

Leicestershire sex offender's sentence doubled following undercover police operation

A Leicestershire sex offender, convicted after an undercover police investigation, has had his sentence doubled following an intervention by the Solicitor General, the Rt Hon Lucy Frazer QC MP.

Lewis Watts, 26, engaged in sexual communication with three different 12-year-old girls via social media, including graphic messages inciting one of the girls to engage in sexual activity. However, he was in fact communicating with undercover police officers in all three cases.

Watts was arrested and charged with three counts of attempting to engage in sexual communication with a child. He was also charged with one count of attempting to cause or incite a child under 13 to engage in sexual activity, and of breaching an existing sexual harm prevention order.

As a result of his new offending, Watts had a sexual harm prevention order brought into force. The Order was granted in 2015 following his conviction for three counts of possession of indecent photographs of children, with a view to their being distributed or shown by himself to others.

Watts initially pleaded not guilty to the latest charges but changed his plea on the first day of the trial. On 28 June 2021, he was sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment at Leicester Crown Court.

Following the Court's decision, the Solicitor General referred Watts' case to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme. On 1 September 2021, the Court found his sentence to be unduly lenient and increased it to 6 years and 3 months' imprisonment.

After the hearing at the Court of Appeal the Solicitor General, Rt Hon Lucy Frazer QC MP, said:

Watts' intentions were deeply disturbing and designed to harm young children. The seriousness of his offending had to reflect the gravity of his criminal intentions. I am pleased that the Court of Appeal saw fit to increase his sentence today.

This ruling follows the decision by the Court of Appeal that where a defendant sets out to sexually abuse a child, in circumstances where the child in fact is an adult posing as a child, then the starting point for sentencing should be set by reference to the harm that the defendant intended to cause the fictional child. The fact that there was no real child for the defendant to abuse will then be reflected in a downward movement from that starting point. The extent of that reduction will be a matter for the court

in individual cases to decide, but the seriousness of the offending must nonetheless be reflected in what the offender intended.