

Supplementary written evidence submitted by the British Transport Police

BTP and Violence and Intimidation Against Women and Girls (VIAWG) - Background

Detecting and preventing sexual offences and all forms of violence and intimidation against women and girls is of the highest priority for BTP.

BTP have identified and recorded non-contact sexual offences since 2019 and have undertaken significant work to encourage reporting on the rail network through large scale media campaigns. This has led to the number of reports almost doubling in two years, but we believe that there is still a huge amount more to be done, and we will continue to work with our partners in the rail industry and Home Office forces to improve our service to victims and survivors of sexual offences and to prosecute, deter and educate offenders.

The Committee acknowledged that non-contact sexual offences will not be resolved by a policing response in isolation but will also require societal change through education and employer action. As public understanding of non-contact sexual offences increases, BTP expect to receive more reports which will have an impact on policing.

It is only through accurately recording, responding to, and monitoring these offences that we can build intelligence and address offences before they escalate. Accurate recording of offences will further improve our ability to measure and communicate positive outcomes, which in turn will allow women and girls to feel safe as they go about their everyday lives.

BTP believe that the following will be key to improving victim and witness confidence to report and challenge predatory behaviour and assisting police forces in recognising and responding to sexual offenders from the outset of their criminal behaviour:

Anonymous Reporting Mechanisms

It is essential that victims and witnesses feel that they can report offences anonymously with confidence that they will not be forced down a criminal justice route against their wishes. The ability to receive anonymous reports has significantly assisted BTP in improving our understanding of high-risk individuals, locations, and times to direct our resources. Offenders and offences can still be identified through CCTV and successful prosecutions can be secured as well as the ability to use intelligence to obtain civil and criminal orders to manage offenders. Whilst best evidence will always be achieved through victim and witness testimony, we should not be missing an opportunity to record and build intelligence around offences where individuals do not feel comfortable to provide their details. This approach has already identified significant benefits for victims and survivors of sexual offences and is also supported by academics such as Professor Katrin Hohl.

Intimidation as part of VAWG

BTP have incorporated intimidation into the VAWG (VIAWG) acronym to emphasise to the community as well as to our partners and staff that sexual offences involving intimidation are offences and will be investigated. Women using the rail network have shared that they have too often been the victim of non-contact predatory behaviour such as staring and sexual comments which does not fit a more traditional definition of VAWG. Our campaigns have made it clear that these types of behaviour are unacceptable as

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well as potentially criminal, and that action will be taken.

Worker's Protection Bill

The introduction of the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 will have an impact on society's response to sexual harassment. Many employers are yet to fully comprehend their role in preventing sexual harassment and this legislation will put the onus on them to take action proactively.

Strong government-led communication to employers regarding this important change in their responsibilities would ensure that there are adequate policies in place across our workplaces and that both employers and employees understand what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and how such offences can be reported.

Section 4B Public Order Act

Many non-contact sexual offences will fall under the remit of Section 4B of the Public Order Act (2023). This will make these offences far more visible nationally and enhance the ability of police forces to record and recognise offences which contain a sexual motivation. Better recording will in turn lead to an enhanced ability to study sexual offending and to evidence links between initial non-contact offences and the escalation into serious sexual assault.

Education

At BTP we have recognised that prosecution is neither viable nor suitable for all offenders and that education will play a crucial role in providing societal change. BTP has begun a project with offender management organisation, RISE, to provide the Consider course¹ as an out of court disposal for suitable individuals (first time and low-level offences). The project is in its infancy however it is hoped that it will have the same potential as successful initiatives which have reduced offences motivated by drug and alcohol misuse. A recent attendee on the Consider course fed back; *"Very sobering and gave me a different perspective of my behaviour."* This has the added benefit of being a prompt resolution, rather than the victim and offender enduring a lengthy wait for a judicial outcome.

The Security Industry

As part of an improved business response to sexual offences, BTP would ask the Committee to consider tighter controls within sectors which have the potential to significantly assist in reducing the harm of sexual offences. The Security Industry Authority (SIA) have a critical role in this space with their members frequently interacting with vulnerable women and girls particularly during the nighttime economy. Sadly, some of these engagements have a negative impact on women's safety through a lack of understanding of risk and a failure to safeguard. The Home Office has oversight of SIA governance and could mandate better regulation and training within the industry alongside consideration of making the role of security staff a position of trust with legal obligations to safeguard vulnerable people.

¹ Consider is a 3-hour course developed by RISE as an introduction to service users in starting the process of identifying their use of unhealthy and inappropriate sexual behaviours, and the impact of these on all affected (<https://risemutual.org/consider/>)