Peter Tatchell Foundation
Speaking out for Human Rights

10 June 2025

Chief Constable Stephen Watson QPM
Greater Manchester Police

Dear Chief Constable Stephen Watson,

Your refusal to apologise to LGBTs for past Manchester police persecution

Thank you for your letter dated 28 April 2025.

Sorry, but I cannot accept your excuse for refusing to answer my three letters requesting a police apology to the LGBT+ community for past homophobic persecution.

These letters were sent to you over a period of 20 months. My first letter was sent to you on 19 June **2023.** Two further copies were sent. You never replied to any of them. It appears that you only finally replied on 28 April after I alerted the Mayor of Greater Manchester and the Manchester media of your refusal to reply and say sorry.

The National Police Chief's Council lead on LGBT+ issues, the Chief Constable of Northumbria, Vanessa Jardine, has recognised the importance of a formal apology for past police abuses. She wrote to you and all other Chief Constables over a year ago urging them to review our request for an apology for historic anti-LGBT+ witch-hunts. I do not understand how Vanessa Jardine's letter to you could possibly be seen as a reason to not reply to me.

To date, 21 Chief Constables have issued apologies to their LGBT+ communities. If they can say sorry, why can't you?

You have stated: **"I cannot accede to your request for a general apology…It would unfairly impugn the faithful and valued services of past officers…(and) be quite unjust for me as the current Chief Constable to cast some sort of sweeping assertion as to the general conduct of the force over a prolonged period of time."**

You have sadly completely mispresented what we are asking. We never sought a "sweeping" condemnation of all past officers. We never disputed that many officers served well. Our request was solely an apology for those who acted in abusive and illegal ways. Other Chief Constables have done that. I do not understand your reluctance.

Your letter to me asked for evidence before you would consider making an apology. This has a whiff of victim-blaming. You seem to expect the victims of police abuses to do all the work for you. This is not acceptable.

Other police forces have responded to my letter by liaising with local LGBT+ community organisations, LGBT+ history projects and consulting local media archives. They have found plentiful examples of homophobic police malpractice to justify an apology.

Why can't you do the same?

Here are some very obvious and very well-known examples of the Greater Manchester Police (GMP) witch-hunts against LGBTs, of which you should be aware and feel obliged to say sorry for:

Greater Manchester Police has a particularly troubling homophobic history that deserves specific acknowledgement and apology. Under Chief Constable James Anderton in the 1980s, the force became synonymous with open hostility towards the LGBT+ community.

At the height of the AIDS crisis, when hundreds of gay men were suffering slow, agonising deaths, Mr Anderton described gay people as "swirling in a human cesspit of their own making." He abused his position as Chief Constable to promote religiously-motivated intolerance towards LGBTs, including publicly supporting the recriminalisation of same-sex relationships.

His comments were not isolated rhetoric—they informed operational policing. GMP officers were directed to illegally harass gay venues, including a notorious raid by 23 police officers on Napoleon's bar in 1984. The names and addresses of members were illegally seized, patrons were forcibly and unlawfully photographed and intimidated by aggressive bullying officers. In some cases, gay and bisexual men were publicly outed by the police. They lost their jobs and were subjected to homophobic insults, threats and violence, as a result of these abuses by Manchester police.

There were also regular police raids on the New Union, Rembrandt Hotel and the Clone Zone shop. These were acts of vindictive, malicious police harassment.

The police openly boasted: "We've been trying to close these queer places for years." This was a clear admission of a witch-hunt and homophobic vendetta.

Why can't you acknowledge this was wrong and say sorry?

This policing was not about public welfare or safety. It was about enforcing prejudice and stigma. Many LGBT+ people in Greater Manchester lived in fear of the police, seeing them not as protectors but as persecutors. These police abuses drove a wedge between the force and the LGBT+ communities—damage which, while historic, continues to resonate today in the absence of an apology.

The public apologies by 21 other Chief Constables have been widely welcomed and recognised as vital steps in rebuilding trust between the police and the LGBT+ communities.

The Chief Constables of these **21 UK police forces** have issued apologies:

Metropolitan, City of London, Sussex, Merseyside, Police Scotland, Northumberland, Durham, Derbyshire, Suffolk, Devon & Cornwall, Dorset, North Yorkshire, Wiltshire, Gwent, West Mercia, Nottinghamshire, Avon & Somerset, Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, South Yorkshire and Gloucestershire.

If they can say sorry, why can't you?

While GMP has made important progress, acknowledging past wrongs is essential to underpinning these efforts. A formal apology would demonstrate moral leadership, humility and humanity. It would send a powerful message to those who endured persecution at the hands of your predecessors—that their suffering has been heard, and that the force of today rejects the witch-hunts of the past.

Apologies are not symbolic gestures. They are acts of justice. They affirm that change has occurred, and that the police now stand alongside the communities it once harmed. For many LGBT+ people, hearing their Chief Constable acknowledge historic mistreatment would be profoundly healing.

As you well know, apologies issued by other forces have not undermined current officers but rather strengthened public confidence. They have helped to rebuild bridges with marginalised LGBT+ communities and show that policing today is informed by compassion, accountability and truth.

Having heard this further submission, I hope Greater Manchesater Police can join the growing number of forces that are bravely facing their past to build a better future.

I resectfully repeat my request for you to make an apology, to draw a clear line under the homophobic past.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Tatchell

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