


HEARING YOUNG VOICES ON STRIP SEARCH: FIVE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

Report of an Inquiry into achieving the rights of children in police custody

 *I think strip searches are horrific. They make you feel disgusted, abused, belittled, but mainly violated.”*

ST, 17 years – first live evidence session



FOREWORD

Since the shocking experiences of Child Q1 were brought to public attention a number of reports have investigated the scope and use of the police’s powers to strip search children and have made recommendations for reform.²

Whilst progress is certainly being made in tightening the legal framework and improving transparency,³ policymakers and Parliamentarians still have very limited evidence from children and young people themselves about their experiences of strip search, and rarely do we hear their views about how the system should be reformed. It takes extraordinary bravery for children and young people to talk about these experiences and we should listen carefully when they do.

This report aims to address that gap, by drawing on the experiences of strip search described by 10 children and young people to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Children in Police Custody (the APPG) to make 5 key recommendations for reform.

The accounts were captured in live evidence session, in interviews and in online survey submissions,⁴ as part of a year-long inquiry into the Rights of Children in Police Custody (2023-2024).

They are supplemented by other evidence gathered from children and young people, police forces, practitioners, volunteers and experts in the field, across 5 live evidence sessions and more than 100 written and online evidence submissions and survey responses. There is an accompanying report on children’s experiences of police custody, ‘Making Children’s Rights a Reality in Police Custody’, which makes wider recommendations for reform.

Children and young people were strikingly consistent in describing strip search as ‘horrific’ or ‘awful’. Although in police custody strip search is often carried out to ensure the child’s safety, far from feeling safe children and young people described feeling violated and humiliated by the experience, even where officers were respectful in their approach.

Young witnesses to the Inquiry recognised that there may occasionally be circumstances in which a strip search is necessary, but that this should be done only as an ‘absolute last resort’. For those few children who must be strip searched, the report recommends additional measures to improve support for children, and their families, and to ensure robust and independent scrutiny in every police force area.

The APPG and I are grateful to all those who have attended the live sessions and everyone who supported and responded to this Inquiry, particularly the children and young people who have shared their experiences and ideas with the APPG.

This report was written by Dr Miranda Bevan, King’s College London, supported by the King’s College London ESRC Impact Acceleration Account, grant no ES/X004384/1.

More information about the Inquiry, its Terms of Reference, full minutes of the live evidence sessions and selected written evidence responses can be accessed on the [APPG website](#).

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Artwork by Erika Flowers, [recordedinart.com](#).

Content warning

This report contains accounts of strip search of children that readers may find distressing.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Welsh MP".

Michelle Welsh, MP for Sherwood Forest
Chair of the APPG on Children in Police Custody

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'STRIP SEARCH'?

Strip search in police custody of a child who has been detained, governed by PACE Code A

A 'strip search' in this context means a search which exposes a child's 'intimate parts'.⁵ Based on [data](#) obtained by the Children's Commissioner there were:

457

STRIP SEARCHES

of children (10-17 year olds) following a stop and search encounter with the police between July 2022 and June 2023 in England and Wales - the equivalent of **one child every 19 hours on average**.⁶

In the year to March 2024 there were

3,528

STRIP SEARCHES

of children in police custody in England and Wales - the equivalent of **one child every two and a half hours on average**.¹⁰

Strip Search in police custody, governed by PACE Code C

A 'strip search' in police custody has a wider definition, being a search which involves 'the removal of more than outer clothing'.⁷ Most of these searches are conducted when officers consider that a child has concealed an item that they would not be allowed to keep, and so will typically involve exposure of 'intimate parts'.

But this category of strip search also includes where a child's clothing is removed for their 'safety' or to be kept as evidence (described by the Home Office as a 'clothes swap'),⁸ which may not involve the exposure of intimate parts. Although exposure of underwear may itself be extremely distressing. [Home Office](#) data does not specify the extent of the search, and not all forces report a 'clothes swap' as a strip search.⁹



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RECOMMENDATIONS OVERVIEW

1

INTRODUCE A PRESUMPTION AGAINST THE STRIP SEARCH OF CHILDREN

That the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) Codes of Practice A and C should be amended to introduce a presumption against child strip search which exposes a child's 'intimate parts', save in exceptional circumstance (defined as being where it is necessary to avoid serious harm, is proportionate and less intrusive alternatives have been exhausted).

2

BETTER INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

That the Home Office commission accessible information about strip search for use not just at the time of search, but in the wider community, including in PSHE and Citizenship teaching in schools. This should be in hard copy and digital formats, and detail children's rights and what to expect.

3

INVEST IN TECHNOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVES TO STRIP SEARCH

That the Home Office and National Police Chiefs' Council prioritise the investigation and introduction (as appropriate) of technological alternatives to reduce the use of strip search.

4

ENSURE PROMPT AND EFFECTIVE APPROPRIATE ADULT SUPPORT

That the appropriate adult safeguard for strip search should be properly resourced and enabled so that appropriate adult attendance is prompt (and within National Standards), subject to robust scrutiny and that all AAs are fully informed about what is to happen and given sufficient time to support the child.

5

IMPROVE DATA COLLECTION, PUBLICATION AND OVERSIGHT

That the transparency and accountability of child strip searches be improved by requiring every force to provide more detailed and fully disaggregated data on every child strip search, and to ensure that there is regular, independent scrutiny of child strip search data and practices by local community members and by HMICFRS.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

DISTRESS AND TRAUMA

Children and young people's accounts to the APPG were remarkably consistent, describing strip search as 'horrific', 'awful', 'dehumanising', and 'violating'. They commonly reflected on the process as one which takes away dignity and undermines autonomy.

Adults with experience of attending the strip searches of children recounted receiving similar responses. Young and adult respondents alike emphasised that such experiences could have a lasting impact on children's trust in the police, and that of their families and communities.

"Children feel violated as adults are forcing them to take off clothes and in some cases, reveal intimate parts of their body. One young person, who had previously been sexually abused, said it felt like she was being abused again. It is a humiliating and traumatic practice."

Trained appropriate adult – online evidence submission 1



"I felt... like my purpose was being degraded. I didn't like it at all."

J, 18 years – first live evidence session

"...this makes me turn against the police and become very resilient and not trust them."

Tyler, 16 years – first live evidence session

RESPECTFUL TREATMENT IS NOT ENOUGH

Many trained appropriate adults who have been present for the strip searches of children observed that the police acted in as respectful a way as possible.

However, children and young people's evidence make clear that, even if conducted as politely and sensitively as possible, a search which requires a child to remove their clothes and expose their underwear or intimate parts of their body, to adult strangers in authority, is humiliating and can be extremely traumatic. As one young survey respondent explained:

“2 fully grown men were stood watching me and I had to take everything off. I think it should be on different terms....it was awful.”

Child and young person survey respondent 5, 17 years



“If you're a straight male you're obviously not going to ever want to be undressed in front of a male. Also that just makes you demoralized, like you're not even a human and it's even worse I think when you're young and you also know it's for no reason, like they're not going to find anything.”

Lz, 20 years – first live evidence session



DISRESPECTFUL TREATMENT IS PARTICULARLY DAMAGING

Whilst the vast majority of officers do their best to mitigate the impact of a strip search, children and young people also described strip searches that were conducted disrespectfully, where they felt they were being belittled or laughed at by officers. Such experiences were particularly painful and damaging.

“It’s quite embarrassing to be honest. I feel like it’s worth it to mention it, just so you can understand the gravity of the situation. ‘You look very nice. Don’t you. Let me search up your ass’. ‘Look at your willy.’ Horrible, nasty comments like that. I actually have a scar from a surgery. And he commented on that awfully. He said how it made me look really nasty.”

Shaq, 19 years – first live evidence session)

To compound these issues, children who behaved in a non-compliant way, in response to an experience that they found abusive and distressing in the extreme, could find themselves being charged with a criminal offence rather than being supported.

“They took all my clothes off me... They didn’t give me a chance to suggest anything else they could do instead. And then I think we had a little wrestle with the police officers, and I think a lady police officer stuck her finger up my bum. I remember that. This happened in the cell. Adults are watching the whole time. It’s weird....She didn’t say nothing about it. I just felt it. I know that’s not meant to happen...There wasn’t no appropriate adult. I had to wait til the next day to have one. While this was happening, I was saying bad words. They charged me for that...I get flashbacks of it for sure...My dignity has just been taken. That’s what it feels like.”

Dre, 17 years – first live evidence session



REPEATED STRIP SEARCH



Some children described being strip searched repeatedly in a manner that felt unwarranted and discriminatory, fundamentally undermining their trust in the police. Repeated strip search is not uncommon.

Of the children strip searched in police custody following arrest and detention in the year to March 2024, 200 children were strip searched twice and a further 67 were strip searched 3 or more times in that year, including 19 children who were strip searched 5 or more times (based on 2371 of the 3528 child strip searches for which 'person ID data' is available).¹¹ In a vicious cycle, the fear of being strip-searched on future occasions could also increase the likelihood of being strip searched again.



I'd say from my point of point of view, it was more just they do it because they can. It's like me and a friend would get stopped and searched in his car. Then they'd move to 'Now we have to strip search you' but for what grounds, what reasons? The grounds would be, maybe, because my friend had money on him, or someone's phone kept ringing...

Even my house was saying it's getting like harassment because of how many green slips I kept coming home with. 'Got strip searched again today, got strip searched again today...

So obviously you wouldn't want to, you don't want to interact with police anymore, because you don't know what's gonna happen. Where I've been stripped out so many times, it's like I could just go walk out of here now and get stopped by police. They're saying stop and search, but to me it's like stop and search... all I know that is a strip search. So the most people in my position, they probably think when they see police is to run, and they're probably just running for no reason because they just don't want to be in the position again. And then police would believe probably you're running cos you've got drugs, you've got a weapon, but you're not, you're just running because you're scared. Yeah, you're running from the police."

Lz, 20 years – first live evidence session

RACISM

Several children and young people believed that there was a racist dimension to some of the strip searches they had experienced. At the same time they felt that if they complained they would not be listened to.

“In a way I didn’t feel scared, I felt a hatred. I actually was very angry because I felt like I could do nothing about it. My youth worker he actually said to me, ‘Why didn’t you report it?’ Racial slurs or whatever else I’ve been called when I’ve been grabbed in searches and whatever else. I’ve been called a ‘spear chucking N-word’ and I’ve been called the Middle Eastern racial slur for Pakistanis. And he said, ‘So why don’t you report it?... And I said, ‘Well, why am I going to report to the police? Why would I do such a thing.’”

Shaq, 19 years – first live evidence session



Racism was identified as a likely factor in the strip search of Child Q¹² and data obtained by the Children’s Commissioner reveal that, despite some improvements, **Black children are still four times more likely to be strip searched** following stop and search, compared to national population figures.¹³ In police custody, **higher proportions of children strip searched were from Black ethnic backgrounds compared with adults** (23% compared with 14%); and 61% of all children strip searched were of a White ethnic background, compared with 74% of adults strip searched.¹⁴ Racism was also an issue raised by organisational and adult respondents to the Inquiry:

“Given the interaction I have encountered with police and black children I was not in the least surprised to hear about what happened to Child Q.”

Trained appropriate adult – online evidence submission 52

“The use of strip searches on children is, in our view, an abuse of power that dehumanises and degrades children. There is a disproportionate overuse of intrusive searches on Black children, and the impacts of these searches on a child, their lives, and the communities that they live in are incredibly negative. This set of powers and how they are utilised are rooted in a deeply entrenched institutional racism that must be urgently addressed.”

Action for Race Equality – written evidence submission

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?



I do believe that kids should be liable to some degree to some sort of search because they'd probably just be even more vulnerable than they are now, if they wasn't."

Tyler, 16 years – first live evidence session

MAKE CHILD STRIP SEARCH THE ‘ABSOLUTE LAST RESORT’

Children and young people told the Inquiry they recognised that very occasionally it is necessary for the police to strip search a child, not least to prevent children being subject to even more extensive exploitation by adults.

However, there was strong support from respondents of all groups that, given its traumatic impact, a child should only be subject to a strip search involving exposure of their ‘intimate parts’ as an **absolute last resort**, and that such a strip search should ‘virtually never’ be resorted to. Whilst the current requirement of ‘necessity’, before a child can be strip-searched is intended to impose a high threshold,¹⁵ respondents felt that this was not observed in all cases. A number of respondents raised the example that the strip search of a child should never be conducted on the basis of the smell of cannabis alone, but noted that this was still occurring.¹⁶ Many respondents felt that a more explicit, higher threshold should be introduced into the legislation.

“Strip searches of children should only be used as an absolute last resort in circumstances where there is a real and immediate risk of serious harm or injury if the search is not carried out.”

Legal representative – online submission 66

The Home Office have proposed a welcome tightening of the restrictions on, and arrangements for, strip searches, including requiring authorisation by an inspector and notification of parents/carers.¹⁷ However Inquiry responses suggest that these restrictions are not sufficiently explicit about the need to have regard to the police’s duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (under the Children Act 2004 s11) in making the decision to search, nor are children’s rights under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child sufficiently protected.¹⁸

The APPG believes that strip search of a child which exposes their ‘intimate parts’ should, in law and in practice, be an exceptional occurrence, justified on the basis of the avoidance of serious harm. The decision to conduct such a strip search of a child should require a balancing of the harm to be prevented against the harm likely to be caused by the strip search itself. It should only occur where all available less intrusive measures have been exhausted or are insufficient to mitigate the risk of serious harm.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Introduce a presumption against strip search of children


That the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) Codes A and C should be amended to introduce a presumption against strip search which exposes a child’s ‘intimate parts’ save in exceptional circumstances, defined as being where:

- the search is necessary to prevent serious harm to the child or others
- the authorising officer has reasonable grounds to believe that:
 - the harm done by the search will be outweighed by the harm of not doing it
 - all practicable, less intrusive alternatives have been exhausted or are insufficient to mitigate the risk of serious harm

ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION FOR CHILDREN AND THE WIDER PUBLIC

The law relating to strip search is extraordinarily complex, with different sorts of strip search, and different safeguard requirements, depending on whether the child is in police custody or not.¹⁹

Children and young people told the Inquiry that they often did not know what their rights were, including whether they should be supported by an appropriate adult. Children felt unprotected, and unable to advocate for themselves, as a result. Some young respondents lacked confidence that the police would provide the support to which they were entitled without being prompted.

 *In some situations I was (offered an appropriate adult) and in some I wasn't. A lot of the time it (the attitude of the police) was quite, sort of, bullying. In my experience they would really try to be, like, sly with certain things. So unless you knew you'd not get it."*

Shaq, 19 years – first live evidence session



Some appropriate adults themselves, including those who have been trained to fulfil the role, felt unclear about what protections should be in place.

"The parameters around this procedure are unclear. I've been an AA [appropriate adult] 5 years I've only just found out there should only be one officer and myself in a strip search unless the person is uncooperative."

Trained appropriate adult – online evidence submission 4

Who is an 'appropriate adult'?

An appropriate adult is a person independent of the police who is present to support, advise and assist a child (or a vulnerable adult). For children this is typically a parent, carer or adult family member but it can be a lay person trained to fulfil the role (as a volunteer or paid to do so).

Inquiry respondents suggested that clear and accessible information (paper and digital) should be available to children and their families:

"An easy to read simple leaflet with pictures that the AA [appropriate adult] can go through with the child prior to any strip search showing the reasons a search is required and exactly what will happen."

Trained appropriate adult – online evidence submission 42

Strip search of a child can be extremely stressful for everyone involved. Children and appropriate adults alike reflected on the challenges, for those who are unfamiliar with what will happen, of taking in all the necessary information at the time of a strip search. Wider and earlier dissemination of accessible information about children's rights, and what to expect in a strip search, would be beneficial. The topic is not routinely covered in secondary school PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic) and Citizenship lessons. The evidence received by the Inquiry suggests that this is a significant oversight, given the public concerns around strip search, and the damaging impact on the wider community.

“If the public could also be aware of the decision making and process in authorising a strip search they may be put slightly more at ease.”

Trained appropriate adult – online evidence submission 16

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Better information for children and their families about strip search

That the Home Office commission accessible information about strip search for use not just at the time of search but in the wider community, including in PSHE and Citizenship teaching in schools. The information should be in hard copy and digital formats, and detail children's rights and what to expect.

INVEST IN ALTERNATIVES TO STRIP SEARCH

A number of respondents identified the importance of exploring all less intrusive means of discovering concealed items. These alternative options are no longer restricted to rub down search, drug sniffer dogs and the use of metal detecting wands.

X-ray technology has been in use for some time in prisons in the UK.²⁰ Scanners using non-ionising radiation, which is harmless and deemed safe for use with all medical conditions, can now detect non-metallic concealed items such as ceramic blades, 3D printed items and packages of drugs. Such scanners are widely used in other sectors, such as airports.

Whilst further work will be required to ensure that scanners, and similar technology, can be safely and lawfully used on children, technology of this sort has the potential to reduce substantially the use of strip search on all detainees. The argument for exploring and investing in such technology is compelling, in light not just of the harms associated with strip search for children, but also the fact that nothing was found in 40% of strip searches following stop and search (based on [2022-2023](#) data).²¹

Good practice example

The Metropolitan Police Service have successfully piloted the use of a full-body scanner using non-ionising radiation at a South London custody suite.

The scanner produces two images. First, a generic avatar image of the scanned person's body is produced with a warning symbol identifying any area of interest/potential concealment. Such an image can rule out the need for further/strip searching but, where required, a much more detailed second 'raw' image can then be generated showing the area of concern down to skin level.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Invest in technological alternatives to strip search

That the Home Office and National Police Chiefs Council prioritise the investigation and introduction (as appropriate) of technological alternatives to reduce the use of strip-search.

ENSURE PROMPT AND EFFECTIVE APPROPRIATE ADULT SUPPORT

The presence of an appropriate adult is the key protection for a child being strip searched. However, the Inquiry heard that the appropriate adult is not always facilitated to support and protect the child in the way the legislation intends.

Most significantly, respondents told the APPG that children can spend lengthy periods of time, sometimes several hours, in handcuffs awaiting the arrival of an appropriate adult for a strip search to be completed.²² This can be painful and distressing. To avoid this, police forces must ensure that appropriate adults are contacted and asked to attend as soon as possible after a child is arrested, or as soon as the need for a strip search is identified (where the child has been stopped and searched).

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide appropriate adults where family members cannot attend, or cannot attend within a sensible time.²³ National Standards require local authorities, through their youth justice services, to provide that service 24 hours a day and for an appropriate adult to attend ‘as soon as possible after the police request is made, normally within one hour and always within two hours’.²⁴ The Inquiry heard that these standards are not always being met.

In 2025 His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation) introduced a new Youth justice inspection framework, which for the first time will focus on the delivery and provision of appropriate adults.²⁵ It is crucial that HMI Probation are robust in their inspection of this key service.

Parents, carers and family members attending as appropriate adults, even if well-informed about the process, can struggle to ensure that the child’s rights are protected and can be hesitant about challenging police officers to ensure that the procedure is conducted properly, as their role demands.²⁶

They are very rarely supported by a legal representative at this stage. A number of responses suggested that parents, carers and family members attending as appropriate adults should be able to access advice and support which is independent of the police, potentially from a trained appropriate adult or youth justice worker.

“I think that if a strip search is envisaged then the services of a trained AA [appropriate adult] should be sought, even if a family member is already nominated as AA. This can be a demanding and traumatic situation for all concerned and the presence of a person able to properly facilitate communication, based on a clear view of rights and responsibilities, can only be of benefit.”

Trained appropriate adult – appropriate adult survey response 17

Whoever acts as appropriate adult, it is essential that they are provided with enough information about the reason for the search and given sufficient time with the child to explain the process and to hear their concerns. There are decisions for the child at this point which can make a real difference to their experience. In particular they can decide whether the appropriate adult remains in the room or not (with the latter's agreement), and whether the appropriate adult observes the search or turns away.²⁷

Some trained appropriate adult respondents felt that this discussion time was not always facilitated.

“They (the police) tend to want to get the strip search done as quickly as possible and can be a little dismissive when the AA wants to ensure total understanding of the procedure with the child.”

Trained appropriate adult – appropriate adult survey response 7

Whilst the APPG recommend, in the accompanying report on police custody, that the appropriate adult role requires a full review, there are steps that are urgently required to make the safeguard meaningful for strip search whilst that review takes place.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Ensure prompt and effective appropriate adult support

That the appropriate adult safeguard for strip search should be properly resourced and enabled by:

- Amendment of the PACE Codes of Practice A, C and G to include explicit requirements that officers request the attendance of an appropriate adult as soon as practicable once it is understood that their presence will be required.
- Local authorities resourcing provision sufficiently to ensure that appropriate adults are available 24 hours per day, and that they attend as soon as possible, and in line with the NAAN National Standards.
- HMI Probation scrutinising the compliance of appropriate adult provision with the NAAN National Standards as part of Youth Justice inspections.
- Local authorities, youth justice services and appropriate adult providers in each area exploring how they can provide support for parents/carers and family members attending as appropriate adults for strip searches.
- Police training and guidance, particularly PACE Codes of Practice A and C and the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice, emphasising the impact of strip search on children and the importance of providing appropriate adults with adequate information, and sufficient time, to support the child being searched.

IMPROVE DATA COLLECTION, PUBLICATION AND OVERSIGHT

DATA COLLECTION AND PUBLICATION

The strip search of a child is an extraordinarily intrusive exercise of state power, occurring behind closed doors and generally in the absence of legal advice. Respondents to the Inquiry stressed the critical importance of transparency in this area. Many felt that data collection by forces, and data publication by the Home Office, is inadequate to identify whether the safeguards that should be in place for children are implemented.

These concerns are reinforced by the Children's Commissioner's [2024 analysis](#) of data on strip searches following stop and search (under PACE Code A), obtained using her powers under the [Children Act 2004](#). For example, she found that between July 2022 and June 2023 in 45% of strip searches it was not possible to confirm whether an appropriate adult had been present.²⁸

At present statistics produced by the Home Office in relation to police use of strip search powers, both in [police custody](#) and [following stop and search](#), are 'in development' and are produced from data which are incomplete and/or of variable quality.²⁹ Whilst sex, ethnicity and age-group data are collected and published, the Home Office does not stipulate the reporting of other key data: the presence and type of appropriate adult,³⁰ the outcome of the strip search specifically (rather than the stop or arrest more generally) and whether a safeguarding referral was made following the search.

In relation to strip searches arising from stop and search (under PACE Code A), critically the location of the strip search is not required to be reported, but [data](#) on the level of clothing removed in the search is now being collected on a voluntary basis. By contrast, for strip searches in police custody (under PACE Code C), whilst location is known, data on the level of clothing removed is not currently collected.³¹ So it is not possible to identify what proportion of custody strip searches involved the exposure of a child's 'intimate parts', rather than being a 'clothes swap', which may be considerably less intrusive.

Whilst acknowledging the sensitivities surrounding this data, many Inquiry respondents called for more detailed data collection and fully disaggregated publication, stressing the importance of including the missing categories identified above. In addition, respondents also called for recording and reporting of the vulnerabilities of the children searched (such as whether the child is care-experienced, at risk of criminal exploitation or identified as being neurodivergent or having mental health issues).

“Data of all strip searches should be centrally held, and compiled into a publicly accessible database. This should include the location (police area), venue of the search, age of the child, any additional vulnerabilities, reasons for the search, and details of communication with the appropriate parent / guardian / appropriate adult prior to the search taking place.”

Legal representative – online evidence submission 78

OVERSIGHT

However, data alone does not improve practice. In light of the variable implementation of the safeguards and the impact of strip search not just on children, but their families and communities, respondents made a strong case for regular, independent scrutiny of the strip searches of children.

“Every detail of the search should be recorded and this should be reviewed by an independent monitoring team at least monthly.”

Legal representative – online evidence submission 69

The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners have produced [guidance](#) for Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables to support the introduction of Custody Detention Scrutiny Panels and, in April 2025, circulated a list of ‘APCC Suggested Scrutiny Questions’ on the strip searching of children.³² But scrutiny panels do not exist in every area, nor does every scrutiny panel review child strip search data. Independent Custody Visiting (ICV) Schemes, who organise volunteers from the local community to perform spot checks on police custody, are often involved in these panels. However, at present fewer than half of ICV schemes report involvement in scrutiny panels which have a focus on children, and consider strip search data.³³ The APPG recommend that children in every force area should be protected by regular scrutiny of strip search data by independent members of their community.

Finally His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) have produced a new [Policing inspection programme and framework 2025–29](#).³⁴ This incorporates what were previously free-standing six-yearly police custody inspections into the four-yearly police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL) inspections. Whilst the increased frequency of inspections is welcome, it is important that the focus on scrutinising strip search data and practice is not lost.³⁵

RECOMMENDATION 5: Improve data collection, publication and oversight

In order to improve the transparency and accountability of child strip searches that:

- The Home Office should require all police forces to provide fully disaggregated data on the strip search of children (under PACE Codes A and C), to include the location of searches, the outcome of the strip search itself (positive or negative), presence and type of appropriate adult, the level of clothing removed and the characteristics of the children searched (their vulnerabilities, in addition to their age-group, sex and ethnicity). This data should be made publicly available, subject to appropriate anonymisation.
- All police forces should work with their Police and Crime Commissioner (or equivalent) to ensure that there is regular, independent scrutiny by local community members of child strip search data and practices.
- HMICFRS should ensure that child strip search data and practices remain a specific focus of police custody inspections under the PEEL inspection framework.

ANNEXES

ANNEX A

LIVE EVIDENCE SESSIONS

First Evidence Session

Hearing from Children and Young People with Experience of Police Custody and Strip Search, 25 April 2023

- Witnesses: Tyler (male, aged 16, video recorded), Shaq, (male, aged 19), Lz (male, aged 20), Jodie (female, aged 19) and S (female, aged 17), from Young Advocates for Youth Justice.
- Presentation by Dr Miranda Bevan of evidence provided for the APPG between 11th and 21st April 2023 by: C (male, aged 17), ST (male, aged 17), Y (male, aged 19), J (male, aged 18) and Dre (male, aged 17).

Second Evidence Session

Legal advice for children in police custody, 23 May 2023

- Dr Vicky Kemp (University of Nottingham)
- Laura Cooper (Youth Justice Legal Centre, Just for Kids Law) and Caroline Liggins (Hodge Jones & Allen)
- Commander Nick John, Metropolitan Police Service

Third Evidence Session

Appropriate adults and other support for children in police custody, 11th July 2023

- Dr Miranda Bevan (formerly Goldsmiths now King's College, University of London)
- Chris Bath (CEO, National Appropriate Adult Network)
- Dr John Taggart (Queen's University, Belfast)
- Lib Peck (Director, London Violence Reduction Unit, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime)

Fourth Evidence Session

Reducing detention periods for children in police custody, Tuesday 21st November 2023

- Louise King (Co-Lead of Just for Kids Law and Director of the Children's Rights Alliance for England)
- Penelope Gibbs (CEO, Transform Justice)
- Matthew Haynes (Team Manager, Coventry Youth Justice Service)

Fifth Evidence Session

Guidance and Oversight, Wednesday 13th March 2024 at 3.00pm – 4.30pm

- Assistant Chief Constable Tom Harding (Director of Operational Standards and Public Safety and Risk, College of Policing)
- Sherry Ralph (CEO of the Independent Custody Visiting Association)
- Michelle Skeer OBE QPM (Inspection Lead for Children, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services)

For full minutes of each live evidence session and a selection of written evidence responses please see the [APPG website](#).

ANNEX B

APPG OFFICERS AND PARLIAMENTARY MEMBERS

Chair

Michelle Welsh MP

Officers

Lord Carlile of Berriew

Lord Finkelstein

Juliet Campbell MP

Members

Lord Bradley

The Lord Bishop of Derby

Catherine Atkinson MP

Dawn Butler MP

Jacob Collier MP

Florence Eshalomi MP

Linsey Farnsworth MP

Amanda Hack MP

Sally Jameson MP

Kim Johnson MP

Afzal Khan MP

Rachael Maskell MP

James Naish MP

Michael Payne MP

Richard Quigley MP

Jo White MP

Steve Yemm MP

For a list of **External Members** please see the [APPG's website](#).

REFERENCES

- ¹ Jim Gamble QPM and Rory McCallum (2022) 'Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review: Child Q' accessible at <https://chscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Child-Q-PUBLISHED-14-March-22.pdf>.
- ² See for example the Children's Commissioner (2022) 'Strip search of children by the Metropolitan Police Service – new analysis by the Children's Commissioner for England' accessible at <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/strip-search-of-children-by-the-metropolitan-police-service-new-analysis-by-the-childrens-commissioner-for-england/>; Children's Commissioner (2023) 'Strip search of children in England and Wales – analysis by the Children's Commissioner for England' accessible at <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/strip-search-of-children-in-england-and-wales/>; Children's Commissioner (2024) 'Strip searching of children in England and Wales: First complete dataset for 2018–2023, including new data July 2022–June 2023', accessible at <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/strip-searching-of-children-in-england-and-wales-first-complete-dataset-for-2018-2023-including-new-data-july-2022-june-2023/>; Independent Office of Police Complaints, (2024) 'Phase 2 – National Learning Recommendations re: EIP Searches of Children' accessible at <https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/IOPC%20National%20learning%20recommendations%20and%20responses%20-%20EIP%20searches%20of%20children%20-%202019.03.24.pdf>; National Appropriate Adult Network, 2022, 'Police Searches of People. A Review of PACE Powers' <https://www.appropriateadult.org.uk/policy/searches>. See also, Dame Vera Baird KC (2023) 'The Baird Review: An independent report into the experience of people who are arrested and taken into custody by Greater Manchester Police with a focus on women and girls', accessible at <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/9861/the-baird-inquiry.pdf>.
- ³ See the Home Office's Consultation on 'Proposed amendments to PACE Codes of Practice A and C: strip searches' accessible at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-amendments-to-pace-codes-of-practice-a-and-c-strip-searches>.
- ⁴ 2 children and young people gave live evidence of strip search to the APPG, 1 provided video recorded evidence, 5 were interviewed by the secretariat, Dr Miranda Bevan, and their evidence reported in the first evidence session and 2 further children provided online survey evidence. Ethics approval for all engagement was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Goldsmiths, University of London.
- ⁵ Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) - Code A, 3.7, accessible at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pace-code-a-2023/pace-code-a-2023-accessible>.
- ⁶ Children's Commissioner (2024) (note 2), p8.
- ⁷ PACE – Code C, Annex A, 9, accessible at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pace-code-c-2023/pace-code-c-2023-accessible#annex-a-intimate-and-strip-searches>.
- ⁸ Home Office (2025) *Police custody and pre-charge bail, year ending March 2024*, accessible at https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-custody-and-pre-charge-bail-year-ending-march-2024/police-custody-and-pre-charge-bail-year-ending-march-2024_1.8.
- ⁹ Home Office (2025) (note 8), 1.8.
- ¹⁰ Home Office (2025) (note 8), 1.8.
- ¹¹ Home Office (2025) 'Unique individuals in custody: Police Powers and Procedures: Police Custody and pre-charge bail, year ending March 2024' pivot 4 accessible at [custody-person-data-pivot-tables-year-ending-March-2024.xlsx](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-custody-and-pre-charge-bail-year-ending-march-2024/custody-person-data-pivot-tables-year-ending-march-2024.xlsx). Published Home Office data does not enable the identification of repeated strip searches of children following stop and search (under PACE Code A).
- ¹² Jim Gamble QPM and Rory McCallum (2022) (note 1), p32.
- ¹³ Children's Commissioner (2024) (note 2), p7.
- ¹⁴ Home Office (2025) (note 8), 1.8.
- ¹⁵ PACE – Code C (note 7), Annex A, 10.
- ¹⁶ See the IOPC's recommendations in relation to Stop and Search, IOPC (2022) *National Stop and Search Learning Report*, accessible at: file:///C:/Users/k2477151/Downloads/OFFICIAL%20IOPC%20National%20stop%20and%20search%20learning%20report%2020%20April%202022_0.pdf.
- ¹⁷ See note 3.
- ¹⁸ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK in 1991, accessible at <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights>.
- ¹⁹ See for example NAAN (2022) (note 2) for an identification of the complexities of the current framework.
- ²⁰ See for example <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-prison-smuggling-attempts-thwarted>.
- ²¹ Children's Commissioner (2024) (note 2), p36. No comparable figures are available for outcomes of child strip searches in police custody (under Code C).
- ²² Minutes of the Fifth Evidence Session, p5ff.
- ²³ Crime and Disorder Act 1998 s.38(1) and (4)(a), accessible at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/section/38>.
- ²⁴ National Appropriate Adult Network, (2018) 'National standards for the development and provision of appropriate adult schemes in England and Wales', 5.3 p59, accessible at <https://www.appropriateadult.org.uk/downloads/national-standards>. These standards are approved by the Youth Justice Board (YJB), see YJB/Ministry of Justice (2019) Standards for Children in the Youth Justice System, p5, accessible at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-standards-for-youth-justice-services>.

²⁵ HMI Probation (2024) *Youth Inspection Programme* accessible at <https://cloud-platform-e218f50a4812967ba1215eaecede923f.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/sites/32/2025/04/New-youth-inspection-programme-presentation-slides.pdf>

²⁶ See the evidence of Dr Miranda Bevan, Live Evidence Session 2 and Miranda Bevan (2022), *The pains of police custody for children: A recipe for injustice and exclusion?*, *British Journal of Criminology*, 2022-07, Vol.62 (4), p.805-821.

²⁷ PACE - Code C (note 8), Annex A

²⁸ Children's Commissioner , (2024) (note 2), p35.

²⁹ Home Office (2025) (note 8), 2.10 and Home Office (2024) *Police powers and procedures: Stop and search, arrests and mental health detentions, England and Wales, year ending 31 March 2024*, section 1, accessible at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/stop-and-search-arrests-and-mental-health-detentions-march-2024/police-powers-and-procedures-stop-and-search-arrests-and-mental-health-detentions-england-and-wales-year-ending-31-march-2024#s2.10>.

³⁰ The statistics report the attendance of an appropriate adult for a child in police custody in respect of the entire detention episode (Home Office (2025) (note 8) 1.5, but not whether the appropriate adult was in attendance at the time of the strip search itself.

³¹ This is of significance since the removal of clothing for evidential or 'safety' purposes is subject to the same protections and reported as a strip search following *Davies v Merseyside Police & Anor* [2015] EWCA Civ 114 accessible at <https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2015/114.html>.

³² APCC and NPCC (2023) *'The Introduction of Custody Detention Scrutiny Panels (CDSPs): A guide for Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables'*, accessible at <https://www.apccs.police.uk/member-resources/resources/the-introduction-of-custody-detention-scrutiny-panels-cdsps-a-guide-for-police-crime-commissioners-and-chief-constables/>.

³³ The Independent Custody Visiting Association kindly surveyed its members as part of their response to the Inquiry. 42% of the 26 Independent Custody Visiting schemes who responded reported involvement in scrutiny panels which had a focus on children and reviewed strip search data.

³⁴ HMICFRS (2025) *'Policing inspection programme and framework 2025-29'*, p12, accessible at <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/publication-html/policing-inspection-programme-and-framework-2025-29/>.

³⁵ See HMICFRS/Care Quality Commission (2022) *'Expectations for police custody: Criteria for assessing the treatment of and conditions for detainees in police custody'*, p14, accessible at <https://assets-hmicfrs.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/uploads/police-custody-expectations-2022.pdf>.

HEARING YOUNG VOICES ON STRIP SEARCH: FIVE KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

Report of an Inquiry into achieving the rights of children in police custody



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