this is recognised. But I also know that we, along with our partners, still have a long way to go. I am determined to improve. It is absolutely right that you should feel that my officers, staff and I will treat you fairly, with courtesy, and in a way which demonstrates an approach centred on anti-discrimination. I am particularly grateful to those community groups and leaders who work with me directly on our trust and confidence plan locally, giving up so much of their time voluntarily to help build a model of policing which works for our communities.

Many of you have also made it clear to me that incidents such as these are not viewed as single events by our communities. They are woven into a long tapestry; a story of the experiences of policing, stretching back many years. This history shapes public trust and confidence in the police today and poor experiences can create a sense of trauma that fans out across the community and is passed down through generations. I have got a very real sense of this, having spent time talking with many of you over the past months.

We are absolutely committed to turning the Metropolitan Police around to be anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobic. I am at one with the Commissioner on the need to rid the Met of anyone whose behaviour can't live up to these aims and I am confident that the vast majority of my officers in Hackney and Tower Hamlets are genuine in their commitment to that ideal. They turn up to work each day and night with the objective of doing what is right to keep the public safe. However, I can also see that what we do through policing and the wider criminal justice system still impacts on different communities and individuals in a disproportionate way.

I have given my commitment to the public in Hackney and Tower Hamlets that our focus will be on ensuring that the lived experience of our communities should match our individual commitments to being anti-discriminatory. I expect you to be demanding customers on that point and I ask for your support and help during our journey.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Conway', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

**James Conway**  
Detective Chief Superintendent  
BCU Commander Central East – Hackney & Tower Hamlets  
Metropolitan Police Service