



Ministry  
of Justice

Stella Creasy MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

The Right Honourable  
**David Lidington CBE MP**  
Lord Chancellor & Secretary of  
State for Justice

MP ref: SC/ZA32427  
MoJ ref: ADR052587

Dear Stella

8 January 2018

### JOHN WORBOYS

Thank you for your letter dated 5 January regarding the case of John Worboys. These were horrendous crimes and my thoughts and deepest sympathy are with the victims. It must be an appalling experience for them to have to relive again the pain and suffering that they endured. I therefore take seriously the points which you and other colleagues raise in your letter, and the government will look at how these cases are handled in future.

John Worboys was convicted of 19 offences in 2009, including counts of sexual assault and rape, and received an indeterminate sentence with a minimum tariff of 8 years in custody. Police investigations have indicated that there may have been more offences committed against more victims. However, I understand that the CPS, who are responsible for decisions about whether to prosecute on the basis of evidence presented to them by the police, determined not to charge Mr Worboys with any additional offences.

The Parole Board reviewed Mr Worboys' case at an oral hearing on 8 November 2017, by which time he had served 10 years in custody including the period when he was held on remand pending his trial. As you know, he was sentenced to an indeterminate sentence for public protection, a sentence that was abolished in 2012. Following the expiry of the tariff set by the court, he was eligible for review by the Parole Board, which was required to consider whether to release him. A three-person panel considered a detailed dossier of evidence, including statements from victims.

The Parole Board's subsequent decision to direct release was communicated to my department on 3 January 2018.

As you mention, sentences imposed by the courts and Parole Board decisions are independent of Government and, as such, Ministers rightly have no power in law to intervene or to override them.

Victims of specified sexual and violent offences where the offender receives a sentence of 12 months or more – as is the case here – have a statutory right to be offered the Victim Contact Service (VCS) provided by the National Probation Service (NPS). Victims who opt in are entitled to be told about key stages in an offender's sentence, such as parole hearings. In traumatic and distressing cases such as this, it is right that victims decide whether and how they wish to be kept informed.

In this case, Mr Worboys was convicted of offences relating to 12 victims who were all referred to the NPS London in 2009. Four accepted the service (although one individual has since ceased contact), and the remainder either declined or did not respond. As a matter of course, when an offer of contact is made by a local Victims Liaison Unit, they also make clear that victims can opt into the VCS at any time, even if they declined or do not respond initially.

All those who opted to remain in contact via the VCS were informed of the parole hearing by their preferred method of contact, and invited to submit an up-to-date victim statement which they could read out at the hearing if they wished. In October 2017, the NPS tried to get in touch with all those who had not responded to the initial offer of contact in 2009. Two people responded requesting contact under the VCS, although these responses were not received in advance of the hearing date.

Of the victims currently in contact with the VCS, some chose to be informed by phone or email and were contacted about the Parole Board's decision to release Mr Worboys immediately on 3 January. Others chose to be informed by letters which were sent straight away, but of course take longer to reach the addressee.

Any victims whose crimes were not prosecuted do not fall within the statutory remit of the VCS. Discretionary contact can be considered on an individual basis, normally via a referral by the police or another agency working with victims, but we are not aware of any requests for discretionary contact made in this case. However, there are other important entitlements that these victims have under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. The Code sets out the services to which any victim who reports a crime is entitled, such as a needs assessment to help work out what support is needed, in addition to the obligations on criminal justice agencies such as the police and CPS to provide access to those services. On making an allegation to the police, victims must be offered a referral to organisations that support victims of crime, which include locally commissioned services (in London provided by Victim Support), and nationally commissioned Rape Support Centres.

I share your determination to ensure that victims of rape and sexual assault have full confidence in the criminal justice system, including in the way that perpetrators are managed following conviction. I enclose a copy of the statement I issued this past weekend setting out my intention to work with victims groups and others to consider how we can better support victims of crime and provide greater transparency to the Board's work. I would welcome views from you and parliamentary colleagues of all political parties about how this could best be done.

Yours ever



**RT HON DAVID LIDINGTON CBE MP**

P.S. I am placing a copy of this letter in  
the Library.