

# Neighbourhood Policing: the experience of young Londoners

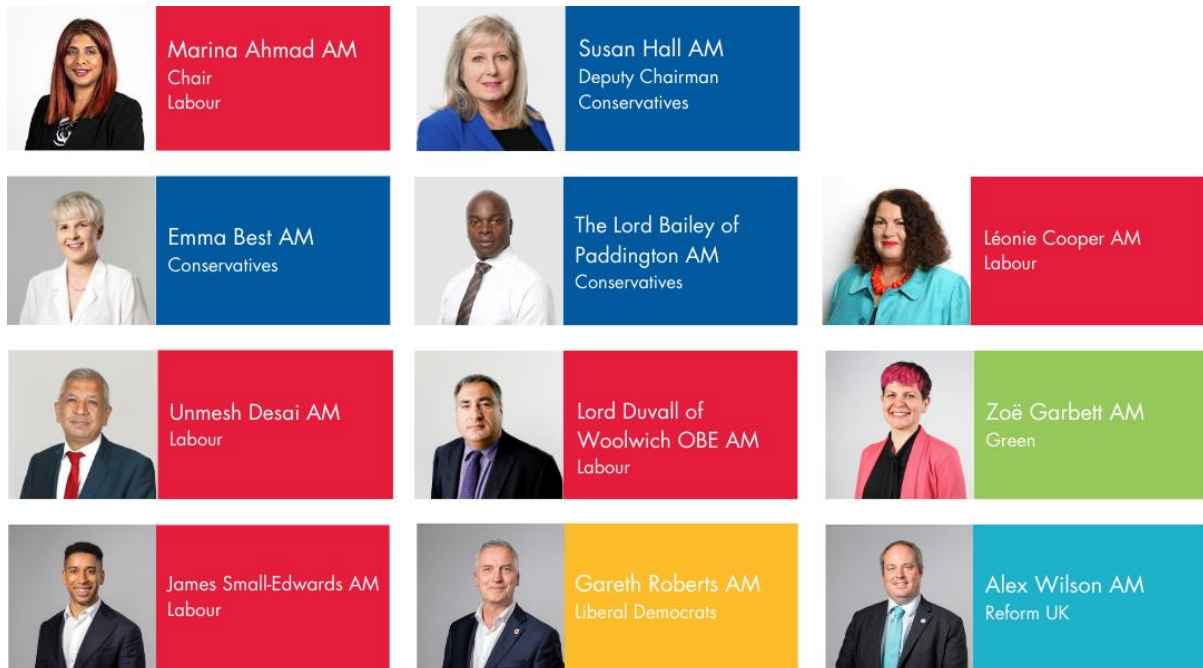
Police and Crime Committee

February 2026



**LONDON**ASSEMBLY

## Police and Crime Committee



The London Assembly Police and Crime Committee examines the work of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and investigates issues relating to policing and crime reduction in London.

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## Foreword



**Marina Ahmad AM**  
**Chair of the Police and Crime Committee**

Young Londoners have a right not only to be safe, but to feel safe in their neighbourhoods. For too many, that confidence is still missing. This report examines how neighbourhood policing shapes young people's everyday experiences of safety, trust, and fairness, and whether recent changes to policing in London are changing that relationship.

This investigation builds on the Committee's previous work on preventing violence and on the impact of violence against women and girls, on young people. Across that work, one message has been consistent. Early and routine interactions with the police matter. They shape how young people understand authority, whether they feel protected, and whether they trust public institutions to act in their interests.

Neighbourhood policing is often a young person's first and most frequent point of contact with the police. When it works well, it can provide reassurance, prevent harm, and support children before problems escalate. When it fails, it can build fear, alienation, and a sense of being treated with suspicion rather than care.

In recent years, the Metropolitan Police has set out ambitious commitments to reform how it polices children and young people, including the publication of its Children's Strategy and a stated Child First approach. At the same time, significant changes have been made to neighbourhood policing structures, including the removal of Safer Schools Officers and Youth Engagement and Diversion Officers. This report was launched at a moment of rapid change, and seeks to understand how these reforms are being experienced on the ground.

Many young Londoners told us they do not feel believed when they seek help from the police, and that they are often treated as suspects regardless of the reason for contact. Some described police presence as intimidating rather than reassuring. These experiences risk undermining the very trust that neighbourhood policing is meant to build, particularly among those communities where confidence in policing is already fragile.

The Committee recognises the scale of the challenge facing the Met, and welcomes its stated commitment to improving how children and young people are policed. However, commitments

alone are not enough. If a Child First approach is to be meaningful, it must be visible and consistent in day to day neighbourhood policing practice. It must be understood by officers, supported by training, and informed by the voices and experiences of young people themselves.

This report sets out a series of practical recommendations aimed at strengthening neighbourhood policing as a foundation for trust, safeguarding, and prevention. The pace of change now underway makes it all the more important that impacts are measured and that young people's experiences are taken seriously. The future relationship between a generation of Londoners and law enforcement will be shaped not by strategy documents, but by what happens in neighbourhoods, schools, and all interactions with the police.

## Executive Summary

In the past two years, the Metropolitan Police (the Met) has overhauled its approach to policing young Londoners. The Met published its Children's Strategy in September 2024, in which states it will take a 'Child First' approach to policing and strengthen links between neighbourhood teams and education settings. And in 2024, it announced a raft of changes to its neighbourhood policing teams and the way it works with young people, including the removal of Safer Schools Officers (SSOs) and Youth Engagement and Diversion Officers (YEDOs). All part of the Met's budget cuts and restructuring of neighbourhood policing. These changes followed the Child Q scandal as well as external reviews, including the Casey Review, which criticised the Met for an uninformed approach to children and an overeagerness to treat children as suspects.

Alongside these policy commitments, the Met operates within a clear statutory framework. Under the Children Act, the police are required to make arrangements to ensure their functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.<sup>1</sup> This duty applies to all aspects of policing and is not optional, discretionary, or secondary to other operational priorities.

We launched this investigation in July 2025, shortly after the Met made these changes to its neighbourhood policing teams and the way it works with young people. In this investigation, the Committee set out to explore how safe young people feel in their communities, how the Met is keeping young people safe through its neighbourhood policing teams, and the impact of the changes it is making to how it works and engages with young people at a local level, including on their feelings of safety and trust and confidence in policing in London.

We have heard that too many young Londoners still do not trust the police and do not feel safe in their local area. They often feel they are not believed by the police, and that they are seen as a suspect first, regardless of their reason for coming into contact with the police. This is not new. We also heard that the cuts and changes to how youth-based neighbourhood policing is delivered in London risks greater detachment and more punitive policing, which could result in a poorer relationship between the Met and many young Londoners. So, while the Committee welcomes the Met's 'Child First' approach and its commitment to training all staff on this approach in a very short timeframe, we are concerned about a gap between the Met's commitment and the reality of day-to-day policing experienced by young Londoners. In this report, we focus on the Met and how – through its neighbourhood policing teams – it can better protect young Londoners from crime, while also providing reassurance, building positive relationships, and preventing offending. Given the scale and pace of change the Met is making to how it polices and engages with young Londoners, there needs to be a concerted effort to measure the impacts of this change in approach. The Committee makes 11 recommendations it believes can help the Met strengthen how it engages and actively involves children and young people in neighbourhood policing in London.

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<sup>1</sup> HMICFRS, [Glossary: section 11 duty of specified agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children](#), 19 August 2021

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

MOPAC should commission and publish an annual, London-wide survey of children and young people on their sense of safety in and around schools, and their experiences of and confidence in policing.

The survey should:

- be designed with input from young people and youth organisations
- allow for consistent year on year comparison
- be disaggregated by age, gender, ethnicity, and borough

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### Recommendation 2

The Met, with the support of MOPAC, should produce a charter on how it will conduct its interactions with children and young people. This should include consultation and co-production with young people, including schools and youth groups, to understand how young people want the police to interact with them.

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### Recommendation 3

In 2026-27, the Met, working with young people and specialist youth organisations, should co-design and co-deliver parts of police training on child first and youth engagement. This should involve real experiences and perspectives from young Londoners.

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### Recommendation 4

By September 2026, the Met should commission an independent evaluation of the delivery of its Child First training to monitor its effectiveness and impact in improving the Met's policing and interactions with young people.

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### Recommendation 5

When the Met publishes its Children's Strategy dashboard, it should:

- Outline progress made one year on
- Provide details of the progress against each commitment

The dashboard should be updated quarterly.

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## **Recommendation 6**

Within the next six months, the Met should publish further details of how the work previously carried out by Youth Engagement and Diversion Officers is being taken forward as part of its wider neighbourhood policing approach.

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## **Recommendation 7**

Within the next 12 months, each neighbourhood policing team should develop a Neighbourhood Policing Youth Engagement Action Plan that includes clear objectives and timelines, named policing leads and key partner organisations. Annual progress updates should be published.

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## **Recommendation 8**

The Met should re-evaluate the efficacy of the CONNECT system, particularly as it relates to issues with children and young people. The CONNECT system should make inclusion of school mandatory.

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## **Recommendation 9**

In May 2026, the Met should commission a 12-month evaluation of the impact of the Dedicated Ward Officer – Children and Young People role, setting out:

- How the work previously carried out by Safer Schools Officers has been absorbed into the Dedicated Ward Officer role
- How the Dedicated Ward Officer role operates in practice
- How the Dedicated Ward Officer role works with professionals in and beyond education
- How the Dedicated Ward Officer role supports wider neighbourhood policing teams in their engagement with young people and schools

This should include clear metrics for assessing the effectiveness of the role.

## **Recommendation 10**

The Met should establish neighbourhood policing teams as the hub of youth engagement for local policing, including new guidance on how these teams will engage with local young people in and out of schools.

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## Recommendation 11

By the end of 2026, MOPAC should create a clear map or directory of youth and community services across London so that neighbourhood police officers know where to refer young people for specialist support.

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### What is neighbourhood policing?

The College of Policing describes the defining features of neighbourhood policing as:

- Police officers, staff and volunteers accessible to, responsible for and accountable to communities
- Community engagement that builds trust and develops a sophisticated understanding of community needs
- Collaborative problem-solving with communities supported integrated working with private, public and voluntary sectors<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> College of Policing, [Neighbourhood policing career pathway](#)

## Neighbourhood policing and young people: Introduction

Many young Londoners do not trust the police and do not feel safe in their local area. While the reasons behind this are complex and varied, a vital link in rebuilding that trust will depend upon the first interactions young Londoners have with the police, often through the Met's neighbourhood policing teams, and the lasting impression that experience leaves behind.

Neighbourhood policing is a term commonly heard in London. It is built around visibility and engagement. To some it may conjure up images of police on the beat, patrolling local streets and tackling crime and anti-social behaviour. To others, it may mean involving the community in local policing, working with residents to prevent crime and address local concerns, and building trust through regular engagement with Londoners. The Mayor of London has described neighbourhood policing as "the bedrock of community confidence and safety in London".<sup>3</sup>

Yet, we are only two years on from Baroness Casey's independent review of the Met's culture which found that "London no longer has a functioning neighbourhood policing service".<sup>4</sup> The Met has since made a number of commitments for reform through A New Met for London, including developing its first Children's Strategy.

In its Children's Strategy, the Met states it will build stronger relationships with London's children, design better prevention strategies, strengthen links between neighbourhood teams and education settings and take a 'Child First' approach to policing.<sup>5</sup>

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*"By building a stronger relationship with London's children we will gain greater understanding of the crimes affecting them and be able to design better prevention strategies. We want to establish relationships with children that will last into adulthood, building increased confidence in the next generation."*<sup>6</sup>

### Metropolitan Police Children's Strategy

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Despite these commitments, the Committee was concerned that some of the changes the Met is making to its neighbourhood policing teams risks damaging young people's trust in the Met, so we set out to look at these changes in context. We launched this investigation in July 2025, shortly after the Met made changes to its neighbourhood policing teams and the way it works with young people. These changes included the removal of Youth Engagement and Diversion

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<sup>3</sup> Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, [A Safer London for Everyone: Police and Crime Plan 2025-2029](#), 28 March 2025

<sup>4</sup> [Casey Review](#), March 2023, p. 14

<sup>5</sup> Metropolitan Police, [MPS Children's Strategy](#), September 2024, p. 14

<sup>6</sup> Metropolitan Police, [MPS Children's Strategy](#), September 2024, p. 14

Officers (YEDOs) and Safer Schools Officers (SSOs), as part of the Met's restructuring of youth-based neighbourhood policing.

In this investigation, the Committee set out to explore how safe young people feel in their communities, how the Met is keeping young people safe through neighbourhood policing and the impact of the changes it is making to how it works and engages with young people at the local level, including on their feelings of safety and trust and confidence in policing in London.

The Committee held two meetings, in July and September 2025, with a range of organisations working with young Londoners. The Committee's second meeting included guests from the Metropolitan Police, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and the Mayor's Violence Reduction Unit. The Committee also heard from the London Youth Assembly and from young people at a youth voice session, facilitated by Safer London, where the Committee met with some of Safer London's Voice, Influence and Participation (VIP) young volunteers.

The Committee also ran a survey to gather evidence from Londoners. The survey was open for responses between 30 July 2025 and 12 September 2025.

## How safe do young people feel in their neighbourhoods?

In a survey by MOPAC between November 2021 and January 2022, of nearly 12,000 young Londoners aged between 11 and 16, 88 per cent said they felt safe at school (9,225 of 10,481); and 76 per cent said they felt safe at home (8,172 of 10,704). The survey also found that around one in ten young people felt unsafe at school, while one in five felt unsafe in their local area, with hate crime, carrying weapons and gangs being of the most concern.<sup>7</sup> With fear of crime as one of the main reasons behind this unease, even though schools and homes may feel safe to many young people, others still carry worries about their safety once they step outside.

The findings from these survey results have been echoed throughout this investigation, confirming the pattern of mixed feelings about safety and fear of crime among young Londoners. For example, Omar Alleyne-Lawler, Communications and Police Engagement Manager from the youth charity Hope in Haringey, told us that young people in the Haringey area “do not feel very safe” and were concerned about “overt and traditional forms of violence, including gang recruitment and personal thefts [...] of mobile phones, electronic devices and e-scooters, or what we see online, in terms of online grooming”.<sup>8</sup>

The experiences of different demographics of young Londoners also varies. Ashley Fontaine, Young People’s Programme Manager, from the crime prevention group Neighbourhood Watch Network, highlighted how fear of crime heightened amongst young women and girls.<sup>9</sup> MOPAC’s survey also highlighted that young people perceive “inequalities in safety” – young people are more likely to believe their area is a safe place for men and boys than for women or girls or for children and young people. MOPAC also found that concerns among “smaller and potentially ‘hard to reach’ groups of young Londoners”, such as young people identifying as non-binary gender, were heightened.<sup>10</sup>

We also heard that perceptions of safety are often interlinked with those who have been victims of violent crimes and exploitation. The Met’s Children’s Strategy highlights that in 2023 there were approximately 61,000 child victims of crime. Separately, 51,000 children were suspected of committing a crime.<sup>11</sup>

Worryingly, we have heard that when young Londoners are victims of crime and ask for help from professionals (such as the police) they are not always well supported. Carly Adams Elias, Director of Practice at youth charity Safer London, told us that this then “compounds their

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<sup>7</sup> MOPAC, [‘We Are London’ 2021-22](#), April 2023, p. 10

<sup>8</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p. 1

<sup>9</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p. 1

<sup>10</sup> MOPAC, [‘We Are London’ 2021-22](#), April 2023, p. 1

<sup>11</sup> Metropolitan Police, [MPS Children’s Strategy](#), September 2024

experience of feeling unsafe”.<sup>12</sup> This is reflected in MOPAC’s 2025 Q2 User Satisfaction Survey, which shows that only 65 per cent of young victims of crime are satisfied with the support they received from the police.<sup>13</sup>

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*“When they [young people] are asking for help or coming into contact with professionals such as the police or other agencies, that then sometimes compounds their experience of feeling unsafe because they do not necessarily get the responses that they need as children.”<sup>14</sup>*

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### Carly Adams Elias, Safer London

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At the Committee’s roundtable with representatives from Safer London’s Voice, Influence and Participation (VIP) young volunteers, we heard that young people often felt that something “really bad” had to happen to them before they got help from the police. Participants told us that they, and many other young people in their communities, did not view the police as a place of safety, and viewed them as more of an intimidating presence. One young person told us that police patrols in their local area created a feeling of fear rather than a feeling of safety. Another told us about a perception that those from an ethnic minority background were more likely to fear the police, and that it would take a long-term piece of focused work to address this.<sup>15</sup>

In evidence to the Committee, Jessica West, Principal at Ark Walworth Academy, neatly summarised the challenge. She explained:

*“Children have a right to two things, to be safe and to feel safe, and both of those things do not necessarily come in tandem. Adult professionals from a range of different organisations need to do work to both ensure that children are safeguarded, but also to make sure that they feel safe in their environment.”<sup>16</sup>*

This report focuses on how the Met’s neighbourhood policing teams engage and work with young people. This includes providing the reassurance young Londoners need, building positive relationships with young people and the specialist organisations that work with them, and protecting them from crime and prevent offending.

It is vital that, in order for the Met and MOPAC to engage and work with young people in the most effective way, they have an up-to-date understanding of the issues that matter to them, as well as their wider sense of safety in London. The last full MOPAC youth survey appears to have been run between November 2021 and January 2022, and published in April 2023. The

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<sup>12</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 1

<sup>13</sup> MOPAC User Satisfaction Survey, [Victim Demographics](#)

<sup>14</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 1

<sup>15</sup> Roundtable with Voice, Influence and Participation volunteers, hosted by Safer London, 8 October 2025

<sup>16</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 2

Committee believes an annual survey should be commissioned, allowing for more up-to-date data on children and young people in London.

### **Recommendation 1**

MOPAC should commission and publish an annual, London-wide survey of children and young people on their sense of safety in and around schools, and their experiences of and confidence in policing.

The survey should:

- be designed with input from young people and youth organisations
  - allow for consistent year on year comparison
  - be disaggregated by age, gender, ethnicity, and borough
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## Youth engagement and neighbourhood policing

The Met has recently made significant changes to how it engages with young Londoners and its approach to keeping children and young people safe. This includes the publication of the Met's first Children's Strategy and its commitment to a 'Child First' approach;<sup>17</sup> alongside the removal of YEDOs and SSOs, with the responsibilities of SSOs being absorbed into neighbourhood policing teams.

### The Met's Children's Strategy

The Met published its Children's Strategy in September 2024. The Commissioner describes the Strategy as:

*"an attempt to recognise explicitly what the Metropolitan Police has not always got right in the past: that in policing the line between vulnerability and criminality we may sometimes have focused too hard on the criminality we can see, not the vulnerability that lies behind it. It is not a 'free pass' for childhood criminality: where under-18s are engaged in high harm behaviour, officers will use the full range of their powers to protect the public and the children themselves, and sometimes this requires the use of force. It is, however, a pledge to work better, with our safeguarding partners and with children, to see the 'Child First' and adapt our response to recognise their needs."*<sup>18</sup>

### 'Child First'

The Met's Children's Strategy is designed to shift how the Met polices and safeguards children and young people. This involves stepping away from traditional forms of reactive and enforcement focussed policing to recognising vulnerability and the needs of children and young people first and foremost – treating children as children, rather than offenders. This includes diverting children and young people away from the criminal justice system, improving outcomes for children and young people and building safer communities. This new style of policing focusses on a 'Child First' approach. The Met defines this as an approach that "recognises that children are different to adults; they have different needs and vulnerabilities". It also emphasises that "in all encounters with the police those below the age of 18 should be treated as children first."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Metropolitan Police, [MPS Children's Strategy](#), September 2024

<sup>18</sup> Metropolitan Police, [MPS Children's Strategy](#), September 2024, p. 5

<sup>19</sup> Metropolitan Police, [MPS Children Strategy](#), September 2024, p. 10



## The Met's Child First approach

The approach set out by the Met in its Children's Strategy states that those under-18 must be treated as children first, with different needs and vulnerabilities than adults. In all situations where children come to the attention of the police, a full understanding of their circumstances should be sought. It also highlights that any engagement with children and young people should be "positive and opportunities sought to enhance our relationship with them."<sup>20</sup>

The Committee welcomes the Met's commitment to a 'Child First' approach. However, we also heard concerns that there is a gap between the Met's commitment to use a 'Child First' approach and the reality experienced by young Londoners.

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*"There is that sense of feeling responsible for the harm that they have experienced, whether they are being seen as a victim or a perpetrator [...] Then there is the conduct that they receive on the ongoing interactions with police. Some of the ways that young people feel that they are treated as suspects and not believed is the way that they are spoken to, the language that is used around them, the level of communication that they get from the police or that they do not get from the police. Often it is a lack of communication. They are not kept involved or informed with what is going on, therefore they feel often quite out of the picture, and they do not feel cared for in that respect."*<sup>21</sup>

## Carly Adams Elias, Safer London

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Throughout this investigation, the Committee heard that young people often feel they are not believed by the police, and often seen as a suspect first, regardless of their reason for engaging with the police. We were told that many young people have "experienced an accumulation of discrimination" in their lives within wider society and that this is "impacting their experience of engaging with criminal justice processes".<sup>22</sup> For example, Carly Adams Elias, Safer London, told us that "a lot of young people already feel quite judged and quite discriminated [against] and fearful of the police before they have even had an interaction with them".<sup>23</sup> She added:

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<sup>20</sup> Metropolitan Police, [MPS Children's Strategy](#), September 2024, p. 10

<sup>21</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 2

<sup>22</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 4

<sup>23</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 4

*"We have worked with lots of young people where they have reported very serious crimes against them, including threats made against their families, being harmed with weapons, and that they are first and foremost treated as if they are not being believed and that they feel like they are being blamed for the crimes that have been committed against them [...] That then impacts on how those young people feel able to engage with the police going forward and then it means that they are less likely to feel that they are able to make statements or follow through with the criminal justice process."*<sup>24</sup>

We agree that children should be treated as children first, taking their age and vulnerabilities into account, regardless of their behaviour or the circumstances in which they have come into contact with the police. However, we heard about a "gulf between the traditional role of policing and the approach required by 'Child First'".<sup>25</sup> Carly Adams Elias, Safer London, told us that the police often do not think about the wider needs of young suspects of crime, the context of their involvement, or suspected involvement, in crime, and that "they are being treated as suspect and not as a child, not as a child first".<sup>26</sup> This approach is not one that recognises accountability and care.

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*"Rather than thinking about, 'What has happened to this child, what does this child need, how can we help this child?' they [the Met] are thinking, 'What crime has been committed? How am I going to follow the processes that I need to prove that?'"*<sup>27</sup>

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### Carly Adams Elias, Safer London

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Despite the difficult interactions some young people experience with the police, we heard that, at the same time, young people understand that the police are there to keep them safe. Jessica West, Ark Walworth Academy, stressed that "The perspective of young people is they do want to be able to feel safe and they do believe that there is a way forward for officers to provide that support."<sup>28</sup> She said:

*"There needs to be a charter, a MPS charter for young people, like a children's charter that would help children to understand what the expectation for that interaction is, that unplanned interaction with an officer. "You will be asked how you want to be addressed. You will be given the officer's name. They are going to tell you what is going to happen*

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<sup>24</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 2

<sup>25</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p.17

<sup>26</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p.

<sup>27</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p.6

<sup>28</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p. 3

*before it happens. This is how you might complain...Those sorts of things would be really helpful to that unplanned interaction that happens between young people and adults, because the opportunity for planned interaction has been significantly reduced by the decisions, and that is the sort of thing that helps children to feel safe.”<sup>29</sup>*

The Committee also heard about the importance of involving young people in creating initiatives that would increase their engagement with the police and feelings of safety – actively involving children and young people in decision making, listening to their voices and respecting their perspectives is central to a ‘Child First’ approach. Ashley Fontaine, Neighbourhood Watch Network, told us that that Neighbourhood Watch’s work with young people includes some work with neighbourhood policing teams, but there is scope to do more. She said:

*“I do a lot of work with young people with co-production and one of the things that I do is how can we create an initiative together that would help you feel safer in your community? We do have some involvement with different localised policing teams, but that needs to happen on a wider level of getting young people involved in policies that will help them to feel safer, even just general initiatives that go out, campaigns that go out, that will help them to understand how they can feel safer and work with their neighbourhood policing teams.”<sup>30</sup>*

As part of its Children and Young Persons Strategy 2024–27, the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) has published a Children and Young Persons Policing Charter.<sup>31</sup> The Charter makes a number of pledges to children and young people. This includes the sharing of best practice and guidance to local police services, and the opportunity for local police to measure its delivery against the pledges in the Charter. The Charter focusses on the NPCC’s three pillars of activity in its Children and Young Persons Strategy: “your trust”, “your voice” and “your future”.<sup>32</sup>

Building on the principles of the NPCC’s Children and Young Persons Policing Charter, the Committee believes that the Met should develop a Charter, similar to its Stop and Search Charter, that sets out its commitment to deliver high quality ‘Child First’ policing and how it intends to engage and interact with children and young people on a daily basis. The Charter should be developed and co-produced with young Londoners to inform understanding about policing that matters most to them.

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<sup>29</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p. 3

<sup>30</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p. 4

<sup>31</sup> [Children and Young Persons Policing Strategy 2024 – 2027](#)

<sup>32</sup> [Children and Young Persons Policing Charter 2025](#)

## Recommendation 2

The Met, with the support of MOPAC, should produce a charter on how it will conduct its interaction with children and young people. This should include consultation and co-production with young people, including schools and youth groups, to understand how young people want the police to interact with them.

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### Child First training

In this investigation, we heard how important training for Met officers is to ensuring the Children's Strategy is embedded in the Met's day-to-day work and police interactions with young people are delivered in a 'Child First' way. In particular, we heard that all officers need training in 'Child First' policing. Katya Moran, Youth Justice Legal Centre, said that "all of the officers in all of the different roles needed to have proper training on what Child First is about, why it has got to where it is, and how it can apply to their day jobs".<sup>33</sup> Given the shortcomings the Committee heard in young Londoners experiences of engaging with the police to date, the Met must step up its efforts to embed 'Child First' into the fabric of how it polices. Young people's respect and trust in the police will be built through small, everyday encounters. Training is central to this.

While the Met's Children's Strategy commits to revising learning packages and includes a commitment to "managing and de-escalating situations in a 'Child First' way",<sup>34</sup> we heard the Met needs to bridge the gap between everyday traditional policing and a 'Child First' policing approach. The Committee was concerned to hear of a void between what is taught on the Met's 'Child First' training and officer understanding of what 'Child First' means in practice. Katya Moran, Youth Justice Legal Centre, told us:

*"We delivered training on Child First and a number of other related topics to custody sergeants from Wood Green and Brixton Police Stations. It was very interesting in the training to observe the gulf that exists between the traditional role of a police officer who is there to solve crime, to identify perpetrators, etc, and Child First which requires a very different approach."*<sup>35</sup>

The Committee was pleased to hear that, as part of the A New Met for London training, the Met is providing a "half day's worth of 'Child First' training to every police officer in the Met to really upskill them in the knowledge of what 'Child First' means and how to turn that into a reality on the street."<sup>36</sup> This training is essential to really embed the 'Child First' approach into

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<sup>33</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 5

<sup>34</sup> Metropolitan Police, [MPS Children's Strategy](#), September 2024, p. 33

<sup>35</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 3

<sup>36</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 2](#), 3 September 2025, p. 1

the Met's neighbourhood policing teams. The Met has since confirmed to the Committee that it is a full day of training.

Cuts to youth engagement teams and the removal of SSOs are likely to reduce opportunities for young Londoners to build relationships with trained youth engagement and child-specialist police officers. Given this, it is even more essential that 'Child First' training is rolled out to all officers across the Met, and that neighbourhood teams are prioritised, as the Met restructures its approach to youth-based neighbourhood policing.

The impact of this training should be monitored. This will ensure that the Met is embedding the core messages and practices of a 'Child First' approach, particularly its commitment to treat children as children first, and enable all officers, at the neighbourhood level and beyond, to recognise the different needs and vulnerabilities of children and young people compared to adults. In turn, this will facilitate positive and non-punitive interactions between the police and children and young people and prevent unnecessary contact between young people and the wider criminal justice system.

Young people can play a key role in police officer training. Involving children and young people in police training not only helps officers understand their perceptions and experiences of policing, it can also help to challenge stereotypes and build mutual trust. The Committee calls on the Met to actively prioritise youth-led training to strengthen understanding between young people and the police, instil proactive community engagement and ensure the views of young people are heard in the policing, crime and safeguarding matters that affect them. Jessica West, Ark Walworth Academy, told the Committee that she has "many times said, please come to my school, have the building to do your training. We will give you the young people to do it. Ask them what they want."<sup>37</sup>

### **Recommendation 3**

In 2026-27, the Met, working with young people and specialist youth organisations, should co-design and co-deliver parts of police training on child first and youth engagement. This should involve real experiences and perspectives from young Londoners.

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### **A change in culture**

A shift in culture is also needed across the Met. In September 2025, the Met told us that, 12 months on from the publication of its Children's Strategy, it is still "really in that development stage". It added, "One of the key points is raising awareness within the organisation around what that means to officers on the ground". When asked how the 'Child First' approach is

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<sup>37</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p. 3

making a difference to children and young people in London, the Met said that it does not have the metrics about how it knows whether it is working.<sup>38</sup>

The Met has agreed to develop and publish an oversight dashboard for its Children's Strategy.<sup>39</sup> The Committee is pleased to hear that the Met will publish this dashboard.<sup>40</sup> This will ensure transparency and demonstrate progress on the implementation and delivery of the Children's Strategy. MOPAC must ensure that the dashboard, and progress on the commitments in the Strategy, are shared widely.

There is much to be admired and commended in the Met's Children's Strategy, but it is the Committee's view that the Strategy has not yet translated into tangible changes and its intended outcomes not yet evident in everyday policing, or in the lived experience of many young Londoners. While there may be instances where this new approach is starting to work, until the Children's Strategy is embedded throughout the Met, it will continue to have strained or challenging relations with many demographics of young people in London.

## **Recommendation 4**

By September 2026, the Met should commission an independent evaluation of the delivery of its Child First training to monitor its effectiveness and impact in improving the Met's policing and interactions with young people.

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## **Recommendation 5**

When the Met publishes its Children's Strategy dashboard, it should:

- Outline progress made on overall delivery of the Strategy
- Provide details of the progress against each commitment

The dashboard should be updated quarterly.

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## **Cuts to youth engagement teams**

For young people to feel safe in their neighbourhoods, it is important that they do not fear the police. Rhys Barfoot from London Youth told us that "there is a way forward as to how young

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<sup>38</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 2](#), 3 September 2025, p. 1

<sup>39</sup> London Policing Board, [Agenda Report](#), 26 June 2025, p. 32

<sup>40</sup> [LPB minutes](#)

people feel safe and that is to de-stigmatise, it is to demystify, and that is to directly engage with police officers".<sup>41</sup>

Trust between young people and the police is fragile. Youth-led training, community policing and safe spaces for young people are important in building and maintaining this trust. Breaking these bonds can lead to fear, disengagement and distrust of the police, undermining feelings of safety. The Committee is concerned about the potential impact of cuts to youth engagement teams, that were vital in building trust and leading some of this positive work.

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*"Cutting engagement is not going to help young people feel safe because it just leaves that void where narratives can build because there are not people around to directly speak to the questions young people have."*<sup>42</sup>

### **Omar Alleyne-Lawler, Hope in Haringey**

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Much of the Met's youth engagement work was previously delivered by local youth engagement teams and YEDOs. As part of the Met's 'tough choices' budget decisions, these posts have now been removed.<sup>43</sup> In a report to the London Policing Board in June 2025, the Met reported:

*"Youth Engagement and Diversion officer posts have been removed, and people have transitioned into the wider Neighbourhoods model as part of the local ward and engagement teams to form a new approach to policing for children and young people. This will ensure more focus on policing local areas around schools and where children and young people are more at risk of harm."*<sup>44</sup>

The Committee understands the need for 'tough choices' within the Met, and for budget savings. However, we heard evidence that investing time and resource in police engagement with young people, and the importance of police that are visible, is valuable to young Londoners and in diverting young people away from unnecessary criminalisation. Ashley Fontaine, Neighbourhood Watch, told us that the young people she has worked with, particularly those in London, have said that they want more visible police in their area, more engagement with police officers, and police officers that are "a bit more approachable."<sup>45</sup>

Omar Alleyne-Lawler from Hope in Haringey echoed these comments. He said that presence of police officers in schools, and around schools, in our local neighbourhoods is something young

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<sup>41</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p. 6

<sup>42</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p. 7

<sup>43</sup> MOPAC, [MOPAC Budget 2025-26: update on Metropolitan Police Service 'tough choices'](#)

<sup>44</sup> London Policing Board, [Commissioner's Report](#), 26 June 2025, p. 48

<sup>45</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p. 4



people have vouched for: “when asked directly if this were something that they would like. The answer is almost always yes.”<sup>46</sup>

However, the Committee also heard that police visibility is not essential for all young Londoners. Instead, the Committee was told that a stable and consistent police presence in communities is also important. This includes keeping officers in post long enough to develop relationships with young people, and develop a positive view of police in general. John Hart from Young Hackney told us:

*“I am not sure more police officers is necessarily what we need there. There is a thing about the stability and continuity of those officers from a senior level all the way through to your police on a neighbourhood level, because often those police officers are changing roles every year, every couple of years, and it is really difficult to get continuity of relationships with young people. It is also even harder to get continuity of a strategic agreement for what we are doing with smaller projects or bigger scale pieces of work. If there was a longer-term approach to how we think about the continuity of police presence, that would be welcome.”<sup>47</sup>*

While the commitments in the Children’s Strategy are welcome, we are concerned about the challenge of delivering the Children’s Strategy in light of the Met’s ‘tough choices’ and budget cuts. The Met itself told us that “in a time of luxury we would have those [youth engagement] officers probably in place and they would have been delivering engagement work at an individual level and partnership work”.<sup>48</sup> Cuts and changes to how youth-based neighbourhood policing is delivered by the Met risks greater detachment and more punitive policing, resulting in a poorer relationship between the Met and many young Londoners. The Committee believes that there is room for improvement in how the Met engages with young people.

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*“Youth engagement has been a challenge for the police for some considerable time [...] I can empathise with young people who have attended police and partnership panels in the past because we are probably not in the youth mindset in terms of how we engage and pique their interest. We are, like many organisations, quite staid in the way that we do things. The challenge for us in policing is trying to work through what the best mechanism is to hear young people’s voices in a way which they want to engage.”<sup>49</sup>*

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## Superintendent Matt Cox, Metropolitan Police

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<sup>46</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p. 3

<sup>47</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 7

<sup>48</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 2](#), 3 September 2025, p. 6

<sup>49</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 2](#), 3 September 2025, p. 12

We urge the Met to ensure that the removal of YEDOs from neighbourhood policing teams does not mean it loses or misses opportunities to engage with and support young people. The Met should prioritise the importance of stability and continuity of relationships between young people and neighbourhood policing officers, removing barriers and providing positive opportunities, and should ensure that this is not lost in the changes it is making to the structure of neighbourhood policing.

### **Recommendation 6**

Within the next six months, the Met should publish further details of how the work previously carried out by Youth Engagement and Diversion Officers is being taken forward as part of its wider neighbourhood policing approach.

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### **Recommendation 7**

Within the next 12 months, each neighbourhood policing team should develop a Neighbourhood Policing Youth Engagement Action Plan that includes clear objectives and timelines, named policing leads and key partner organisations. Annual progress updates should be published.

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## **Police in schools and the removal of Safer Schools Officers**

Police have had a direct role in schools since 2002, when the then Government launched the Safer Schools Partnership Programme (SSP). The SSP established a “a formal agreement between a school or partnership of schools and police to work together in order to keep young people safe, reduce crime and the fear of crime and improve behaviour in schools and their communities”.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Home Office, [Safer School Partnerships Guidance](#), 2009

## The role of Safer Schools Officers in London

Following a pilot of 100 officers in 10 London boroughs in 2002, by 2009 every London borough had SSOs.<sup>51</sup> In May 2025, there were 371 SSO posts across the city.<sup>52</sup>

The role of SSO in London included the following duties:

- Preventing young people from committing crime in the first place or from re-offending.
- Supporting school behaviour policy, though not intervening in altercations between pupils where a member of staff is available to do so, unless the officer believes there is a possibility of injury to a person or damage to property.
- Providing a visible and familiar point of contact with their assigned school or schools, and helping to advise Headteachers and their staff on policing issues.
- Participate in multi-agency case conferences for students who they have multiple interactions with.
- Perform regular uniform patrols after school to address, truancy, anti-social behaviour and crime; working with safer transport and safer neighbourhood teams as required.<sup>53 54</sup>

## Removal of SSOs from London's schools

The Met has recently changed the way it works with schools. In May 2025, the Met confirmed that it was making the operational decision to remove SSOs from London's schools.<sup>55</sup> All SSOs were moved into neighbourhood policing teams and transitioned into a new role: Dedicated Ward Officer – Children and Young People (DWO-CYP).

There are mixed opinions on the presence of police in schools, and the decision to remove SSOs has been met with a range of views. The removal of SSOs has been unpopular with many in education, including both students and teachers, while others argue that police in schools are unnecessary.

<sup>51</sup> MOPAC, [Report: Safer Schools Officers](#), 2022, p. 3

<sup>52</sup> Metropolitan Police, [FOI: Current Safer Schools Officers \(SSOs\) and the recent restructuring](#), June 2025

<sup>53</sup> MOPAC, [Report: Safer Schools Officers](#), 2022, pp. 2-3

<sup>54</sup> Safer Schools Partnerships blog, [The roles within a UK Safer School Partnership](#), 2 July 2023

<sup>55</sup> Metropolitan Police: [FOI Response: Current Safer Schools Officers \(SSOs\) and the recent restructuring](#), June 2025

Given the decision to remove SSOs has been taken, the Committee has considered the range of views it heard about dedicated police officers in schools and what this means for young Londoners as the Met embeds the new DWO-CYP role in neighbourhoods across the capital.

Civil liberties groups told us that there is a lack of evidence that SSOs improved safety for young Londoners. Welcoming the Met's announcement, the Runnymede Trust said: "there is no credible or conclusive evidence that police make schools safer". Similarly, Liberty, told us: "there is no evidence that a regular police presence in schools reduces crime or violence".<sup>56</sup>

We also heard about issues of trust. In its evidence, Liberty added that there was conflict in using interactions with officers as a method to increase trust. It told us that "interactions with police officers are a key source of low trust and confidence in the police among young people, particularly those in over-policed communities".<sup>57</sup> This was echoed in the Committee's roundtable session with Safer London's VIPs. They said that SSOs were not a safe and reassuring presence for every young person, particularly those in more deprived communities. Some also felt that SSOs were only there to intervene when a situation was already very serious, and not for more everyday engagement.<sup>58</sup>

The Met acknowledged to the committee the risk that police presence in schools can lead to the criminalisation of young people. In oral evidence, the Met told the Committee that officers are under a statutory obligation to record crimes when they are brought to their attention and have no discretion to do otherwise. As Superintendent Matt Cox explained, "when a crime is brought to our attention, it would be recorded because we are obliged to do that and committed to doing that".<sup>59</sup> This raises concerns about how routine interactions in school settings can escalate into formal criminal justice outcomes for children.

We also heard concerns that SSOs disproportionately impacted certain demographics (such as pupils on free school meals). Katya Moran, Youth Justice Legal Centre told us that it has done some work looking at the policing of pupils and highlighted its concern that "GCSE attainment for numbers of children on Universal Free School Meals as part of the criteria for deciding that that school should have an SSO".<sup>60</sup> Katya added that:

*"[the Youth Justice Legal Centre's wider concerns about SSOs] were really founded in whether certain demographics of pupils were going to end up with a negative impact from having a police officer in their school which might not be in another school. Were*

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<sup>56</sup> Written evidence from Liberty

<sup>57</sup> Written evidence from Liberty

<sup>58</sup> Roundtable with Voice, Influence and Participation volunteers, hosted by Safer London, 8 October 2025

<sup>59</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 2](#), 3 September 2025, p. 7

<sup>60</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 30

*they going to see higher rates of criminalisation as an unintended consequence of those SSOs being there?”<sup>61</sup>*

The Committee also took evidence in support of SSOs. Much of this evidence focused on the importance of young people being able to have a relationship with a specific, named officer. Jessica West, Principal at Ark Academy Walworth, told us about how “young people will come in and say, “Is Kyp about?” or “Has anyone seen PC Megan; is she coming in this week?” That is a conversation. Those are trusted people whose names they know.”<sup>62</sup> She added that her recent “experience of school officers, school sergeants and school inspectors has been better than it has been in the whole of the last 15 years.”<sup>63</sup>

Rhys Barfoot, London Youth told us that “From the youth boards and advisory panels that we engage with, one of the big [elements of] feedback was that young people were not too pleased about the removal of the SSOs.” He described the positive relationships young people had with SSOs and that the SSO was “always the first point of contact.” He added that “some of the young people fed back that there were times where young people from other schools or other boroughs would want to go to their school and that SSO was there to protect them.”<sup>64</sup>

The removal of SSOs was described to the Committee as “catastrophic”<sup>65</sup> by Jessica West, Ark Walworth Academy.

Young people at the Committee’s roundtable hosted by Safer London also highlighted positive experiences with specific SSOs. One young person told us about the SSO in their school and how “pupils used to go up to her and tell her stories”. They added that the SSO was able to intervene positively when situations did arise “as she was already a familiar face, so people trusted her”.<sup>66</sup>

The evidence we heard highlights that the presence of police in schools remains a contested area of police work and a delicate one to get right. Carly Adams Elias, Safer London told us that the success of SSOs came down to a consistency of approach, and that it did not necessarily make a huge difference if these officers were in a school environment, or in the community:

*“For me, it is less of whether it is in a ward or in a school. It is that all officers need to be conducting themselves in a particular way to be able to build relationships, show empathy, show curiosity and lead with a safeguarding approach. If that is happening,*

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<sup>61</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 26

<sup>62</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p.15

<sup>63</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p.9 & p. 2

<sup>64</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 3

<sup>65</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p. 14

<sup>66</sup> Roundtable with Voice, Influence and Participation volunteers, hosted by Safer London, 8 October 2025

*then any of those options is going to be great, but if it is not then they are all going to be felt to be punitive and criminal justice-focused, and young people are still then not going to trust the police.”<sup>67</sup>*

For the new DWO-CYP role to have a positive impact on young Londoners, it will be important that the Met finds ways to allow for continuity and relationship-building to occur alongside informal, positive interactions, and not just as a crisis response. Equally, the Met should ensure that it operates in a way that does not target certain demographics unfairly, or involves an over-reliance on “policing” tasks, instead of building positive relationships with young people in London’s local communities.

### Removal of SSOs – consultation and evidence base

The Met told us that reports, such as Liberty’s ‘Policing the Playground’ report<sup>68</sup> and the London Policing Ethics Panel report ‘Policing London’s Schools: Supporting Children to Flourish?’<sup>69</sup> contributed to its decision to remove SSOs from London’s schools. Superintendent Matt Cox told the Committee:

*“To the point of the MOPAC Ethics Panel Report on which a lot of this evidence was based and, more recently, the Liberty report [Policing the Playground] review of a model in [the London Borough of] Hackney, it really demonstrated that (a) there was no clear evidence base that police officers were having a positive impact either on confidence and trust in young people in schools or on the safety of young people in schools where they should be the most safe that they are in their communities. Further to that, having police officers dedicated in schools was actually negatively impacting a section of society which came from ethnic minority backgrounds or socially/economically deprived backgrounds [and ...] recording crimes where they did not need to be and therefore being embedded into police indices where actually they would have been better done in schools.”<sup>70</sup>*

The London Policing Ethics Panel Report also concluded that research on policing in schools draws too heavily on studies from the United States. It stated that while there is “a substantial body of research looking at the potential benefits and harms in this area, most are US based, and propose a negative association between policing in schools, school exclusions, and offending behaviour with a disproportionate impact on Black and Minority communities”. It added: “Whilst we view this research with caution, the associations are weakly affirmed in some UK-based studies. We believe a prudential approach would be to seek further evidence from the UK as to whether the findings are potentially transferable.”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 30

<sup>68</sup> Liberty, [Policing the Playground: A New Model for Schools Policing](#), 18 July 2025

<sup>69</sup> [Microsoft Word - Schools WORKING DOC FINAL post panel.docx](#)

<sup>70</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 2](#), 3 September 2025, p.16

<sup>71</sup> London Policing Ethics Panel, [Policing London’s Schools: supporting children to flourish?](#), July 2024

Similarly, Superintendent Cox told us that “It is a really nuanced piece around what success of the schools looks like.” He added that “because the evidence base around the impact of police over those years is not clear in the first instance of having people in schools, it is quite tricky to measure the negative or positive impact of removing them from the schools landscape perspective.”<sup>72</sup>

With limited consultation on the removal of SSOs and an evidence base that is made-up more of US examples, the Committee believes that, at the very least, an extensive public consultation should have been undertaken before the decision to remove SSOs was made. In light of this, there now needs to be a full, transparent and independently run evaluation to determine the consequences of this decision for young Londoners and their experience with the police.

### **Dedicated Ward Officer – Children and Young People**

The Met has said the new DWO-CYP role “will not be visible officers assigned and stationed to deploy within a designated school”, and “a smaller percentage of their time will be nominated to working with schools and their time will be focused on ensuring children are safe as they travel between home and school as opposed to offering a police presence within schools”.<sup>73</sup>

Given what we have heard about where young people feel least safe, the Committee appreciates the Met’s efforts to focus its work on making young Londoners feel safe outside of the school environment. However, it will be important that it reconciles this new role – and ways of working – with the commitments it has made in the Children’s Strategy, including its pledge to strengthen links between neighbourhood policing teams and education settings.<sup>74</sup> The Met should draw on those that had direct experience of SSOs, including teachers and young people, as its DWO-CYP’s integrate into its neighbourhood policing teams.

DWO-CYP’s will be part of the local policing team, they will focus on children and young people and their safety within a specific local area (a ward and/or cluster of wards). Specific duties include:

- Proactively reducing crime and anti-social behaviour affecting and perpetrated by young people, using problem-solving approaches, intelligence analysis, and community engagement.
- Serving as the primary point of contact for priority schools in a ward, providing advice, delivering crime prevention presentations, and coordinating Safer Corridors initiatives (safe routes to/from school).
- Collaborating with other police units, Youth Offending Teams, social services, and community partners to address youth related crime.

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<sup>72</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 2](#), 3 September 2025, p.16

<sup>73</sup> Metropolitan Police, [FOI Response: Current Safer Schools Officers \(SSOs\) and the recent restructuring](#)

<sup>74</sup> Metropolitan Police, [MPS Children’s Strategy](#), September 2024,



- Assisting with and advising colleagues on investigations involving young people from their assigned schools and wards, adopting a restorative justice approach where appropriate.
- Being visible and communicating regularly with the community.<sup>75</sup>

Superintendent Cox told the Committee that for the Met “this is about a young person’s safety in the community all of the time, whether that is in their parks, the open spaces, and we have to look at both the safety and crimes perpetrated by young people as well.”<sup>76</sup>

At the Committee’s meeting, Superintendent Cox cited metrics around neighbourhood crime types, including violence with injury, robbery and theft, as a way to assess the impact of the new DWO-CYP roles.<sup>77</sup> While a fall in crime statistics and a reduction in young victims of crime is important and would be welcome, the Committee urges the Met not to focus solely on crime statistics, as members had heard of SSO’s impact in building trust between young people and the Met and representing a consistent, familiar and trusted officer for young people to engage with.

The Mayor’s team has confirmed that a “performance system for the new Dedicated Ward Officer – Children & Young People model is now in development”.<sup>52</sup> No further details have been provided on this system to date.

This system should improve upon current data-gathering and handling processes. The Committee heard that the introduction of the CONNECT system has created weaknesses in how safeguarding information about children is recorded and shared. Jessica West told us that CONNECT does not require officers to record a child’s school using a mandatory field, relying instead on free text entries that are inconsistent, error prone, and often incomplete, making it difficult or impossible for schools to identify incidents involving their pupils. The Met should address this as a matter of urgency, to allow schools to easily identify when their pupils are involved in encounters with the police.

## Recommendation 8

The Met should re-evaluate the efficacy of the CONNECT system, particularly as it relates to issues with children and young people. The CONNECT system should make inclusion of school mandatory.

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<sup>75</sup> Metropolitan Police: [FOI Response: Current Safer Schools Officers \(SSOs\) and the recent restructuring](#), June 2025

<sup>76</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 2](#), 3 September 2025, p. 3

<sup>77</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 2](#), 3 September 2025, p. 3

## Monitoring and evaluation

The decision to remove SSOs has been made and implemented. However, the Committee heard that the “full impact of the removal of SSOs has not yet been realised.”<sup>78</sup> Given the evidence we have received, we believe it is essential for the Met to undertake careful monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the removal of SSOs as the role of the new DWO-CYPs develops over the next 12 months.

In order to monitor the impact of the removal of SSOs, and how the work previously carried out by SSOs is being taken forward, the Met should commission an independent evaluation exercise to determine the impact of the removal of SSOs. This should include direct consultation and liaison with schools and young people across London about the decision to transition SSOs into neighbourhood policing and how the new community based DWO-CYP role is delivering, or not delivering, for young Londoners.

In addition, the Met should set out how the new DWO-CYP role will be monitored to ensure that young people in London’s neighbourhoods do not lose opportunities to engage with the Met or lose a key point of contact with the police. This should include how these officers will work with professionals and specialist youth organisations, in and beyond education, and how the role will support wider neighbourhood policing teams in their interactions and work with young people, in and out of schools.

Anecdotally, Jessica West told the Committee of a high number of vacancies in the DWO-CYP role in her borough: “In my particular borough there are 16 posts for DWO-CYP, but there are only eight people and two of them are off sick. There are only eight people because the others are vacancies and there is no recruitment strategy to the vacancies.”<sup>79</sup>

Finally, we believe that the Met should consider establishing neighbourhood policing teams as the ‘hub’ of youth engagement. This would mean that when a young person comes into contact with the police, the neighbourhood team would be able to provide an appropriate ‘Child First’ response and divert young people from a potentially inappropriate criminal justice response.

## Recommendation 9

In May 2026, the Met should commission a 12-month evaluation of the impact of the Dedicated Ward Officer – Children and Young People role, setting out:

- How the work previously carried out by Safer Schools Officers has been absorbed into the Dedicated Ward Officer role
- How the Dedicated Ward Officer role operates in practice

<sup>78</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 2](#), 3 September 2025, p. 20

<sup>79</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 1](#), 3 September 2025, p. 17

- How the Dedicated Ward Officer role works with professionals in and beyond education
- How the Dedicated Ward Officer role supports wider neighbourhood policing teams in their engagement with young people and schools

This should include clear metrics for assessing the effectiveness of the role.

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### **Recommendation 10**

The Met should establish neighbourhood policing teams as the hub of youth engagement for local policing, including new guidance on how these teams will engage with local young people in and out of schools.

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## Working in partnership: a shared effort to keep young Londoners safe

One of the key themes of the evidence the Committee heard through this investigation is that the police are not always the most appropriate agency to take forward work with young people. The Met has recognised this in its commitment in its Children's Strategy to work with partners and improve its partnership working to keep children and young people safe.<sup>80</sup> This includes working with a range of partners to connect young people to specialist services and tailored support.

The Met's Children's Strategy focuses on how the Met should better direct its expertise towards policing young people. In light of this, here we set out the evidence we heard on how the police could strengthen its work with partners to deliver improved outcomes for young Londoners.

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*"Whilst we are committed to working in partnership, we also want to use this strategy to set out where policing can best respond to children. Police expertise is most effective in: identifying and safeguarding victims, investigating crime, pursuing perpetrators and providing emergency responses. These are our primary functions that we deliver working with communities to prevent future crime. Our safeguarding partners are better equipped and trained to deliver complementary services including working with families, developing support plans, securing access to resources, advocacy, specialist support, diversionary interventions and monitoring."<sup>81</sup>*

### Metropolitan Police, Children's Strategy

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#### Diversionary work

Whilst the police may often be the first organisation that comes into contact with a child or young person during an arrest, stop-and-search or a safeguarding intervention, the Committee heard that often the best option for them is to divert them to a partner organisation. Katya Moran, Youth Justice Legal Centre, told the Committee that "sometimes what the police can do to operate in the most 'Child First' way possible is in fact, in that moment, to decide not to police a matter".<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Carly Adams Elias said that:

*"It is not always going to be the role of the police to continue to take that forward, but the police's role is to think about, if they are the first people coming into contact with*

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<sup>80</sup> [Metropolitan Police Service Children's Strategy](#), p. 6

<sup>81</sup> [Metropolitan Police Service Children's Strategy](#), p. 7

<sup>82</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 10

*that child, seeing that as an opportunity to help and support that child rather than to criminalise them or take advantage of that moment to help think about how we safeguard them and build that safety around them.”<sup>83</sup>*

Following the removal of YEDOs, the Met told us that some of its diversionary work has now “reverted to signposting”.<sup>84</sup> The Committee would like to see more detail from the Met about how it is monitoring and ensuring that its neighbourhood teams are safeguarding children and young people, and not unnecessarily pulling them into a policing response, following this change in practice.

## Building partnerships with neighbourhood policing teams

While Met officers are not experts in working with young people, we heard that the Met is actively looking for opportunities to engage young Londoners and build positive relationships through partnerships with youth organisations. To support its officers, the Met has developed a “Youth based community policing handbook” which recognises the “vital role” youth partners play in tackling “youth-based problems”.<sup>85</sup> We were pleased to hear evidence suggesting that there are strong partnerships in place between the Met and third sector youth organisations in London. Rhys Barfoot, London Youth, told the Committee about a youth organisation in East London that reached out to the Met and the positive impact this has had on local young people. He said:

*“There is one example which I can speak of, one of our members in east London. I know that very recently they have started having a much better rapport and relationship with their local officers and I believe it was the youth organisation initiating this process, which is really positive. However, they spent a lot of time really focusing on that community engagement by allowing officers to have access to the project at certain times and then them using that area as a surgery. Then it is not just specifically a youth organisation; it is like a community hub almost. I know from speaking to the practitioners that they have definitely seen an attitude shift of the young people that they are working with.”<sup>86</sup>*

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<sup>83</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 12

<sup>84</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 2](#), 3 September 2025, p. 6

<sup>85</sup> MPS, Youth based community policing handbook, January 2025

<sup>86</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 21

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*“You have the youth workers and the police. At a local level, there will be connectivity because certainly through neighbourhood policing, we will be attending venues where activities go because we want to build those links with those workers but also the young people they are working with.”<sup>87</sup>*

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### **Superintendent Matt Cox, Metropolitan Police**

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The Committee also witnessed first-hand the important role expert youth organisations play in the lives of young people at its roundtable facilitated by Safer London. The rapport and relationship the Safer London staff had with the young people demonstrated the importance of how specialist organisations, like Safer London, can bring young people round a table and talk honestly about their experiences with the police, both positive and negative. As highlighted by Rhys Barfoot, London Youth, there are a “breadth of experts working across London that have these relationships with young people” and instead of trying to “re-invent the wheel” the Met should do more to reach out and work together with these organisations.<sup>88</sup>

Given the recent changes to the way the Met works with London’s children and young people, the Committee believes that this is an ideal time for the Met to strengthen how its neighbourhood teams engage with young Londoners through organisations like Safer London and London Youth. At its best, partnership working is not just about police presence; it is about collaboration between police, schools, youth services, local councils, charities, and communities, and children and young people themselves. We want to see the Met embed strong partnership working across its neighbourhood policing teams to guarantee young people are referred to those organisations that are best able to support them and meet their needs. In the gaps left by the removal of SSOs and YEDOs, the Met must work with partnership agencies to fill this space.

MOPAC supports partnership working with young people through the delivery of multi-agency initiatives that aim to prevent crime, support vulnerable young people, and build safer communities. Its role involves “investing in crime prevention activities; commissioning services to support victims of crime; and bringing together partners to tackle complex safety issues and their underlying causes”.<sup>89</sup> The Committee recommends that the Met works closely with MOPAC to determine how best to strengthen and build partnerships at the local level, to ensure a shared understanding and response to the concerns of young Londoners.

To establish and deliver robust partnership working between the Met and youth organisations across London, we recommend that MOPAC creates and regularly updates a map or directory of specialist youth and community services. This would help neighbourhood police officers know where to refer young people for support, and enable local neighbourhood policing teams access to information that will help them fulfil their commitment to a ‘Child First’ approach.

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<sup>87</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young People – Panel 2](#), 3 September 2025, p. 9

<sup>88</sup> London Assembly Police and Crime Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 - Neighbourhood Policing: The Experience of Young Londoners](#), 2 July 2025, p. 11

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac>

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## **Recommendation 11**

By the end of 2026, MOPAC should create a clear map or directory of youth and community services across London so that neighbourhood police officers know where to refer young people for specialist support.

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## Committee Activity

The Committee held its first meeting on neighbourhood policing and the experiences of young people on 2 July 2025 at City Hall. The following guests attended this session:

- **Carly Adams Elias**, Director of Practice, Safer London
- **Rhys Barfoot**, Youth Involvement Manager, London Youth
- **Katya Moran**, Director, Youth Justice Legal Centre,
- **John Hart**, Service Manager, Early Help and Prevention Young Hackney

The Committee held its second meeting at City Hall on 3 September 2025. The following guests attended this session:

Panel 1:

- **Omar Alleyne-Lawler**, Communications and Police Engagement Manager, Hope in Haringey
- **Ashley Fontaine**, Young People's Programme Manager, Neighbourhood Watch Network
- **Jessica West**, Principal, Ark Walworth Academy

Panel 2:

- **Commander Neerav Patel**, Local Policing, Metropolitan Police Service
- **Superintendent Matt Cox**, Metropolitan Police Service
- **Dean Nevill**, Senior Policy and Commissioning Manager, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)
- **Gary Connors**, Assistant Director, Violence Reduction Unit

The Chair of the Committee also attended a session of the London Youth Assembly on 23 September 2025 to discuss the investigation and hear from Youth Assembly members.

A youth voice session, facilitated by Safer London, was held on 8 October 2025. At the session, the Committee heard directly from some of Safer London's Voice, Influence and Participation (VIP) young volunteers.

The Committee ran a survey to gather evidence from Londoners. The survey was open for responses between 30 July 2025 and 12 September 2025, and received seven responses.

Written evidence was also received from Liberty and the London Youth Assembly.

## Other formats and languages

If you, or someone you know needs this report in large print or braille, or a copy of the summary and main findings in another language, then please call us on: 020 7983 4100 or email [assembly.translations@london.gov.uk](mailto:assembly.translations@london.gov.uk)

### Chinese

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### Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज़ का सारांश अपनी भाषा में  
चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये  
गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

### Vietnamese

Nếu ông (bà) muốn nội dung văn bản này được dịch sang  
tiếng Việt, xin vui lòng liên hệ với chúng tôi bằng điện  
thoại, thư hoặc thư điện tử theo địa chỉ ở trên.

### Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের একটা সারাংশ নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান,  
তাহলে দয়া করে ফো করবেন অথবা উল্লিখিত ডাক ঠিকানায় বা  
ই-মেইল ঠিকানায় আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

### Greek

*Εάν επιθυμείτε περίληψη αυτού του κειμένου στην γλώσσα  
σας, παρακαλώ καλέστε τον αριθμό ή επικοινωνήστε μαζί  
μας στην ανωτέρω ταχυδρομική ή την ηλεκτρονική διεύθυνση.*

### Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کا خلاصہ اپنی زبان میں  
درکار ہو تو، براہ کرم نمبر پر فون کریں  
یا منکورہ بالا ڈاک کے پتے یا ای میل  
پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

### Turkish

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ਚਾਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ  
ਉਪਰ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਡਾਕ ਜਾਂ ਈਮੇਲ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

### Gujarati

જો તમારે આ દસ્તાવેજનો સાર તમારી ભાષામાં  
જોઈતો હોય તો ઉપર આપેલ નંબર પર ફોન કરો  
અથવા ઉપર આપેલ ટપાલ અથવા ઈ-મેઇલ સરનામા  
પર અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.

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