



Home Office

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Lord Rosser
The House of Lords
Westminster
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30 May 2019

Lord Rosser

During a debate on Tuesday 14 May, you asked about a working group looking at the characteristics of offenders involved in group-based child sexual exploitation (CSE), as referred to in the Government's response to an oral question on 18 October 2018.

First, I must clarify that there is no working group looking at group-based CSE. During his speech at the NSPCC on 3 September 2018 the Home Secretary committed to establishing a working group with businesses and the advertising industry to look into what action can be taken to prevent legitimate advertising funding online abuse, and referred to a £2.6m investment in child protection organisations to prevent offending. In the same speech, the Home Secretary referred to work to explore the characteristics of group-based CSE, including the characteristics of victims, offenders and the wider context of abuse. I apologise that the Government's response to the question on 18 October conflated these activities, and I will take this opportunity to provide an update on all of these.

The working group has considered what further analysis is needed to identify the cause within the advertising supply chain of advertisements appearing on CSAE websites, and the measures responsible operators within the advertising sector can take to help ensure CSAE sites are blacklisted.

We continue to work closely with child protection partners (including the Lucy Faithfull Foundation) to improve our understanding of offender behaviour and prevent future offending. As part of their work the Lucy Faithful Foundation offers confidential advice to offenders who want to change their illegal behaviour, including via the Stop It Now! Child sexual abuse prevention helpline, which has had 3885 callers seeking advice and support to stop viewing online sexual images of children since November 2018.

As the Home Secretary indicated in his speech, officials are pursuing work by several means to improve our understanding of the prevalence and nature of group-based child sexual exploitation. This work forms part of ongoing policy development and as such,

does not have a definitive timescale for completion or planned publication. To respond to your questions, it may be of help outlining current work in this area.

Building a robust and extensive evidence base is critical to ensure national policy is focussed in the right areas to tackle this pernicious crime.

To this end, Home Office officials have worked with police, Home Office analysts and the National Crime Agency, to create sustainable improvement in how we collect and analyse data on this form of offending. This will inform our understanding of the ways group-based and other forms of CSE can manifest in non-recent and current offending so that we can effectively target prevention efforts.

Home Office officials have also completed interviews with a number of investigating officers from various forces across England and Wales. These interviews will provide insight into characteristics of victims and offenders and key challenges for investigation and prosecution of these often-complex cases.

As part of building a broad evidence base, officials continue to build links with academics whose research focuses on child sexual exploitation along with a wider review of research and assessment in this area.

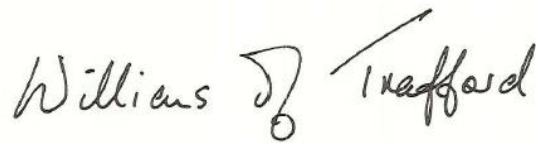
Significant external pieces of work in this area include the investigation by Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). The Government launched the Inquiry to get to the truth, expose what has gone wrong and learn lessons for the future. The Inquiry operates independently of Government and, within its terms of reference, decides for itself what it investigates. One of the Inquiry's investigation strands is looking into sexual exploitation of children by organised networks. During a preliminary hearing on 2 May the Inquiry outlined the scope of the investigation. We welcome the Inquiry's work in this area. As always, government departments will cooperate fully and will give careful consideration to its findings in due course.

During the debate, Lord Blunkett also raised the issue of taxi licencing and operation of taxi drivers across local authority boundaries which I have taken the opportunity to address here.

The independent Task and Finish Group on Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle (PHV) Licensing (TFG) has made a number of recommendations for addressing concerns about safety and safeguarding in relation to taxis and PHVs, including the issue of taxis operating outside of their 'home area'. In his report, the Chair of the TFG recommends that all journeys start and/or end in the 'home area'. In its response to the Chair's report, the Government notes that there are a range of views within the sector and interested parties about how cross-border, or out-of-area, journeys by taxis and PHVs should be permitted or restricted. This can be seen in the range of views expressed by individual members of the TFG in their comments in the annex to the Chair's report.

Government agrees with the principle of the Chair's recommendation and will consider further (with a view to legislation) how it might best work in detail. In particular, Government will need to consider what size of area is appropriate. We will also consider what flexibilities or exemptions might be needed to reduce or avoid negative impacts on any particular business models, types of transport or passenger, and businesses or localities that are close to (perhaps multiple) licensing authority borders.

I hope you find this letter helpful. I will also send a copy to all Peers who spoke at the debate and place a copy in the House Library.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light yellow background. The signature reads "Williams of Trafford" in a cursive style. The word "Williams" is written in a standard cursive, followed by "of" in a smaller, more decorative script, and "Trafford" in a larger, more prominent cursive.

Baroness Williams of Trafford