



Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

19 March 2024

Dear Jenny,

I am writing to you in your role as Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee.

My Oral Questions session on 21 June 2023 included a discussion on the strip searches of children by Welsh police forces. I committed to providing the Senedd with an update on this important issue when Policing in Wales had completed and provided me with information based on an analysis of their internal processes and data.

Policing is a reserved issue and the responsibility of the UK Government. However, police strip searches of children is an issue we take seriously given the importance of the wellbeing of Welsh children. I have had several discussions with the lead PCC, Andy Dunbobbin in our regular catch-up meetings and Policing in Wales have provided me with the below information and confirmed this can be shared with Senedd members.

Policing in Wales has advised that a review of their procedures and processes found all four Welsh Forces have strict governance procedures in place, are compliant with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984 requirements around strip searches of children which includes external, independent scrutiny in the form of the Independent Advisory Group, Regional Safeguarding Boards and The Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Forces have a range of scrutiny and governance frameworks in place to support the wellbeing of children being searched, including the use of body worn cameras and custody suite CCTV; Appropriate Adults in attendance in nearly every area; panels and advisory groups. All Forces have adopted trauma informed practice into their stop and search procedures and make safeguarding referrals where appropriate.

The term 'strip search' covers a wide range of practice, from the removal of an outer piece of clothing like a jacket through to much more intimate searches. Although all of this activity needs to be conducted sensitively and appropriately, the figures provided by the police highlight that the vast majority of these searches were much less invasive than the term 'strip search' might imply, with the vast majority involving only outer clothing being removed.

The police review found that a total of 5,428 strip searches of children were undertaken in Wales over the two-year period between 2021-22 and 2022-23. All but six of the 5,428

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

cases involved children aged 13 or older. These searches were predominantly linked to the carriage of offensive weapons or illicit drugs. It should be noted the number captures the number of searches as individual incidents, as opposed to the number of children searched.

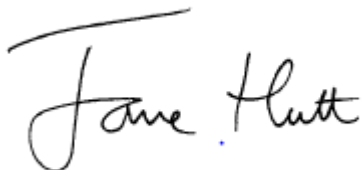
Whilst they fall in the definition of strip searches as outline above, for most of these searches children had no clothes removed, or only had a standard search undertaken – i.e. where a coat, jacket or gloves were removed. Of the 5,428 searches, 85 involved a more thorough search, or a search requiring the exposure of intimate areas.

The information also shows the number of children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds that had strip searches:

- Gwent 12
- North Wales 1
- Dyfed Powys 3
- South Wales 51

DCC Rachel Williams holds the portfolio for Child Centred Policing across Wales and is working with all four Welsh Forces to better understand any and all improvements that can be made in this area of policing, alongside the inspection and expectations by Police and Crime Commissioners and His Majesty's Inspectorate for Policing and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The Welsh Government will continue to engage with policing on this issue.

In line with my commitment during Plenary I am copying this to response to all Members of the Senedd.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Hutt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line above the first name.

Jane Hutt AS/MS

Gweinidog Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a'r Prif Chwip
Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip