

# Jim McMahon OBE MP



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Dr Carolyn Wilkins  
Level 3 - Room 329  
Civic Centre  
Oldham  
OL1 1UG

22 February 2021

Ref: JM30896

Dear Carolyn

Further to my previous correspondence regarding the Council Resolution about sexual harassment in public. Please find enclosed a delayed copy of a letter I have received from the Home Office in response to my enquiry on your behalf.

I hope the letter is helpful, if not, or if you would like to respond to the reply, please get back in touch with me.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jim McMahon".

Jim McMahon OBE MP  
Member of Parliament  
Oldham West & Royton

*Serving the Communities of Chadderton, Royton and Oldham*



Home Office

Victoria Atkins MP  
Minister for Safeguarding

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8 January 2021

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your letter of 27 November on behalf of Oldham Council about sexual harassment in public. I am replying as the Minister for Safeguarding and I am sorry for the delay in responding to your letter.

I want to assure you that the Government takes all forms of harassment extremely seriously. Unwelcome advances that intimidate, degrade or humiliate, are an abuse of power and are unlawful. Whether it is in the workplace, on the street, or as part of domestic or sexual abuse – sexual harassment, in any situation, is unacceptable.

Incidents of violence against women and girls (VAWG) can shatter the lives of victims, their families and those closest to them, and protecting individuals from violence, and supporting victims and survivors, remains a key priority for this Government. Violence and abuse can affect anyone and is still far too prevalent in today's society.

Nobody should be subjected to unwanted conduct of a sexual nature and the law on harassment, sexual assault and rape is clear. Several criminal offences cover sexual harassment in public places and the Equality Act 2010 provides a civil remedy for harassment in the workplace.

There is a range of legislation that could cover sexual harassment depending on the circumstances. This includes:

- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Public Order Act 1986
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Equality Act 2010

However, tackling sexual harassment is not something that legislation alone can be expected to solve. The Government is clear that we also need to continue driving cultural change in attitudes towards a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment – sending a clear message that this behaviour is never acceptable, in any situation.

The Women and Equalities Select Committee published their report into the sexual harassment of women and girls in public places on 23 October 2018 and our response was published in May 2019. We agreed with the Committee's recommendation that we needed to centrally measure the prevalence of sexual harassment in public places as we currently lack robust evidence on the extent of sexual harassment in public places, nor its changes over time. Together with the Government Equalities Office (GEO), we are working to better understand the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace and in public places, and in Autumn 2019 the GEO undertook a nationally representative survey to 12,000 respondents. The results from this survey are currently being analysed.

GEO have worked to challenge deep rooted social norms by engaging with young people about respect and equality in order to prevent sexual harassment from happening in the first place. We committed to making Relationships Education mandatory in all primary schools and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) mandatory in all secondary schools, from September 2020. Through the Relationships Education and RSE curriculum, young people will be taught about what constitutes a positive, healthy relationship, as well as providing young people with an understanding of consent and boundaries.

Protecting women and girls from violence, and supporting victims and survivors, remains a key priority for this Government, especially during this unprecedented time. The previous VAWG strategy made great strides in tackling these despicable crimes, including commissioning an end to end review of rape cases in the criminal justice system and creating stalking protection orders. Since it launched in 2016, we have committed £100 million of funding for VAWG services, including to support organisations tackling domestic violence and abuse and £8 million to support children.

While that Strategy has now come to an end, our work to tackle violence against women and girls has not. We are continuing to progress our ground-breaking Domestic Abuse Bill through Parliament, and provide funding to ensure victims and those at risk have additional support through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The risks of violence to women and girls that existed ten years ago are still there, but the pace of societal and technological change means that new and evolving forms of VAWG are continuously emerging and this Government is ready to face this challenge. To that end, we intend to publish a new VAWG Strategy next year. The new Strategy will be broad, ambitious, and reflect the evolution of VAWG over the last five years. It will cover emerging harms including online dating abuse and cyber flashing, as well as wider forms of VAWG such as sexual harassment, abuse and violence, which continue to affect thousands of women and girls every year. 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.

To meet this ambition, we launched a Call for Evidence on 10 December which will draw on the knowledge and experience of the public. That includes those who have been directly affected, their friends, family and colleagues. We are also keen to hear from organisations that provide support to victims and survivors, frontline professionals, and academics.

The Call for Evidence can be found at [www.gov.uk/homeoffice/VAWG-be-heard](http://www.gov.uk/homeoffice/VAWG-be-heard). Given their clear interest in VAWG issues, I would encourage Oldham Council to respond to this call for evidence with the information they have on sexual harassment.

I trust this clarifies the Government's position.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'V'.

**Victoria Atkins MP**