



Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

DECS Reference: MIN/0155216/21

10 June 2021

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 8 June to the Home Secretary on behalf your constituents about public sexual harassment and the #CrimeNotCompliment campaign led by Plan International UK and Our Streets Now. I am replying as the Minister for Safeguarding.

No one should feel unsafe while going about their daily life. Sexual harassment in public places is sadly all too common an experience for many young women and it is unacceptable for anyone to make a woman feel objectified or scared.

As a Government we are committed to tackling all forms of abuse against women and girls. The Government's previous Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy included sexual harassment for the first time, in recognition of the disproportionate impact that it has on women and girls. We will be publishing a new Tackling VAWG Strategy this year to help strengthen and go further in our response to tackling these crimes.

We are aware of the campaigning work that Plan International UK are doing to raise awareness of public sexual harassment and the effect that it has on women and girls. Indeed, the Home Secretary met the Plan International UK Youth Advisory Panel recently, where she heard their first-hand accounts of the impact that public sexual harassment has had on their lives. At this meeting the Home Secretary was struck by their understanding of the issues surrounding VAWG and the passion and clarity with which they articulated their views.

To help inform development of the Strategy, we launched a national Call for Evidence on 10 December for a ten week period to better understand the public's views on these terrible crimes, the impact they can have, and the measures which may help identify and prevent them.

Following the tragic events surrounding Sarah Everard and the subsequent outpouring of stories and experiences of women who have faced violence or harassment, the Home Secretary took the decision to re-open the public survey part of the Call for Evidence on 12 March for a further two weeks. We received more than 180,000 responses in total which demonstrates the strength and breadth of concern about violence against women and girls.

We are now analysing all of the responses and working with departments across Government to develop an ambitious VAWG strategy that will focus on preventing these crimes from happening in the first place, supporting victims and survivors, and pursuing perpetrators.

We know that the pace of societal and technological change means that new and evolving forms of VAWG are continuously emerging, and so we must continually adapt our approach. The new Strategy will focus on prevention, drive forward improvements in the effort to target perpetrators, ensure that we respond to the changing nature of these crimes, and, most importantly, continue to put victims and survivors at the heart of our approach.

There are a number of already existing laws which make street and sexual harassment illegal, including where such behaviour occurs in a public place. I agree that there is a need to raise awareness of the fact that sexual harassment is against the law. However, we are not convinced at this point that creating a new offence which would overlap with existing ones is the most effective way to do that, although we will continue to look closely at the existing legislation. The Government is, however, looking closely at what can be done to raise awareness about the existing offences on the part of both the public and the police.

That is closely linked to the clear need to drive a cultural change in attitudes, sending a clear message that this behaviour is never acceptable, in any situation. We will be considering what more we can do, particularly in driving change through education and awareness raising, as we review the evidence and views provided through the responses to the Call for Evidence.

Thank you for writing on behalf of your constituents about this important issue, which affects so many women and girls.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Victoria Atkins MP