



Home Office

Baroness Williams of Trafford  
Minister of State for  
Countering Extremism

2 Marsham Street,  
London SW1P 4DF  
[www.gov.uk/home-office](http://www.gov.uk/home-office)

Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP  
Chair of Science and Technology Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

30 APR 2019

*Dear Norman,*

Thank you for your letter of 9 April in which you requested the date by which a new computer system will be implemented to facilitate the automatic deletion of custody images of unconvicted individuals.

I confirmed in my last letter to the Committee our commitment to enabling more efficient review and automatic deletion of custody images linked to conviction status. Custody images are an essential tool for protecting the public and we are obliged to enable policing to make the very best use of them whilst ensuring they are used in accordance with the law and that public trust is maintained. We are therefore determined to implement a robust, efficient and durable solution but the complexity of the project means it is not sensible to commit to an absolute date for implementation.

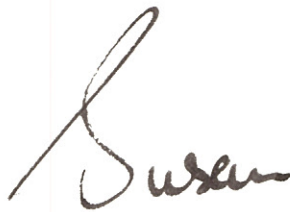
There are a number of challenges to overcome but we are working up a detailed technology and business change plan, which will entail substantial investment. Unlike the arrangements for DNA and fingerprints, there is no single national system for custody images, with a unique identifier for every record. Many records do have the appropriate identifier to enable them to be linked to arrest records. However, there are several million on the Police National Database that cannot be linked easily, or at all, and would have to be manually reviewed or deleted in bulk, entailing many thousands of hours' work.

It is also important to note that police forces have used images for far longer than it has been possible to use them in an automated way to identify suspects. We therefore also need to work with police forces to change their business processes to improve the quality and consistency of data. Ultimately this will make the transition to automatic deletion easier, but the scale of the task is significant.

We also recognise that governance arrangements feel complex for stakeholders, and we will address this through the review of biometrics governance, which we will provide an update on shortly.

In the meantime, I have asked my officials to work with the police to determine how manual deletion might be enhanced without placing an unmanageable burden on policing. The impact will differ force by force and it is therefore important that we also work closely with Police and Crime Commissioners.

I am pleased that the police have committed to providing more information to those taken into custody about their right to request the deletion of their custody images. However, we are not complacent on this issue and we will keep the Committee informed of progress.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan', written in a cursive style.

**Baroness Williams of Trafford**