

Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

28 February 2017

Chief Constable Simon Bailey
NPCC Lead on Child Protection
Norfolk Constabulary
Jubilee House
Falconers Chase
Wymondham
Norfolk NR18 0WW

Dear Chief Constable Bailey

I am writing in response to your comments in today's *Times* newspaper and on the Radio 4 *Today* programme about the police's capacity to deal with offences of viewing indecent images of children.

Your comments that the police have reached "saturation point" and "are not coping" with the scale of paedophile offences were clearly of great concern to us. As you may know, the Committee has launched an inquiry into Policing for the Future, which is examining the challenges facing the police in tackling new and emerging crimes, and their ability to deal effectively with online child abuse of this kind is one of the central issues we are considering.

I would be grateful if you could clarify a number of points for the Committee.

You stated that the police are making over 400 arrests a month for offences related to viewing indecent images of children and that this was placing too great a burden on the police, CPS and the courts.

However published statistics for England and Wales for the year ending 31 March 2016 show that comparable monthly arrest figures were 1,250 for fraud, 5,500 for criminal damage, 5,600 for public order offences, 6,500 for drug offences and 16,000 for theft. The Committee would like to know why it is possible for police forces and the justice system to handle a much higher number of arrests for these offences but is struggling to cope with more than 400 arrests a month for online crimes which involve the abuse of children.

This raises some very serious concerns about the scale of online child abuse, about the level of resourcing the police have available for it, about the systems the police has in place to deal with this new and increasing crime and also about the priority being given to it by police forces. We would be grateful if you could provide information on each of these things.

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You also referred to there being a significant number of “very low-risk” paedophile offenders and you stated that the police have become very adept at assessing the risk to children in terms of which offenders will move on from viewing indecent images to committing contact abuse offences.

This was certainly not the case a few years ago when the police indicated that making such assessments was very difficult. I would therefore be grateful if you could set out the evidence to support your statement, including the changes which have taken place in the last few years to bring about the improvements in risk assessment to which you refer. As you would expect, the Committee will be very concerned about any change in policing which puts more children at risk or which prevents interventions that could keep more children safe.

You also stated that offenders who viewed indecent images would still be arrested but would not be charged; instead they would receive a conditional caution and be required to undergo a rehabilitation course. You also said that they would continue to be placed on the Sex Offender Register.

I would be grateful if you could clarify precisely what this would mean in terms of the checks under the Disclosure and Barring Service. Specifically, could you explain, under the current disclosure and barring rules, if a case was dealt with outside the criminal justice system, what information would then be available to organisations carrying out checks on people applying for voluntary or paid positions with children.

It would also be helpful if you could provide some immediate reassurance that you are not proposing to implement these changes in approach straight away. The Committee and Parliament will need to consider the evidence and I would be very alarmed if the police were to adopt this approach in advance of this. As you will know, for many decades institutions have put children at risk because it was seen as too difficult, not a priority, or resources were insufficient, to keep them safe. I would not want to see the same happen over online child abuse.

I would be grateful to receive your response by 7 March.

Yours sincerely

DPA

Yvette Cooper MP
Chair