

Sentences increased for men involved in attempted child sex offences

Four men have had their sentences increased following an intervention by the then Solicitor General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP.

The four cases were unrelated but they each concerned a defendant who had attempted to commit sexual activity with a child online.

Their sentences were referred to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence scheme. Due to the specific nature of their offences, each case was heard in a joint hearing on 4 March 2021. The Court of Appeal handed down the judgment for the cases on 21 April.

George Vasile, 40, began messaging an online dating profile, unaware that it had been set up by an undercover police officer posing as a twelve-year-old girl. Vasile was sentenced to a 2-year community order on 17 November 2020 at Basildon Crown Court and was ordered to complete 150 hours of unpaid work and 60 days rehabilitation activity. The Court of Appeal increased his sentence to 2 years' imprisonment suspended for 2 years, leaving in place the 150-hour unpaid work requirement and the 60-day rehabilitation requirement imposed as conditions of the community order.

Lee Crisp, 38, engaged in sexual communication with a profile set up by a member of 'paedophile hunter' group posing as a thirteen-year-old girl. Two other members of the group, also posing as teenage girls, soon joined the conversations. Crisp was arrested after the group passed the information to the police in July 2019. Crisp was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment, suspended for 2 years on 4 January 2021 at St Albans Crown Court. The Court of Appeal increased his sentence to 2 years' imprisonment, suspended for 2 years in combination with a Rehabilitation Requirement.

Carl Keirle, 32, engaged in sexual communications with a fifteen-year-old girl. He was sentenced to a 3-year community order on 18 December 2020 at Portsmouth Crown Court. The Court of Appeal increased his sentence to 2 years and 6 months' imprisonment.

Matthew Millen, 44, promised to pay a man £300 to sexually abuse his daughter. Unbeknown to Millen, however, the man was an undercover police officer and he was subsequently arrested. Millen was sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment on 4 December 2020 at Southampton Crown Court. The Court of Appeal has increased his sentence to 7 years' imprisonment.

After the joint hearing at the Court of Appeal the now Attorney General, Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP, said:

I was shocked and appalled by the wicked intentions of these men and it was only thanks to the vigilance of the police and others that their criminality did not extend further. I welcome the

decisions of the Court of Appeal in what is a landmark case for the court.

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.