# London bans cannabis smell stop-and-search to cut racial bias by 30%



London's approach to cannabis policy is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by recent recommendations that aim to address long-standing issues of racial disparity in law enforcement and to create economic opportunities. The London Drugs Commission, established by Mayor Sadiq Khan in 2022, has outlined a detailed framework for reform that departs from decades of punitive measures, calling for the decriminalisation of personal possession while maintaining strict oversight on commercial distribution.

Historically, cannabis possession in the UK has been classified as a Class B drug, punishable by up to five years’ imprisonment. However, recent data highlighted by the commission shows a troubling trend: Black and Asian communities are disproportionately impacted by enforcement practices, despite usage rates being broadly similar across all demographics. This inequity has long raised concerns about systemic discrimination within the policing process, underscoring a need for substantial change.

At the core of this new framework is a groundbreaking recommendation that prohibits officers from using the smell of cannabis as a legitimate basis for stop-and-search procedures. This shift aims to reduce stop-and-search incidences by an estimated 30%, a critical move towards rectifying the racial disparities that have plagued London’s communities for decades. Reports indicate that young Black men face the brunt of these searches, leading to criminal records that hinder future employment and housing opportunities. In addressing these concerns, the new policy prioritises violent drug-related offences over non-violent possession cases, enabling law enforcement to redirect efforts toward genuine public safety issues.

The potential economic ramifications of this policy shift could be substantial. A UK's parliamentary study from 2016 projected that full legalisation might generate between £500 million to £1 billion in tax revenue annually, alongside significant savings in policing and judicial expenses. Such funds could be channelled into investment in the most affected communities, funding education programmes, mental health services, and job training initiatives.

Moreover, London's cautious strategy includes limited home cultivation of cannabis, allowing residents to grow their own plants under tailored regulations that seek to disrupt illegal markets. This balanced approach is designed to provide legal avenues for personal use while preventing widespread unregulated production, learning from international examples—including the experiences observed in regions like Thailand, where rapid policy shifts have sometimes led to unintended consequences.

In undertaking these reforms, the London Drugs Commission has also mandated ongoing social equity audits to ensure that policy changes yield real benefits for historically marginalised communities. This unprecedented emphasis on transparency aims to hold law enforcement accountable and foster public trust. The Mayor’s recent action plan, which includes community involvement in the oversight of stop-and-search practices, aligns with this goal. A quarterly race equality audit will be produced alongside initiatives to enhance scrutiny over policing actions, particularly those involving the smell of cannabis.

Despite these promising developments, challenges remain. Experts, such as those from the Centre for Social Justice, caution that decriminalisation could inadvertently heighten mental health issues or lead to a dual illegal-legal market, mirroring problems seen in other cities like New York after similar reforms.

As London navigates these transformative times, educational campaigns will be critical in reshaping perceptions of cannabis safety, particularly among youth who may underestimate risks associated with decriminalisation. Furthermore, integrating healthcare support services for addiction and ensuring access for at-risk populations will be vital to prevent potential negative impacts from policy changes.

In summary, London's methodical approach to cannabis policy reform signals a shift toward a more equitable framework that addresses historical injustices while attempting to foster economic development. The success of these initiatives will hinge on sustained community engagement, robust monitoring systems to evaluate long-term impacts, and a commitment to adapt strategies based on evidence rather than ideology, ultimately redefining the city's relationship with cannabis moving forward.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[4]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/11/13/london-mayors-action-plan-recommends-police-do-not-stop-search/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/stop-and-search-to-be-better-scrutinised), [[5]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/stop-and-search-based-smell-cannabis)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/police-cannabis-smell-stop-search-racism-b421626.html), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/law/2021/mar/18/met-may-change-stop-and-search-tactics-on-cannabis-possession)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/law/2021/mar/18/met-may-change-stop-and-search-tactics-on-cannabis-possession)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/stop-and-search-to-be-better-scrutinised), [[7]](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/), [[3]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/police-cannabis-smell-stop-search-racism-b421626.html), [[4]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/11/13/london-mayors-action-plan-recommends-police-do-not-stop-search/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/stop-and-search-to-be-better-scrutinised), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/law/2021/mar/18/met-may-change-stop-and-search-tactics-on-cannabis-possession)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/stop-and-search-to-be-better-scrutinised)
* Paragraph 9 – [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/stop-and-search-to-be-better-scrutinised), [[3]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/police-cannabis-smell-stop-search-racism-b421626.html)
* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://www.journee-mondiale.com/en/londons-new-cannabis-policy-eliminates-30-of-police-stops-with-one-rule-change/), [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/stop-and-search-to-be-better-scrutinised)

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## 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.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/stop-and-search-to-be-better-scrutinised> - The Mayor of London has announced an action plan to enhance the scrutiny of the Metropolitan Police's use of stop and search powers. This plan includes greater community involvement, particularly focusing on the Territorial Support Group and Violent Crime Taskforce. A quarterly race equality audit will be produced, and a three-month project with communities will co-design and launch a new scrutiny process. Additionally, stricter oversight will be implemented for stop and searches based solely on the smell of cannabis, with body-worn video footage being made available to communities for further scrutiny.
3. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/police-cannabis-smell-stop-search-racism-b421626.html> - Police have been instructed not to use the smell of cannabis as the sole ground for stop and search procedures amid allegations of racial discrimination. A complaint upheld by a watchdog highlighted the issue, leading to new guidance that officers should not rely solely on the smell of cannabis when deciding to stop and search individuals. This move aims to address concerns about racial profiling and the disproportionate targeting of Black and Asian communities.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/11/13/london-mayors-action-plan-recommends-police-do-not-stop-search/> - The Mayor of London has proposed changes to stop and search policies, recommending that officers should not stop and search individuals solely based on the smell of cannabis. This initiative is part of a broader action plan aimed at improving trust within Black and ethnic minority communities. The plan also includes increasing the recruitment of officers from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and subjecting stop and search procedures to community scrutiny.
5. <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/stop-and-search-based-smell-cannabis> - In response to concerns about the use of the smell of cannabis as grounds for stop and search, the Mayor of London has reaffirmed the Metropolitan Police Service's policy that officers should not rely solely on the smell of cannabis when deciding to stop and search someone. This position aligns with national guidelines and aims to strengthen oversight to ensure that stop and search practices are conducted professionally and fairly.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2021/mar/18/met-may-change-stop-and-search-tactics-on-cannabis-possession> - The Metropolitan Police is considering changes to its stop and search tactics concerning cannabis possession. This consideration follows new academic research into the impact of drug stop and search tactics on violent crime and community relations, particularly among London's Black communities. The aim is to boost the effectiveness and proportionality of police enforcement tactics related to cannabis.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/sian-berry-london-mayor-cannabis-stop-search-b1794303.html> - Sian Berry, a candidate for London mayor, has pledged to deprioritise the policing of cannabis, including ending the use of cannabis smell as the sole grounds for stop and search. She advocates for a public health approach to drug use in London, aiming to address issues around the enforcement of cannabis laws and reduce the disproportionate targeting of Black communities by police.