

Prison term for man involved in attempted child sex offences

A man who attempted to have sex with a child has had his sentence increased after the Solicitor General, the Rt Hon Lucy Frazer QC MP, thought his original sentence was too low.

Between 3 April and 10 June 2020, Ionut Voicu, 36, engaged in sexual communications online with what he thought was a 13-year-old girl, with the intention of having sex with her. He was in fact communicating with an undercover police officer.

Voicu sent a number of pornographic videos to the 'child' before arranging to meet her at a local retail park. He suggested they walk to her house once her mother had left for work. Voicu was arrested by police officers at the retail park.

Following his arrest and examination of his phone, it was discovered that the offender had communicated with another young girl between 5 and 6 May 2020. The girl could not be traced by the police, or her age verified.

On 14 May Voicu, having pleaded guilty to a number of child sexual offences at Taunton Crown Court, was sentenced to a community order for 36 months with a sex offender treatment requirement, and a requirement to complete 40 hours of unpaid work.

The Solicitor General referred Voicu's original sentence to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence scheme.

On 1 July the Court of Appeal found his sentence to be unduly lenient and increased his sentence to 3 years and 4 months' imprisonment.

Speaking after the hearing, the Solicitor General said:

I was appalled by Voicu's intentions and it was only thanks to the vigilance of our police that his criminality did not extend further. I welcome the decision of the Court of Appeal to increase his sentence to properly reflect the severity of his actions.

The Court of Appeal has decided that where a defendant sets out to sexually abuse a child, but in circumstances where the child happens to be 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.