



Home Affairs Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA
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From the Committee Chair

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Home Secretary
Via email

23 May 2024

Dear Home Secretary,

I am writing to you following the Home Affairs Committee's short inquiry into Non-contact sexual offences, which concluded in April 2024. We had planned to present our findings to you in a report before the summer recess, but due to the imminent election announced by the Prime Minister on 22 May 2024, we have summarised our main findings in this letter.

We launched this inquiry following the rapes and murders of Libby Squire and Sarah Everard, whose perpetrators were found to have had a history of committing non-contact sexual offences, namely indecent exposure and voyeurism. The aim of our inquiry was to ascertain whether non-contact sexual offences can be gateway crimes to contact sexual offences. We also wanted to explore what progress has been made by the Government and the police to better understand whether non-contact sexual offending can escalate to contact sexual offending, and if so, what is being done to stop perpetrators committing those offences and prevent escalation. We held two oral evidence sessions over the course of two months, where we heard from Lisa Squire (mother of Libby Squire), academics (including the Government's Independent Advisor to the Rape Review), policing representatives and the Minister for Victims and Safeguarding.

We would like to thank all those who gave oral evidence to our inquiry, particularly Lisa Squire, whose undeniable strength and commitment to raising awareness of the importance of reporting non-contact sexual offences, and tireless campaigning around these offences, have helped shed light on a serious, but often overlooked issue.

Below, we have set out what were likely to become some of our key recommendations and conclusions had we had time to publish a report:

Reporting of non-contact sexual offences



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We were told “women have accepted a lot of this low-level offending for a long time” and that encouraging women to report non-contact sexual offences is key to stopping them. However, we were told that many women and girls do not report non-contact sexual offences for a range of reasons, including fear that the report would not be taken seriously, the types of reporting mechanisms available to victims and societal attitudes towards these types of offences.

Part 1 of the Angiolini Inquiry report recognised that reports of indecent exposure to the police, are still not taken seriously. It also noted many women do not report incidents of exposure to the police. It recommended that by March 2025, the Home Office with the National Police Chief’s Council, should launch a public campaign to raise awareness of the illegality of these offences and to encourage reporting. Whilst we agree with this recommendation, the Government’s 2021 Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy committed to launching a public campaign to raise awareness of sexual offending. A public campaign, whilst useful, does not address societal attitudes that some of these offences are “often seen as a joke” and that the police will not take them seriously. Until more pressure is put on the police to take these lower-level sexual offences more seriously, women will not be encouraged to report.

We support the call for a public campaign on the illegality of exposure, as recommended in Part 1 of the Angiolini Inquiry report, the campaign should cover all non-contact sexual offences. Whilst we recognise the positive impact public campaigns may have on increasing the number of reports to the police, it will not address the heart of the reasons for why victims are not reporting: that the police will not take them seriously and the lack of anonymous reporting tools.

The Home Office must work with the National Police Chief’s Council and College for Policing to ensure non-contact sexual offences are absorbed into the national framework for what policing can do to tackle VAWG. The police must do more to improve its response and understanding of non-contact sexual offences and offenders and reinforce the severity of these types of offending to frontline police officers.

All police forces should give serious consideration to introducing anonymous reporting mechanisms, where victims of non-contact sexual offences can report them anonymously if they wish. This approach has worked well for the British Transport Police, who have been able to use those reports to build a picture of where perpetrators are carrying out their crimes, which then enables them to act on it.

In terms of addressing societal attitudes towards non-contact sexual offences, the Department for Education and the Home Office should consider whether Relationship and Sex and Health Education provides an opportunity in schools to educate young men and women that these kinds of crimes are unacceptable and illegal.

Data on non-contact sexual offences



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In order to understand the prevalence and patterns of non-contact sexual offences, data collection and intelligence is vital in helping to build a picture of what and where the problems are. Yet we were repeatedly told throughout our inquiry that data on the prevalence of non-contact sexual offences (including police-recorded data and data provided by the Office for National Statistics) is inadequate, and unclear. For example, data on exposure and voyeurism is lumped together in one, making it difficult to breakdown. In some instances, data on non-contact sexual offences is also included in "other sexual offences". Furthermore, no data is published on the number of perpetrators who commit non-contact sexual offences and later go on to commit contact sexual offences. This makes it difficult to ascertain whether there is a link between non-contact sexual offending and contact sexual offending.

The Home Office, working with the police and Office for National Statistics, must work urgently to revise how data on non-contact sexual offences is collected and published. Data on each non-contact sexual offence, including, but not limited to indecent exposure and voyeurism, must be recorded and published as the individual offences that they are.

The Home Office, in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice, should also publish yearly statistics on the number of individuals who have been convicted of non-contact sexual offences and then gone on to commit contact sexual offences. This should take effect from January 2025.

Research on non-contact sexual offences

Whilst it is speculated that some offenders who commit non-contact sexual offences are likely to escalate their offending to contact sexual offences, there is a lack of research to support this. In the case of Couzens and Relowicz, a series of non-contact sexual offences were committed by them before they went on to rape and murder. However, we heard from Professor Clare Mc Glynn that other non-contact sexual offenders will chose to continue committing non-contact sexual offences, rather than escalate their sexual offences.

The lack of research both on escalation of sexual offending, and on patterns, behaviours and motivations of non-contact sexual offenders, was something that was repeatedly raised as a concern with us. Professor Sarah Kingston, Professor of Criminal Justice and Policing at the University of Central Lancashire, told us, "further work and research is definitely needed to understand this issue" and Louisa Rolfe, Assistant Commissioner for the Metropolitan Police, told us that in regard to research "there is a gap and there is a mixed picture". Part 1 of the Angiolini Inquiry also noted the "lack of available evidence, including reliable data" on indecent exposure. It recommended that the Home Office, in collaboration with the College of Policing, should commission research to explore whether there is a link between masturbatory exposure and contact offending.

The Government's 2021 Violence Against Women and Girls also recognised the lack of research on escalation of sexual offending and committed to improving its understanding of escalation, stating that it will conduct research into escalation of



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sexual offending. In a letter from Minister Farris dated 22 May, she told us that this research had now been conducted but that, "no firm conclusions on the escalatory patterns could be drawn, partly due to limited volume of convictions for non-contact sexual offences". Furthermore, that research does not explore the patterns, behaviours and motivations behind those who commit non-contact sexual offences.

We agree with recommendation 4 in Part 1 of the Angiolini Inquiry, that the Home Office, in collaboration with the College of Policing should commission research to explore whether there is a link between masturbatory exposure and contact offending. However, we recommend that this goes beyond just looking at links between masturbatory exposure and contact offending, to all non-contact sexual offences, including exposure, voyeurism (including upskirting) and cyber-flashing.

Separate research into the patterns, behaviours and motivations of non-contact sexual offenders should also be undertaken by the Home Office in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice. Once this research has been completed, a review of legislation governing non-contact sexual offences (including the Sexual Offences Act 2003) should be undertaken.

Police handling of non-contact sexual offences

Deputy Chief Constable Maggie Blyth, NPCC Lead for tackling Violence Against Women and Girls, told us that the police are dealing with an "epidemic" in relation to Violence Against Women and Girls and that the police "are now recognising this is now a threat like terrorism". However, when we questioned them about what they are doing to tackle non-contact sexual offences, we were not given any concrete answers. Some of the key concerns raised to us in regard of police handling of non-contact sexual offences included:

- Hierarchy of offending: non-contact sexual offences are not considered to be part of the police's VAWG framework and therefore not a priority for the police in tackling VAWG.
- Allocation of resources: Whilst the Uplift programme aimed to increase the number of frontline police officers, we were told that what is desperately needed is more crime analysts who can spot patterns and trends through reports and potentially advise the police on where they should focus their efforts.
 - CCTV: CCTV is vital in terms of helping to identify offenders. However, the quality of some of the CCTV is so poor that it infringes the police's ability to identify and monitor possible perpetrators.
 - The Police National Database (PND): access to the PND is limited and that impacts police forces' ability to handle complaints relating to non-contact sexual offences.



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Non-contact sexual offences need to be treated as part of VAWG, in both the Government's response to VAWG and the policing response to VAWG.

The Home Office and National Police Chief's Council should consider whether police forces with RASSO units should absorb the handling of non-contact sexual offences.

Urgent investment is needed to help police forces recruit crime analysts and other essential experts who support investigations into sexual offences.

In the statement you made to the House on 29 February, you reiterated your longstanding commitment to tackling Violence Against Women and Girls. I therefore hope you will consider the contents of this letter with the upmost seriousness.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

Dame Diana Johnson MP
Chair of the Home Affairs Committee