

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

VOYEURISM (OFFENCES) (NO. 2) BILL

First Sitting

Tuesday 10 July 2018

(Morning)

CONTENTS

Sittings motion agreed to.
Written evidence (Reporting to the House) motion agreed to.
Motion to sit in private agreed to.
Examination of witnesses.
Adjourned till this day at Two o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Saturday 14 July 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* MS KAREN BUCK, †SIR ROGER GALE

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| † Caulfield, Maria (<i>Lewes</i>) (Con) | † Morden, Jessica (<i>Newport East</i>) (Lab) |
| † Chalk, Alex (<i>Cheltenham</i>) (Con) | † Qureshi, Yasmin (<i>Bolton South East</i>) (Lab) |
| † Creasy, Stella (<i>Walthamstow</i>) (Lab/Co-op) | † Robinson, Mary (<i>Cheadle</i>) (Con) |
| † Duffield, Rosie (<i>Canterbury</i>) (Lab) | † Russell-Moyle, Lloyd (<i>Brighton, Kemptown</i>) (Lab/Co-op) |
| † Frazer, Lucy (<i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice</i>) | † Saville Roberts, Liz (<i>Dwyfor Meirionnydd</i>) (PC) |
| † Hobhouse, Wera (<i>Bath</i>) (LD) | † Smith, Laura (<i>Crewe and Nantwich</i>) (Lab) |
| † Hollern, Kate (<i>Blackburn</i>) (Lab) | † Thomson, Ross (<i>Aberdeen South</i>) (Con) |
| † Jones, Andrew (<i>Harrogate and Knaresborough</i>) (Con) | † Whately, Helen (<i>Faversham and Mid Kent</i>) (Con) |
| † Keegan, Gillian (<i>Chichester</i>) (Con) | Kenneth Fox, Gail Poulton, <i>Committee Clerks</i> |
| † Knight, Julian (<i>Solihull</i>) (Con) | † attended the Committee |
| † Milling, Amanda (<i>Cannock Chase</i>) (Con) | |

Witnesses

Gina Martin, writer and campaigner

Assistant Commissioner Martin Hewitt, Lead for Rape and Sexual Violence, National Police Chiefs' Council

Public Bill Committee

Tuesday 10 July 2018

(Morning)

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

Voyeurism (Offences) (No. 2) Bill

9.25 am

The Chair: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I have a few housekeeping announcements before we begin. The first and most important of all—although not quite as important as it might have been yesterday—is that Members may take off their jackets if they wish to do so. Will Members please make sure that all their electronic devices are on silent or airplane mode or something? We do not want things ringing in the middle of the sitting. Water is available. Teas and coffees are not permitted during the sitting.

I have taken the liberty of asking the staff to exclude the public, rather than to let them in and then have to throw them out again so that we can sit in private for any private discussions that we may need to undertake. We will sit in public once we get going properly. We will consider the sittings motion on the amendment paper, then a motion to enable the reporting of written evidence for publication, and then a motion to allow us to deliberate in private, which is a formality, about questions before the oral evidence session. In view of the time available, I hope we can take these matters formally and without debate. However, if anybody wishes to intervene, they are absolutely at liberty to do so.

Resolved,

That—

(1) the Committee shall (in addition to its first meeting at 9.25 am on Tuesday 10 July) meet—

(a) at 2.00 pm on Tuesday 10 July;

(b) at 11.30 am and 2.00 pm on Thursday 12 July;

(2) the Committee shall hear oral evidence in accordance with the following Table:

Date	Time	Witness
Tuesday 10 July	Until no later than 10.00 am	Gina Martin
Tuesday 10 July	Until no later than 10.30 am	The National Police Chiefs' Council
Tuesday 10 July	Until no later than 2.30 pm	Rt Hon Maria Miller MP
Tuesday 10 July	Until no later than 3.00 pm	Brook

—(*Lucy Frazer.*)

Resolved,

That, subject to the discretion of the Chair, any written evidence received by the Committee shall be reported to the House for publication.—(*Lucy Frazer.*)

The Chair: Copies of the written evidence that the Committee receives will be available in the Committee Room.

Resolved,

That, at this and any subsequent meeting at which oral evidence is to be heard, the Committee shall sit in private until the witnesses are admitted.—(*Lucy Frazer.*)

9.27 am

The Committee deliberated in private.

Examination of Witness

Gina Martin gave evidence.

9.30 am

The Chair: We now resume our public sitting and hear evidence from Gina Martin. Before calling the first Member to ask a question, it says here, rather pompously, that I have to remind all Members that questions should be limited to matters within the scope of the Bill and that we must—this is important—stick to the timings in the sittings motion that the Committee has agreed, otherwise we shall overrun and not have the time to afford our guests the courtesy of the proper opportunity to answer questions. Ms Martin, thank you very much for joining us.

Gina Martin: Thank you for having me.

The Chair: It is good of you to be here and spare your time.

Q1 Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Good morning. Thank you for coming. You said that your experience demonstrated the need for a specific victim-centred offence to cover upskirting. To what extent do you think the Bill achieves that aim?

Gina Martin: When I was upskirted—when it happened to me—it was obvious that it was to humiliate me. The pictures were taken up my skirt and passed to people around me, and it was done in response to my rebuffing their sexual advances. My aim, from the beginning, was to work on a Bill with everyone here to cover different situations. I believe the Bill does that because it covers humiliation, distress or alarm.

Q2 Wera Hobhouse: Do you think the Bill strikes the right balance between protecting the victim and protecting individuals who accidentally take such images?

Gina Martin: I do, yes.

Q3 Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): Thank you very much for coming in, Gina, and for everything you have done to campaign on this issue and to raise awareness—that is the reason we are here today.

Do you think the impact of the Government seeking to bring in this new legislation as soon as possible will be on the side of victims? Do you think this is the right direction to go? I would like to hear your views on whether you think we are doing the right thing, essentially.

Gina Martin: I do, yes, and I think the point you made that the speed at which we do this should be as quick as possible is really important. Upskirting happened to me at a festival a year ago yesterday, and yesterday, Sunday, I received a message from a 16-year-old girl who went to the very same festival, where it happened to her twice by the same person. That shows that this is happening as we sit here and are dealing with it. What we are doing now is absolutely imperative.

Q4 Ross Thomson: In terms of ensuring we close this particular loophole in the law, which you have rightly exposed, do you think we need to keep the focus particularly on the issue of upskirting, to ensure that we can get the Bill passed as quickly as possible and also send out a clear message that this type of behaviour is unacceptable?

Gina Martin: That is incredibly important to me. I think it has to be focused, it has to be simple and it has to focus on this one issue. We all know there are other broader issues that we want to focus on, but this is an upskirting Bill and it has to focus on just that.

Q5 Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Women's Aid and Professor Clare McGlynn have argued that the Bill's scope needs to be extended so that victims of all image-based sexual offences have the right of anonymity in court. What are your views on this?

Gina Martin: Again, we need to deal with a lot of valuable issues. Do I think this Bill needs to cover all of them now? No, I think this is an upskirting Bill and the most important thing is that we cover this problem quickly and simply, and afford women the protection they deserve as soon as possible. I would argue that this is a Bill about upskirting and that those issues that Clare has brought forward should be dealt with properly and with scrutiny at a later date.

Q6 Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): It was really disturbing when we discussed this and you relayed how it had happened to you. Part of this was the pressure of people around you. It was quite a physical event for you. There seem to be two elements to this: the upskirting and the taking of the photograph to humiliate you and the passing around. How do you view those two incidents in terms of the humiliation aspect, or is there no difference at all?

Gina Martin: It is very difficult. I think the feeling of harassment was compounded. I have not separated out in my mind which I think was worse, because it was just a very horrible blurry event. I just hated all of it, if I am being totally honest. That is my very human response to it.

Q7 Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Hello Gina. One of the debates in relation to the Bill is about the concept of motivation, about whether we need to set out in law reasons why people do what you are talking about and, therefore, why that is wrong. We are debating whether we need to do that or simply to say that this, in and of itself, is wrong whether a person does it because they want to humiliate someone, because they find the pictures sexually exciting or because they will make money out of them. What is your view on that?

Gina Martin: That is a question that is more for a lawyer. I am not a lawyer, and I am not going to sit here and talk about the legislation in detail. One thing you touched on there was monetary gain. I would like to say categorically that of course I would like to see that we could prosecute at some point the paparazzi and photographers who do this. I am of the understanding that that needs to be done very, very carefully, with a lot of detail, to ensure that there are no unexpected consequences. I do not necessarily think that we should delay this process to look at that specifically—that is for another time.

Also, having worked specifically in the media for a very long time, I am very aware that if one celebrity decided to prosecute and raised charges using outraging public decency against paparazzi that would change very quickly. There is a big amount of education that needs to go on in that area. That is my feeling on that.

Q8 Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): You, of course, and we share this feeling, want it to stop, right? But one of the things the Bill has to look at is the consequences for the individual. In the Bill as drafted, someone goes on the sexual offenders register only in the event that the offence was committed for the purpose mentioned in proposed new section 67A: sexual gratification. To put that in plain English, perverts go on the register but idiots do not. So, if someone is at a festival and they are just being idiotic and are humiliating and distressing girls, but that is their principal motivation rather than a sexual one, they do not go on the register. Are you comfortable with that? Do you think it strikes the right balance? Do you have any other views?

Gina Martin: I am pretty comfortable with that, but again, it is something we need to look at more specifically. I am here to give my evidence as a human, not to give strong evidence specifically on the Bill.

Q9 Alex Chalk: Sure, but what I am really interested in is you as a victim. Victims need to get a sense of justice, so they will want to have a view on whether the punishment fits the crime. We know that someone can go inside for this, so that is one aspect of it, but equally someone could go on the register for a long time, which is a big stigma and burden. Where do you think the right balance is struck? Do you think that the Bill has it broadly right, where it says that it is for people who are doing it for sexual motivations but not for those who are just being idiotic and offensive?

Gina Martin: Yes, because I think that if it is for sexual gratification it is a more serious offence, because it is often done multiple times and is a pattern of behaviour. That is where we go to more robust punishments. For me, personally, the Bill does strike the right balance.

Alex Chalk: Thank you.

Q10 Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): We have already touched, forgive me, on the issue of motivation, but I think this is going to be critical to our considerations in this Bill Committee. As the Bill stands, it will need to be proven that there is either a sexual motivation or harassment. Do you have any concerns that a defence for people accused of this offence might be that it was accidental, and that that remains a loophole that needs to be addressed?

Gina Martin: I have spent enough hours sitting in enough meetings with my lawyer, Ryan, to understand that that is not something that needs to be worried about massively. Again, I am not a lawyer. There are ways of dealing with it and understanding case by case what happened. It is not the top concern that that would be an issue. That is my understanding.

Q11 Liz Saville Roberts: My second question is that if the taking of the photo is then found to be a crime with whichever motivations are finally accepted, to what degree, from the victim's point of view, does distribution constitute harassment? Will that cause distress, and should the act of distribution, therefore, be considered within the Bill?

Gina Martin: For me, it is really important that the Bill sets out the intent and the action. Distribution is obviously distressing. I work specifically in digital and

social media—that is my job—and a lot of work and education need to be done there to address this. It is really important to me that the Bill looks carefully at stopping and deterring people from committing the act in the first place.

Q12 Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): We will hear evidence this afternoon that there should be stronger penalties for those who take images of under-18s. On the Women and Equalities Committee, we heard evidence during an inquiry about how prevalent this is for younger people, even at school age. What is your view on the impact that the Bill should have in protecting people under 18 who are caught up in this?

Gina Martin: I think the Bill sets out to protect everyone across England and Wales, regardless of their age. It is very broad and it protects everyone. I am sure that the right steps will be taken depending on age, the offence and the way in which people take the photos.

Q13 Maria Caulfield: For young people who may not understand the implications of what they do at a very young age, does there need to be some leeway, rather than criminalising people who may make a genuine mistake when they are younger and who, when they were a little older, would never consider doing something such as upskirting? Does the Bill protect those who make a genuine mistake?

Gina Martin: I feel it does that well. Again, my understanding—having worked on this for a year with great lawyers who know the details of the Bill, the situation and the offence very well—is that each prosecution is dealt with objectively by looking at the situation. As with any law, we would not prosecute kids how we prosecute adults. The Bill does that really well.

The Chair: Wera, you indicated that you wanted to come back—or has the moment passed?

Q14 Wera Hobhouse: The moment has sort of passed, but the issue has not. Would you not have felt as humiliated and distressed if somebody's motivation for taking the image was just financial gain?

Gina Martin: Can you repeat the question?

Wera Hobhouse: We were talking about motivation. The Bill covers two different motivations: to humiliate and cause distress and for sexual gratification. We are also looking at the possibility of other motivations, for example if somebody says, "I didn't even know that person. I didn't want to humiliate her and I don't get very excited about the image, but somebody offered me money." Would it not have distressed you in the same way if it had been done with another motivation?

Gina Martin: I do not want to sit here and imagine how I would feel if I were the victim of that exact scenario. That has been a big problem that I have dealt with—people trying to guess exactly how I felt during the situation—but it is important to remember that there could be a lot of unintended consequences from looking for solutions to the monetary gain situation.

We do not want the paparazzi to be charged as sex offenders for doing their job. We can all agree that that is not a great job to do—I do not agree with it—but they could be charged as sex offenders. They should be able to be prosecuted for outraging public decency,

which they can be, and I have worked closely with celebrities who have been through that. They have talked to me in confidence about it, and they have said that because of this campaign, they have considered prosecuting for outraging public decency, which is great.

Q15 Wera Hobhouse: But we have just established that outraging public decency would not have properly covered what was done to you. Is going back and saying, "Well, they can be covered under outraging public decency," not the same as saying, "I don't care about anybody else because this specific thing has happened to us."?

Gina Martin: No, not necessarily. I could have prosecuted under outraging public decency, because there were two or more people there to witness what happened to me, but I did not because the police were confused about the grey area of the law. I never did this to cover my own situation; I did it to cover every instance and help other women as well. I could have prosecuted under outraging public decency, if I had chosen to.

Q16 Wera Hobhouse: We have just established that we are introducing a new Bill because that was not good enough to help you to prosecute somebody who committed an offence. Should we not then look at another group of women? I understand that you had a particular issue yourself, but is this law not there to cover not just the individual case that you experienced, but other victims who are not exactly like you but who would feel similarly distressed if it happened to them?

Gina Martin: Yes, absolutely, but having worked with women who it has happened to for monetary gain, I believe that there is a way of doing it that is just as valuable but that does not delay this Bill or mean looking into it in this Bill. That is the truth.

Q17 Wera Hobhouse: Are you saying that you are just worried about the delay of the Bill?

Gina Martin: I am absolutely worried about the delay of the Bill. I do not think we should delay this protection being afforded to women in order to look at that, because it needs to be looked at in detail. Also, it would take one celebrity to table a report of outraging public decency to stop this happening. I have discussed that at length with the media and people this has been done to by the paparazzi.

Q18 Alex Chalk: On the paparazzi point, the Bill says that a person commits an offence if he "does so with the intention"

that he, or another person he has passed it on to, will look at the image

"for a purpose mentioned in subsection (3)"—

that is, for sexual gratification or "humiliating, alarming or distressing" the person. In other words, if a pap takes the image and sends it on to somebody who thinks, "Hey, look at her! Look at what underwear she is wearing," or, indeed, uses it for some perverted reason, do you think that that meets the concern that is being raised from your point of view?

Gina Martin: Again, I do not want to sit here and give legal advice, because I am not a lawyer, but there is an argument that although it does not say, "personal gain from publishing those images and other people gaining sexual gratification from them," there is a way

that the Bill covers that situation, because it covers all people in England and Wales. There is an argument that that could be covered as well in this Bill.

Q19 Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): I want to thank you specifically, because I had not heard of upskirting until you started this campaign. I think a lot of people in the country are much more aware of it now. Until I started reading this, I had not heard of down-blousing either. What is your view on down-blousing and including it in the Bill? Is it a similar offence and intrusion to upskirting? Is it as popular? Is it happening at festivals, as we speak?

Gina Martin: I have heard about it. My personal experience is that all of the hundreds and hundreds of stories that have come to me over the past year have been about upskirting. I have not received that many stories about down-blousing. I do not know why that is. Of course, I think it is horrible. I would like to see a million things sorted out and prosecuted against. This being an upskirting Bill, I have to focus on that issue, but thank you for raising it.

Q20 Liz Saville Roberts: Gina, thank you for coming before us today. I know what you have gone through.

I understand that you want to see something move as quickly as possible. There are concerns that legislation that is made in haste is not necessarily always effective. We have had examples of that in the past. Would you consider that it is important that we are as thorough as possible in taking evidence and in looking at ways of making this piece of legislation as robust as possible, with as few loopholes as possible?

Gina Martin: Yes, of course I would.

Q21 Liz Saville Roberts: Would the fact that it should be done in two months override the need for thoroughness?

Gina Martin: No, of course not.

Q22 Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I want to raise a couple of things. First, you said that you have been hearing from hundreds of women. Is it your impression that this is happening all the time on a daily basis and really is extensive? As Gillian said, many people had not even heard of this until your campaign, but it seems to have suddenly brought something into the open. Is it your impression that it is really quite common now?

Gina Martin: Yes, and a big part of that is because a lot of women do not know it has happened to them. It is incredibly secretive assault. A study done recently by a women's magazine asked women to give their stories of it anonymously. The feedback it got was that up to 80% of women said that they felt harassed and upset, but a lot of women said that people had seen it happen to them. People feel that this is something that happens to women—and men and children—extensively, but they do not know it has happened because it is very hard to see it. I was lucky that I saw the picture. That is why we have not spoken about it for so long, and it has been normalised and accepted in society for so long. This campaign has ignited a conversation, so of course people have flooded in, talking to me. I am the only one who has ever gone out and said loudly that it has happened, so I think they trust me, which is nice.

Q23 Helen Whately: It is also why you want to see action taken quickly on this, rather than solve a bigger problem.

Gina Martin: Yes, because it has always been happening.

Q24 Helen Whately: You talk about closing the loophole whereby upskirting is not covered properly by current law. You have also clearly been very thoughtful about when it would be appropriate for someone to be put on the sex offenders register versus when it would not. You have been clear about ensuring that that is the case for someone who is a sexual predator, but am I right that you think that some people should go on the sex offenders register but that a distinction needs to be made with teenagers fooling around? You think there should be a distinction between the most serious sexual predators who are upskirting and others who are not doing it with the same motivation.

Gina Martin: Yes, 100%. If I did not think that, the amendment would not be valuable. Obviously, there is a distinction between someone who has 5,000 photos on their phone and a 13-year-old who does it once and does not fully understand the full repercussions of his actions. I feel like the Bill that we have put forward covers all those instances and can be used case by case, objectively by prosecutors.

Helen Whately: Thank you.

Q25 Mary Robinson: Just on that point, where would the balance be? We are differentiating between a younger person fooling around, taking photos and sharing them and someone who has a different, more sinister intent, but would the impact on the person who is the victim not be the same? How are we going to get the balance between thinking about the intent of the person committing the crime and the impact on the victim? After all, the victim comes forward because of the impact on them.

Gina Martin: In each situation that this happens in, regardless of where it is, the age of the person and so on, it is very hard for me to say specifically where it is on the spectrum of how they feel. I have friends who it has happened to. They half did not know it was happening, but it happened to them and they were embarrassed and they left. Their instance was not as violently violating as mine felt. It is difficult for me to know, but that is something where the Bill needs to look specifically at each person's circumstance. Currently we cannot do that.

Q26 Mary Robinson: At the impact on the victim.

Gina Martin: Yes.

The Chair: We are doing commendably well, but we are going to run out of time, so I will call Stella Creasy and then the Minister.

Q27 Stella Creasy: Gina, you just talked about the difference between someone who does this once and someone who systematically seeks out women to take pictures in this way. Mary was talking about how we might capture intent. What is your feeling about saying that if someone is clearly showing a pattern of hostility towards women that makes them think they have the right to do this, it should be a factor in the kind of sentence they get once they have been found guilty, because there are different sentences in the legislation?

Gina Martin: In terms of?

Stella Creasy: If they are shown to be hostile towards women because they have gone out and done this several times. Perhaps they have made websites of all the pictures they have taken and they have shown a different approach—a sense of entitlement—to being able to take pictures of women in this way. Do you think that level of behaviour should be reflected in and have an impact on the sentence they get, if they have been found to have taken the pictures and breached the conditions?

Gina Martin: Yes, I feel like this constantly repeated behaviour, the sinister intention and the power play have to be taken into account, and their behaviour would be taken into account by prosecutors.

Q28 Stella Creasy: Prosecutors would not be able to do that at the moment, unlike if someone had sought out people from an ethnic minority to do this to. Prosecutors could take that into account, but if the offender were to seek out women explicitly, prosecutors would not be able to take that into account, particularly as opposed to anything else right now under the law. Do you think that should change for something like this?

Gina Martin: It is difficult for me to say without knowing the process. I would not want to sit here and give advice, because I do not know the process of prosecuting this. I have been leading the campaign as a victim, so it would be difficult for me to give that advice. If Ryan was here, I am sure he would be happy to talk to you about that and to give you a more comprehensive answer. It would be remiss of me to give you an answer on that.

Q29 The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): Gina, thank you very much for all the work you have done campaigning for this. You have done a tremendous campaign. I just want to pick up on something that Liz Saville Roberts asked you. She asked whether it was important to be thorough, rather than quick. The narrow area we have identified in the Bill follows the Scottish legislation, which has been in place for some time. The motivations we have identified in the Bill take a precedent that exists and that the Crown Prosecution Service prosecutes under in other sexual offences and other offences. There is thorough ground to put forward a law on this narrow area but, in other areas, if we wanted to expand the Bill, that would be unprecedented and would warrant further consideration.

Gina Martin: Yes, that is where I stand currently.

Q30 Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): Thank you, Ms Martin, for all the work and campaigning you have done. I know that you tweeted that you started this last year and you are pleased to see it coming to the Bill Committee today. I want to ask a couple of questions.

As you know, the upskirting offence in the Bill would allow victims to be anonymous because it is categorised as a sexual offence. There has been considerable debate and a suggestion, particularly from Professor Clare McGlynn and Women's Aid, that the Bill's scope needs to be extended, so that victims of all image-based sexual offences have the right to anonymity in court. For example, it does not cover revenge porn. What are your views on that?

Gina Martin: My view is that it is incredibly important to bring forward this protection quickly and focus on the issue that we have here. I have been a victim of sexual assault and harassment throughout my life. I would like to see every situation covered. I would also like to see the things that you mentioned, but I do not believe that this is the place to do it.

This is a Bill about upskirting. It is unprecedented for a Bill to go through so quickly with so much support. We have an opportunity to put down one piece of the puzzle. I would like to see us do that with this specific issue. I would personally help afterwards to focus on the rest.

The Chair: Thank you. Are there any further questions? Ms Martin, thank you very much indeed both for your candour and your willingness to stick your head above the parapet. I hope that this experience, at least, has not been too bruising for you.

Gina Martin: No. It has been lovely. Thank you all.

Examination of Witness

Assistant Commissioner Martin Hewitt gave evidence.

9.57 am

The Chair: We will now hear oral evidence from the National Police Chiefs' Council and we have until 10.30 am. For the benefit of the record, could you please identify yourself?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: My name is Assistant Commissioner Martin Hewitt. I am from the Metropolitan police.

The Chair: Mr Hewitt, thank you for taking the trouble to come and talk to us this morning. I know that there will be significant questions, which I am sure you will be able to answer with great candour, as we expect. Who would like to set the ball rolling?

Q31 Yasmin Qureshi: What impact do you think the Bill will have on the resources of those working in the criminal justice system, including the police?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: There would clearly be an impact if this legislation were enacted because it would create a new offence. It would fill a gap that exists currently in the legislation to deal with this type of offence. I do not think it would be a massively impactful issue for us and the subsequent services. You would have to think about police resourcing.

Clearly, any legislation would inevitably and quite properly lead to publicity about that legislation, which would be a positive thing. It would be an important element of any legislation to make it very clear to anybody who was thinking of perpetrating the crime that there would be a law that would deal directly with it. That would have a positive impact in terms of prevention. It would clearly lead to an increase in reporting but I do not think that level of increase would be so significant that it would outweigh the benefits of being able to deal with this crime effectively.

You would obviously have the knock-on when individuals were charged in the Crown prosecution and courts system. The other end that we would have to consider is

the impact of people who would potentially be placed on the sex offenders register. That is a list that grows. To give the example from my own force in London, we have seen an increase of about 8% or 9% per annum over the past few years in London of those who are on the sex offenders register. Clearly, there is a monitoring regime around those individuals based on the risk element. There would properly and obviously be an impact on resources, but I guess that is weighed against the necessity we have to be able to deal effectively with what is a newish crime and a crime that is quite impactful.

Q32 Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab): Clause 2 of the Bill includes motives, such as obtaining sexual gratification and causing humiliation, alarm and distress. How difficult will it be for the police to secure a prosecution by establishing the motives?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: Establishing motive is always a challenge in any sort of crime. You will clearly have the digital evidence—that is, whatever photograph was taken. That will take you some way towards motive. Adding the element of alarm and distress is important, because the legislation should be very victim focused. Clearly, I would suggest, any person who realised or became aware that someone had taken a photograph in those circumstances would be distressed by it, so you would be able to use that.

Equally, one of the other factors we have to consider is that, often, these photographs find their way on to websites. There are websites where people will upload these kinds of photographs. Again, there is a further trail that takes you towards motivation on behalf of the person who has committed the offence.

We will always have to prove motivation, but the alarm and distress element is very strong. I suggest that, with the right kind of questioning, the right approach to interviewing and the digital evidence you would have, you would be in a reasonable place to assert the motivation.

Q33 Mary Robinson: When Gina Martin brought this to the police in the first place, she was able to get somebody on to it straight away, because there was a police officer there. The first thought was that it would be treated through the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 more generally, yet that did not come to anything. Is that because it was not previously covered or because it is difficult to prove a case? Are we going to have to guard against simply getting into another piece of legislation where it is difficult to prove the case again?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: I don't think it is about difficulty. For me, that is the gap this legislation can potentially fill. The two pieces of legislation that you would most likely try to use as it currently stands are, first, outraging public decency legislation, which—let's be honest—even with the language used in that you realise it is not necessarily fit for the time that we are now. In the first instance, that has to happen in a public place. It also requires witnesses to have been present at the time where the offence took place. An important point coming from my sexual offences lead is that it is not, per se, a sexual offence, and I think these should be treated as a sexual offence. We also have the voyeurism legislation, which has been used, but again, that requires a private setting and seeing and filming a private act.

I do not think the legislative framework as it stands is adequate for the issue that we have. It is another example where the advances and availability of technology—let's

be clear, I would guess that everyone at secondary school probably has a smartphone with them all of the time, which means they have a camera with them all of the time. This means they have the opportunity to commit an offence, amongst others. There are a number of what I believe are sexual offences that are image-based—the so-called sexting and the revenge porn as it is popularly called—all of these offences where the ability for people, universally, to take quality images quickly and potentially share those images takes us to a place where, at the moment, the legislative framework does not give us the ability to deal with that effectively. That is the gap. You always have to prove a crime and there will be always be occasions when that can be challenging. We can deal with it much more effectively with clauses that are specifically focussed on this type of offending.

Q34 Mary Robinson: Thank you for that answer. You seem to be implying that there is more scope for expanding this list of offences.

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: I just think that this is a specific issue that needs to be dealt with. I don't know if I really want to get into that here. It is worth making the point that we collectively need to focus on a number of image-based sexual offences. People are committing offences in ways they never did before because of the universality of the technology. Legislation can never keep up with every change, but the technology that exists, and our ability to obtain digital forensic evidence and to check things in the way that we can around offending, takes us to a place where we need legislation that fits the nature of the criminality.

Q35 Liz Saville Roberts: Thank you Assistant Commissioner for the information so far. What interests me is that you raise the issue of the exponential growth in digital imagery offences, and you also touch on the growth of 8% to 9% of the sex offenders register. Obviously we have to keep a balance to take into account capacity, but nonetheless we should not be restricting what we legislate for. Growth should not be a motivation for us to cease legislating. How could you advise us to keep the appropriate balance? Looking at this growth in digital imagery crime and in the sex offenders register, the wider question is: what practices need to be changed, and what support do police forces need in order to enforce and bring evidence for successful prosecutions?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: There is no doubt that we have been wrestling for some time with a dilemma in exactly the way you describe. Developments in technology have enabled a whole range of offending that previously would still have taken place, but in a very restricted and challenging way.

Consider the issue of indecent images: previously it was difficult for somebody to access indecent images. They had to find their way into very specific websites and undertake a series of acts to get there and do what they did. Indecent imagery is now almost readily available in so many spaces, and this means that far more people are accessing it either deliberately or inadvertently. Equally, there is the technology we use to spot when particular computers are accessing that imagery. We are in a situation in which there is a real volume challenge for us. The legislation point needs to be clear at the outset

that doing this is illegal, and in this instance we do not have clarity around the specific issue of upskirting, so we need legislation that clearly says that—in the circumstances described—“This is an illegal act”.

The question then is how we respond, and how the system deals with that illegal act. In the first instance it would require awareness, training and understanding to be shared between police forces so that all officers were aware of the new legislation—as we would do with any new piece of legislation—and so that they understand what their powers are and what needs to be done. Then you get into the use of discretion and how you apply the legislation, as you would under any circumstances. For example, where it involves a 15-year-old and a 15-year-old, we need to think and then apply the usual logical approach that would be applied to whichever outcome you were seeking. The system would need to be able to look at whether certain offences were suitable for a caution or some form of warning. We do not want to be dragging loads of young people into the criminal justice system unnecessarily. With image-based sexual offences, you always have that challenge of trying to understand the level of risk presented by the offender, whether it is the viewing of images or upskirting. Some offenders will do no more than take a photograph or view an image, but some may be contact offenders or be escalating in the nature of the offending, and our challenge is always to have systems and processes in place that allow us to try to identify what the risk level is. Even among those registered sex offenders I spoke about, there are clearly RSOs at the top end who are the highest risk RSOs for whom we have significant control mechanisms, and then others at the lower end, where there is a much lighter level of control.

What you wrap into that, as I said at the very beginning, is what we do in terms of publicity and getting the information out there, not just to the police but to the broader public, about what this legislation says, why it is being done and what it says about what we expect and do not expect. I think that will have a really positive impact. You then broaden that out to all the spaces where this offence might take place, for people to become more aware of it. Looking at the offences we have dealt with most, there are obviously quite a few on transport systems, but they are also in supermarkets, shops and places like that. There is an awareness thing that can go on, and then it really is about dealing proportionately with the offending.

All those things are challenges, but I do not think that any of them take us away from the fact that these acts are illegal—they should be very clearly and specifically illegal. Particularly in this instance, they are also incredible distressing and harmful to the victim, but we have to try to find an ability to operate proportionately, and that gets us into some difficult debates about the images online.

Q36 Liz Saville Roberts: You emphasised earlier the significance of harassment and distress suffered by the victim. How do we ensure that that is safeguarded as a primary issue and that there is not an inappropriate defence of accidental motivations, or alternative ones such as profit? How do we ensure that we safeguard the victim experience as the priority driver?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: It is partly about how the investigation is run. There may be circumstances in which someone could run an accidental defence, but

it seems unlikely to me. Not only do you have the evidence that the individual provides you with from what is on their phone, but often, in many of the places where this is happening, you have evidence from internal CCTV—in a supermarket, on a train or wherever. The point for me is that we then ensure that we utilise the mechanisms we have, such as the victim impact statements, when we are prosecuting. The evidence from the victim and the impact on them can very clearly be presented in court. Frankly, even if someone did try to say that it was done accidentally, that would not change the distress caused to the person realising that someone had taken a photograph up their skirt. Whether they could successfully run a defence that said, “I accidentally did that”, would depend on the way in which we conducted our interviews and how the CPS carried out the prosecution.

Q37 Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): Thank you, Assistant Commissioner, for your answers this morning. You mentioned the desire not to unnecessarily criminalise younger people. I am keen to close this legislative gap in a proportionate way, drawing a distinction between the stupid occasion and the repeated pervert. How do the police tackle the existing offences, such as sexting, for those who are under 18?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: You look at all the circumstances. When the figures are produced on other sexual offending, for example, there will often be a lot of criticism levelled at us about people who get cautioned. We will, on occasion, caution people for rape offences, but if your victim and your offender have mental health issues or a mental impairment, we will take decisions based on all the circumstances. You are looking at the circumstances of the victim and of the offender, and on that basis, you will make a judgment. If you have an adult offender and a child victim, that is clearly an aggravating factor, but you will also have mitigating factors, as I said. If you have two 15-year-olds or 14-year-olds, there are mitigating factors around that, but as you alluded to in your question, if it emerges that that 14-year-old offender has done it on numerous occasions, or there is a repeated pattern of behaviour, again, that would clearly be an aggravating factor.

We would then work with the Crown Prosecution Service to identify what the correct disposal and the correct charge would be—probably the charge would be the same—and whether we would dispose of it in a charge way or whether we would use some other form of control. It is difficult to come up with a clear line. It is about individual cases and looking at the circumstances, including the nature of the offence, the nature of the victim and the circumstances of the victim and the offender. When you work against those three areas, in the centre of those criteria or questions, you come up with what you think the most appropriate position is.

We are facing that a lot with people who are sharing images. If a teenager takes an image of another teenager, having possession of that is an offence. Once you pass that around, that is another offence. We have to constantly ask the question, proportionately, what is the right thing to do? Is that the ill-advised behaviour of a 15-year-old who needs to learn some lessons and change what they do, or are they someone who needs to end up in the criminal justice system? That is a constant balancing act, particularly when you bring juveniles into play. Equally, you could get someone who does it and who

has a mental health condition. They may be a 30-year-old, but they may not have the capacity of a 30-year-old. Every case will have to be dealt with on its own merits.

Q38 Wera Hobhouse: Thank you again for coming in, Assistant Commissioner. We all understand that we do not want to create legislation that puts massive burdens on the police and the Crown Prosecution Service, for which reason the main thing is that it acts as a deterrent so people do not do it in the first place—so they see that if they do any of it, it is a criminal offence.

Is it not very important, therefore, that the law is clear and that it makes all upskirting a criminal offence, full stop—no ifs, no buts? You have described a situation where you could say that an image had been taken accidentally, but someone would still end up in a court situation. Would it not be much better if the law was so clear that every upskirting was an offence—so that you would not get all these people in—because we all know it? Is that not the case?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: Absolutely. We always seek very clear laws, which make our job a lot easier. Defences will always be run, and some of them will have some credibility, although I would guess that most will not in this sort of instance. For me, that is absolutely right. Having that clarity around an offence that we know is taking place—and, as I said, with the kind of access people have to their phones—is really important.

Equally, the other reason that I think that is important is that this does not sit in isolation; it is part of a continuum of sexual offending. Of course, it is not a contact offence, but it is part of that continuum, and it is absolutely right that we send a clear message that it is unacceptable to do any acts that are motivated by sexual gratification and have a victim on the other end. That starts with this, but it works through sexual assault and right into rape offences. We need that clarity, which will allow us to deal with it. As I say, you deal with it proportionately once you have the investigation.

Q39 Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): You talked about clarity. From a slightly different perspective, do you think that it is important to keep the Bill focused on this specific offence, in being a deterrent for the public and getting the message out there? At all festivals next summer, I would like to see signs saying, “You will go to prison, if you commit this offence.” I would like to see clarity for officers on the beat. To widen the scope of this legislation to include other acts could mean upskirting somehow getting lost and officers not quite being as focused as perhaps they would be if the Bill were clear and simple.

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: I agree with that entirely. As I just said, if you can reach absolute clarity in legislation, which makes it very clear where the line is and whether you have stepped over that line and that that is an offence, that is absolutely beneficial from our perspective. As we said, we can work out fairly clearly the kind of place where this happens. There has been lots in shops and supermarkets, on transport, and, as you say, at festivals, nightclubs and pubs. Having legislation that makes it very unambiguous for the people running those licences and events, so that they can be clear to everybody who comes into that place, is where we should aim to be. The more we hang things off and spread it, the harder it is to explain it to police officers and others.

Q40 Julian Knight: Just to be clear, you are saying, effectively, that we should not go outside the scope of this offence to bring in other offences and, therefore, perhaps detract from this particular offence, so that it does not become a catch-all for all forms of nefarious activity?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: Yes. I introduced that concept of image-based sexual abuse, but that was just to make the point that there is a range of ways that people can offend using digital imagery. It was not to suggest that we ought to make this any less clear than it would appear to be. The one exception that I might make around that is whether there is a potential to add an element around distribution or sharing of that image, because, at the moment, the legislation does not go to that stage. As I said, there is some evidence that there are places where people go to upload these images. I think that is taking that offence to a further stage and is adding to the backdrop. That may be worth considering, but we should have absolute clarity about the core elements of that offence.

Q41 Stella Creasy: I have two issues I would like to raise with you. I am conscious of time. First, you have made a powerful case for the impact on victims of these kinds of offence. Do you think that impact is any less if it is a picture of somebody’s breasts, rather than their buttocks or genitals?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: I am not sure that I can answer that question, but I understand the point you are making. It feels to me that the intrusion of going in and under a garment—the skirt; I know you don’t have to physically—takes it to a slightly further stage than an image of somebody that is taken clearly outside their clothing. You are in the same territory, but I do think there is something particularly invasive about somebody being able to take an image up a skirt. But I understand the point you are making.

Q42 Stella Creasy: The concept of consent is secondary in that instance to the location—that is what we are trying to understand.

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: If you have not given consent to somebody to take a photograph that is sexualised, you have not given consent to them. I accept that point entirely. That takes us to the last question about clarity. To my knowledge, the phenomenon we are facing, particularly at the moment, is this phenomenon of upskirting, and it would be really good for us to be able to send a very clear message. I get that someone taking a photograph of someone’s breasts or backside from other angles is offensive, but I am not sure—I think it might confuse.

Q43 Stella Creasy: Secondly, the National Police Chiefs’ Council is meeting on Thursday, when we will be considering this Bill, to talk about the roll-out of the policy from Nottingham, where they have put misogyny on the same level as racial and religious hate crime. They have said that there is a case for recognising this as an aggravating factor. When it comes to an offence such as this, if it is proven that somebody has, for example, created a website where they have uploaded images and who seems to be systematically following women around to take these kinds of picture, should that be taken into consideration in the sentencing, in the way that could

[Stella Creasy]

happen now with somebody who was racially or religiously motivated, so that the court could take into account the misogyny behind this?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: I am not sure the circumstances you describe are about misogyny. For me, that is about somebody who is a more serious predatory sexual offender. I see this in sexual offending terms. I will be there on Thursday as part of the debate you describe.

Q44 Stella Creasy: Will you be supporting the roll-out of Nottingham?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: That is for the debate on Thursday. I do not want to pre-empt that debate. For me, this is about sexual offending. If it is proven that an individual has done this repeatedly, or has followed certain people, or is putting himself in certain places to do that, that is an aggravating factor that I would expect the prosecution—and ultimately, if they were convicted, the sentencing—to take into consideration, as opposed to the person where it appears to be a one-off issue.

Q45 Stella Creasy: So do you think there is a case for an aggravating factor? The question is, what would it be under? If they had not picked out a particular type of woman to do this, but it was women, as the law is currently drafted we would not be able to recognise that in the sentencing.

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: But this will be women, in the way the Bill is drafted at the moment, will it not?

Q46 Stella Creasy: But, for example, if somebody had targeted women in this way, but targeted every type of woman—there was no particular pattern, as opposed to somebody simply targeting women systematically to do this—and was clearly showing hostility to them as a category of person because they felt an entitlement to be able to do this, is that something the courts could look at?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: That sounds fairly complex to me and you would have to ask the courts to answer that question. I see where you are going. I think I would keep this more purely in the realm of sexual offending and the pattern of behaviour of that person as a sexual offender. Whether that is about an approach in a relationship with women is a different thing.

Q47 Stella Creasy: So the Dapper Laughs person who gets their jollies from putting up pictures of women in compromising positions but does not take sexual gratification from them is not a particular category of person that you think we should be challenging?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: I do think we should be tackling them; it is just whether this is the right legislation to tackle them with. I think the courts will have to consider that.

The Chair: We have three minutes left. I cannot call other Members because I must bring the Minister in at this stage. We have to finish at 10.30 am.

Q48 Lucy Frazer: I have one short question. Assistant Commissioner, on exercising discretion as to how to treat young people, you said that you were often criticised, you had to exercise your judgment and there were challenges in these things. Do you think it is important that the law is clear—not only that the act that you are asked to prosecute is clear, but that the motivations and purposes that you are asked to decide on as to whether they constitute that offence are clear as well? Will that make your job easier and therefore ensure more prosecutions?

Assistant Commissioner Hewitt: Yes, we need that clarity, which covers the act itself. From the way I have seen the legislation drafted, that seems fairly clear to me. As with any crime, you are then looking to the motivation of the offender. In this instance, as we discussed in one of the earlier questions, clarity about the motivation around their personal gratification, and clarity about the impact on the victim as well, is really important to allow us to be able to balance both those elements in prosecuting.

To be honest, it is quite hard to think of another motivation for taking a photograph up someone's skirt. The Bill seems pretty clear to me in the way it is drafted at the moment. As someone who has investigated quite a few crimes over the years, I would be fairly confident that if I had the evidence that somebody covertly took a photograph up someone's skirt and I had the evidence of what that photograph showed, I would be in a pretty good position to get that person charged with that offence—or whatever disposal we chose. It seems pretty clear to me.

The Chair: Thank you. I apologise to those Members who have not been called this morning. I have made a note of the names and I will endeavour to give at least some sense of priority this afternoon. I apologise, but the clock has beaten us.

Mr Hewitt, thank you very much for taking the time and trouble to see us and for the excellent evidence that you have given. We know how busy you are and how precious your time is. I think I am probably right in saying I am the only person in the room who has also held a warrant other than you and I particularly appreciate the fact that you are here this morning. The Committee will sit again at 2 o'clock this afternoon and we shall hear evidence from the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee.

10.30 am

The Chair adjourned the Committee without Question put (Standing Order No. 88).

Adjourned till this day at Two o'clock.