

13th May 2026

Catherine Feast
Chief Executive Officer
Magistrates' Association
Office B, 199 Southwark Bridge Road
Southwark
London
SE1 0ED.

By email

RE: PREVENTING HIGH-RISK OFFENDERS FROM USING ONLINE DATING AND SOCIAL DISCOVERY SERVICES:

Dear Catherine,

The Online Dating and Discovery Association (ODDA) is the recognised trade body for the sector with a mission to create safe, responsible and enjoyable experiences for everyone. Representing nearly 500 brands worldwide, a key priority for the ODDA and its members is to prevent the risk of harm from individuals who pose a threat to others, including those who have committed serious sexual or violent offences against women.

To achieve this, the sector has worked hard to implement a range of trust and safety measures that include better information sharing between platforms, human and AI content moderation as well as giving users more control over what information they share with others.

But to tackle the problem effectively requires a more joined-up approach within the criminal justice system. The ODDA is therefore calling on key stakeholders to prohibit individuals arrested, charged or convicted of certain offences from accessing online dating and social discovery apps.

Academic research points to the fact that many offenders arrested for serious offences continue to target victims while out on bail putting vulnerable users at greater risk. In our view, anyone who has been arrested for, charged with or convicted of an offence involving violence, sex, stalking, harassment or romance fraud should be prohibited from accessing certain websites or apps. Cases like Anthony Burns who targeted hundreds of women and girls on dating apps despite already being categorised as a high-risk offender following previous convictions, serves as a reminder of what can happen when the system breaks down.

We recognise that the decision to grant bail and impose certain conditions rests with the Courts and is decided on a case-by-case basis following careful consideration of the risks. However, we

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firmly believe Magistrates have an important role to play in protecting women and girls from violence and abuse by removing the opportunities to cause harm. We feel is a proportionate response that reflects the seriousness of the risk.

Our members are not seeking to abdicate their responsibilities, but instead, want to make it as hard as possible for anyone who poses a risk of harm to access apps where they can continue to target vulnerable users. This requires platforms, regulators and others to work together in taking a systems-wide approach to the growing problem of violence against women and girls.

In addition to the above, the ODDA has been playing its part by working with Government to explore other ways we can make our sector safer for women and other vulnerable groups. For example, earlier this year we published a form on our website to report convicted sex offenders using publicly available information following discussions with officials at the Ministry of Justice. A link to the form, which you can find here: <https://theodda.org/for-consumers/report-a-convicted-sex-offender/>, has now been included in the latest update of the Licence Conditions Policy Framework. We also continue to push the Home Office to expand Clare's Law giving the 'right to ask' and the 'right to know' to users of online dating apps and are actively supporting the Government's Enough! campaign.

Ultimately, our goal is to make the internet safer for everyone. We can only achieve this by working together and we hope that you will support us through the work of Magistrates across the country.

I look forward to hearing from you and exploring ways we can work together in reducing the risk of harm to users of online dating and social discovery services.

Yours sincerely,



Simon Newman
Chief Executive Officer
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