



Home Office

Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson
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Rt Hon Dame Karen Bradley MP
Chair, Home Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

23 December 2024

Dear Dame Karen,

Timescales for policy development

At the Home Affairs Select Committee on 17 December, the Home Secretary underlined the Government's work around facial recognition technology for the police. Following the session she has asked me to write to the Committee to provide further detail.

Facial recognition technology is a powerful tool that has the potential to increase police effectiveness and efficiency, and contribute to keeping our streets safe by improving the police's ability to make more identifications, more quickly and accurately.

There is a legal framework for police use of facial recognition. This framework requires police compliance with existing data protection, equalities and human rights laws, national guidance, the Code of Practice for surveillance cameras and is supplemented by specific published policing policies. Facial recognition algorithms provided by or procured with Home Office funding for police use are also required to be independently tested for equitability (bias). However, the Government is aware of the concerns about the lack of a specific statutory provision and the broader concerns regarding the potential impact on civil liberties.

We are listening carefully to stakeholders and partners and I have met with the police, regulators, civil society groups and others. I also intend to hold an information session with MPs and Peers early next year, to give them the opportunity to understand the technology and its impact in greater detail. There is also a formal evaluation of police use of facial recognition in progress.

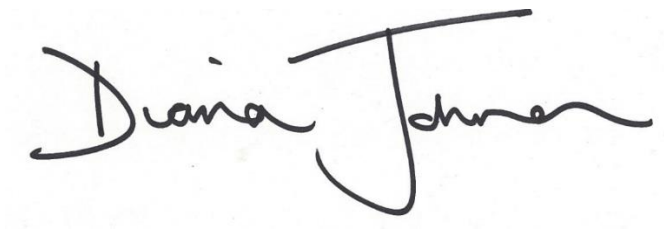
We are considering this alongside broader police reforms and we expect to publish a white paper in the Spring. It will cover issues from technology to the future workforce, from how the policing system can work better to tackle fast changing crime, to leadership and culture.

Facial recognition and retail crime

Private organisations like shops and supermarkets can use live facial recognition systems, which they can buy from companies that provide this technology. As with any other organisation, they must comply with data protection and equalities legislation. The Information Commissioner and the Equality and Human Rights Commission provide oversight on the use of facial recognition by private companies.

Police and private systems are entirely separate. Shops and business are encouraged to send images they capture of criminals on CCTV to the police. These can then be searched against the police database using retrospective facial recognition to try and identify the offender.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Diana Johnson'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large 'D' and 'J'.

Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson DBE MP
Minister of State for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention