



Home Office

Jess Phillips MP
Minister for Safeguarding and Violence
Against Women and Girls

2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF
www.gov.uk/home-office

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

05 November 2024

Government response to the Home Affairs Select Committee's inquiry on non-contact sexual offences

Dear Dame Karen Bradley MP,

Thank you for inviting the Government to respond to the letter and findings outlined by the former Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee in her letter dated 23 May 2024, following the short inquiry into "non-contact sexual offences".

I would like to thank all those who gave evidence to the Committee on this important topic. In particular, I would like to thank Lisa Squire for her incredible strength and tireless commitment to campaigning to bring attention to the seriousness of these crimes.

We are absolutely committed to addressing all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), including non-contact sexual offences which are too often incorrectly dismissed as 'low-level' or 'less serious'. The scale of VAWG in our country is intolerable, and we have set out our unprecedented mission to halve levels of these crimes within a decade, using every lever available to us.

This means reforming the police response to these offences, strengthening the criminal justice system and ensuring there is provision for specialist victim support. As highlighted by the Committee, it is imperative that we address societal attitudes, which is why prevention and education are absolutely fundamental to our approach.

I agree with the Committee that there is much more to do to ensure victims feel confident in reporting non-contact sexual offences, knowing that they will be supported, taken seriously and that everything will be done to stop offenders.

As you will know, the Angiolini Inquiry commenced in January 2022, following the horrific kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a then-serving Metropolitan Police officer in March 2021. Amongst the findings from Part 1 of the Inquiry were that the allegations of exposure against Wayne Couzens were not adequately investigated by the police, and this resulted in missed opportunities to bring his offending to the attention of his employers.

We are working closely with policing and colleagues across Government to ensure each of the recommendations made in the Part 1 Report are addressed at pace. I will provide a detailed update on progress in due course.

In the meantime, I can confirm that progress to date includes: a review of the way non-contact sexual offences are dealt with by the criminal justice system, which is currently under way. We are placing a particular focus on how the police handle these offences and will seek to consider the concerns raised by the Committee's inquiry.

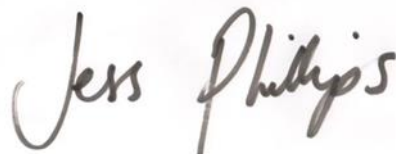
We are also taking forward research to explore whether there is a link between active masturbatory exposure and subsequent contact offending. I am pleased to report that we agreed with the Committee's conclusion that this research should go further, and so this includes examining potential links between a broader range of non-contact sexual offences and subsequent contact offending to help fill a vital evidence gap.

In addition, the Home Secretary recently announced that we will take forward legislative measures to improve police standards. These changes will ensure that officers convicted of certain criminal offences are automatically found to have committed gross misconduct and will strengthen requirements on police forces to suspend officers under investigation for offences relating to VAWG. They will also ensure a statutory underpinning for national vetting standards.

Thank you again for providing me with the opportunity to respond to the Committee's findings. Tackling VAWG is an integral part of our safer streets mission, and I look forward to working with you on this important agenda.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jess Phillips". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jess Phillips MP
Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls