# London’s new cannabis stop-and-search rules to cut police stops by 30%



As London navigates a significant transformation in its cannabis policy, the city's approach could redefine its legacy of drug enforcement and social equity. The London Drugs Commission, initiated by Mayor Sadiq Khan in 2022, represents a notable pivot from punitive measures towards a framework centred on decriminalisation and strategic resource allocation. This comprehensive 42-point plan aims to balance the changing landscape of drug laws while addressing the deep-seated issues of racial disparities in policing.

Currently, cannabis in the UK remains classified as a Class B substance, subject to harsh penalties, including up to five years in prison for possession. Nonetheless, the commission's findings illuminate critical disparities in law enforcement, revealing that Black and Asian communities are disproportionately targeted despite equivalent usage rates across demographics. The systemic nature of these issues signifies a long-overdue reevaluation of how society tackles drug-related challenges.

The economic implications of the proposed changes are considerable. A 2016 parliamentary study projected that comprehensive legalisation of cannabis could yield between £500 million and £1 billion annually in tax revenues while significantly reducing enforcement and judicial costs. Such financial benefits underscore the potential for cannabis reform to contribute positively to the economy, particularly in historically underserved communities.

A pivotal aspect of the new framework involves a revolutionary reform on stop-and-search procedures. By prohibiting the use of cannabis odour as a basis for police stops, the commission anticipates a dramatic reduction in searches—estimated at 30%. This measure is aimed at dismantling long-standing discriminatory practices that disproportionately affect young Black men, consequently reducing the numbers of individuals with criminal records that hamper their employment and housing prospects. The prioritisation of violent drug offences over personal possession further reallocates police resources towards genuine public safety issues, marking a significant shift in law enforcement priorities.

While the commission’s guidelines allow for limited home cultivation, it introduces this change cautiously, contingent on future evidence demonstrating its efficacy in undermining illegal markets. This measured response seeks to find a balance between personal freedom and the risks associated with unregulated cannabis production. Drawing lessons from international examples, such as Thailand’s rapid policy shifts, London’s approach aims to implement gradual changes with systematic oversight to avoid potential negative outcomes.

The commission's commitment to social equity through mandatory racial equity audits on cannabis-related enforcement activities represents an unprecedented transparency initiative. This ensures that the benefits of policy reforms extend to historically marginalised communities, rather than simply perpetuating existing inequalities. Such audits, alongside demographic analyses, are essential for understanding how policy adjustments impact various population segments and can provide crucial insights for future reforms.

The economic landscape for London residents is ripe with potential as these policy changes take shape. Reducing costs associated with the criminal justice system could free up resources for community investment in education, mental health services, and job training programmes. However, the Centre for Social Justice has raised concerns that decriminalisation might inadvertently escalate mental health issues and create a complex dual market of legal and illegal cannabis, reminiscent of challenges faced by cities like New York.

Looking ahead, the successful implementation of these policy changes hinges on proactive public education campaigns aimed at dispelling misconceptions about cannabis safety, particularly among younger audiences. Additionally, there’s a critical need for NHS-funded addiction support services to expand access in communities most affected by substance abuse, ensuring the reforms are beneficial rather than harmful.

Finally, establishing robust monitoring systems will be vital for the long-term evaluation of these policies. Independent health impact assessments will be essential to track mental health outcomes, crime statistics, and progress on social equity, thereby allowing policymakers to adapt strategies in real-time based on emerging evidence.

In conclusion, London’s evolving cannabis landscape, characterised by its cautious yet progressive reforms, stands as a data-driven model between outright prohibition and full legalisation. The success of these initiatives is contingent upon ongoing evaluation, community involvement, and a readiness to adapt based on the real-world impacts of these changes. As the city embarks on this transformative journey, it may set a precedent for other regions grappling with similar challenges.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[5]](https://www.london.gov.uk/london-drugs-commission-terms-reference)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[4]](https://www.vice.com/en/article/decriminalise-weed-in-london-uk-government-backed-race-review-says/), [[6]](https://www.thejusticegap.com/decriminalisation-of-cannabis-possession-needed-to-tackle-disproportionate-policing-says-report/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[4]](https://www.vice.com/en/article/decriminalise-weed-in-london-uk-government-backed-race-review-says/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/law/2021/mar/18/met-may-change-stop-and-search-tactics-on-cannabis-possession), [[6]](https://www.thejusticegap.com/decriminalisation-of-cannabis-possession-needed-to-tackle-disproportionate-policing-says-report/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[3]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/sian-berry-london-mayor-cannabis-stop-search-b1794303.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[6]](https://www.thejusticegap.com/decriminalisation-of-cannabis-possession-needed-to-tackle-disproportionate-policing-says-report/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[3]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/sian-berry-london-mayor-cannabis-stop-search-b1794303.html), [[7]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/aim-to-divert-young-people-away-from-drug-use)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/)
* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/)
* Paragraph 11 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2021/mar/18/met-may-change-stop-and-search-tactics-on-cannabis-possession> - In March 2021, The Guardian reported that the Metropolitan Police in London were considering changes to their stop-and-search tactics concerning cannabis possession. This initiative aimed to assess the effectiveness of current enforcement methods and address concerns about racial disparities in policing. The review sought to determine whether focusing on cannabis possession was the most efficient use of police resources and to explore alternative approaches to reduce potential harm to communities, particularly Black and Asian groups disproportionately affected by such searches.
3. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/sian-berry-london-mayor-cannabis-stop-search-b1794303.html> - In January 2021, Sian Berry, a candidate for London mayor, pledged to deprioritise the policing of cannabis if elected. Her manifesto included ending the use of cannabis possession as the sole grounds for stop-and-search operations. Berry argued that this approach would address the disproportionate targeting of young Black men by the police and refocus resources on more serious crimes. She also advocated for harm-reduction strategies, such as safe consumption facilities and medical-grade heroin prescriptions, to support individuals with substance use issues.
4. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/decriminalise-weed-in-london-uk-government-backed-race-review-says/> - A government-backed race review in January 2022 recommended that the Metropolitan Police and three other forces trial cannabis decriminalisation to address the disproportionate criminalisation of young people from ethnic minorities. The report suggested pilot drug 'diversion' schemes, where individuals caught with small quantities of cannabis would not be arrested but offered support and advice. This approach aimed to reduce the number of young people entering the criminal justice system for low-level drug possession offences.
5. <https://www.london.gov.uk/london-drugs-commission-terms-reference> - The London Drugs Commission, established by Mayor Sadiq Khan in 2022, was tasked with assessing the effectiveness of current drug laws, particularly concerning cannabis. The commission's purpose was to analyse alternative policy options and instigate a national debate on reducing drug-related harm. Its scope included examining the impact of cannabis laws on crime, public health, and economic outcomes, as well as exploring police enforcement and support services for individuals with substance use issues.
6. <https://www.thejusticegap.com/decriminalisation-of-cannabis-possession-needed-to-tackle-disproportionate-policing-says-report/> - A report from the drug reform charity Release, published in January 2022, highlighted the need for decriminalisation of cannabis possession to mitigate disproportionate policing and the 'hyper-criminalisation' of ethnic minorities. The report noted that current drug laws often criminalise individuals for minor offences and disproportionately impact Black and ethnic minority communities. It called for a shift towards harm-reduction strategies and a reevaluation of the legal framework surrounding cannabis use.
7. <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/aim-to-divert-young-people-away-from-drug-use> - In January 2022, a spokesperson for the Mayor of London stated that a limited trial involving three of London's 32 boroughs was under development. The pilot aimed to divert 18-24-year-olds found in possession of a small amount of cannabis away from the criminal justice system and provide support instead. This initiative was part of the Mayor's broader strategy to reduce crime and address the over-policing of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds.