

Hansard

[UK Parliament](#) > [Hansard](#) > [Lords: 14 April 2021](#) > [Lords Chamber](#) > [Undercover Policing Inquiry](#)

Undercover Policing Inquiry

Volume 811: debated on Wednesday 14 April 2021

APR

14

2021

[Download text](#)

Question

🕒 12.56pm

Asked by

Baroness Clark of Kilwinning >

[Share](#)

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the progress of the Undercover Policing Inquiry into police surveillance, established in 2015.

The Minister of State, Home Office >

(Baroness Williams of Trafford) (Con)

[Share](#)

My Lords, the inquiry's investigations are independent of the Home Office, and I welcomed the commencement of its evidential hearings in November 2020. The department maintains regular liaison with the inquiry on sponsorship issues such as progress and expenditure. We remain of the view that it is important for the inquiry to report as soon as practicable, as set out in its terms of reference.

Baroness Clark of Kilwinning >

(Lab)

[Share](#)

I thank the Minister for that answer. As she is aware, one of the reasons why the inquiry was established was that a number of women had dishonestly become involved with undercover police officers in quite an abusive way—some of them, indeed, having children by those officers. One of the calls from many of the participants in the inquiry was for the inquiry to be public and live-streamed. One of the reasons for that is that there may be many more women who have been dishonestly treated in this way—and more children whose fathers are undercover police officers. Will the Minister look at live-streaming the inquiry and at how it can be made public, so that the images and names of the undercover police officers are more readily available and activists can see whether they have been impacted in some way?

Baroness Williams of Trafford >

(Con)

[Share](#)

The inquiry chair has already opined on the publication of a list, and the noble Baroness will know what his comment on that issue was. I understand her point about women being involved with undercover police, and some of them getting pregnant and having children. On televising proceedings, she would need to go to the inquiry chair to request that; the inquiry is

independent of government.

[Back to top](#)

[Previous debate](#)

[Next debate](#)

Lord Morris of Aberavon >

(Lab) [V]

[Share](#)

What is the cost of the inquiry to date and what is the target date for its report? It is acquiring the aura of the Saville inquiry. How many immunities have been granted by the Attorney-General? Since it has been said that the legitimacy of the inquiry is bound up with the full co-operation of its participants, is it diminishing?

Baroness Williams of Trafford >

(Con)

[Share](#)

The cost to date is £36.2 million. The report to the Home Secretary is due before the end of 2023.

Lord Mackay of Clashfern >

(Con) [V]

[Share](#)

My Lords, will my noble friend say whether there is any mechanism to ensure that an inquiry as important as this will report in a reasonable time?

Baroness Williams of Trafford >

(Con)

[Share](#)

My noble friend makes a very pertinent point because, of course, some of the inquiry goes back to 1968, so timeliness is very important. As members of the sponsor department of a statutory inquiry, both the Home Secretary and the Permanent Secretary have sponsorship responsibilities that are set out in the inquiries management statement. I have personally engaged with the chair in my capacity as sponsor to discuss the progress of the inquiry and stress the importance of learning lessons promptly.

Lord Paddick >

(LD)

[Share](#)

My Lords, given that the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Act was recently passed by this House with Labour and Conservative support—giving the police the ability to give CHIS participating in protests immunity from prosecution, with no specific prohibition on CHIS acting as agents provocateur—what reassurance can the Minister give to the House that police CHIS were not involved in recent protests against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill?

Baroness Williams of Trafford >

(Con)

[Share](#)

HMICFRS published a report just last month on policing protests. It concluded that there was no use of undercover officers in protest policing, which appears proportionate to the nature of criminality inherent in protests generally. It makes only brief reference to the ongoing undercover police inquiry.

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb >

(GP)

[Share](#)

My Lords, the chair of the inquiry has ruled that the Special Branch registry files, which could give more information about the work of undercover officers, will not be part of the inquiry. That means that the truth will be very filtered, which makes it hard for core participants, who feel that they will not get justice. Would the Minister agree to a meeting with me and perhaps a member of each of the opposition parties to discuss the major flaws in the inquiry and why the core

participants are so upset?

Baroness Williams of Trafford >

(Con)

[Share](#)

Just before Questions, I said to the noble Baroness that I would look into what I could and could not do because, of course, the inquiry is independent, and rightly so. Parliament would expect it to be independent and therefore would not expect interference from the sponsoring Minister—but I will take back her point.

Lord Rosser >

(Lab) [V]

[Share](#)

Can the Government give an assurance that, following the conclusion of the Mitting inquiry, any people who were actively spied upon by the police, including individuals who may have been tricked into intimate relationships with undercover officers, will be made aware of what occurred and will not be denied access to justice?

Baroness Williams of Trafford >

(Con)

[Share](#)

My Lords, I am sure that the rationale would not be to deny people access to justice. Clearly, the revelation of any names would be a matter for the chairman of what is an independent inquiry.

Lord Moylan >

(Con)

[Share](#)

My Lords, the inquiry was set up in 2015; over five years passed before opening statements were delivered. Some 90 staff are directly engaged, and, as my noble friend has said, the cost, so far, exceeds £36 million, but that excludes very considerable expenditure by police forces responding to the inquiry. I estimate that the inquiry's total cost to the public purse, by the time it reports—well into the current decade—will be in excess of £100 million. Can my noble friend the Minister tell me if that is a reasonable forecast that the department is budgeting for?

Baroness Williams of Trafford >

(Con)

[Share](#)

I am not sure whether it is a reasonable forecast, but, responding to my noble friend's points, I can say that the inquiry needs to deliberate promptly and with an eye properly on its use of public funds in order to do so.

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick >

(Non-Aff) [V]

[Share](#)

My Lords, could the Minister confirm what the direct role of the inquiry is around undercover policing with other police forces, given that infiltration took place in organisations with a UK-

wide reach?

[Back to top](#)

[Previous debate](#)

[Next debate](#)

Baroness Williams of Trafford >

(Con)

[Share](#)

I assume that the noble Baroness is referring to Northern Ireland. It is probably inappropriate to comment on that at this point, while judicial proceedings are ongoing.

Lord Mann >

(Non-Afl)

[Share](#)

An inquiry cannot request files where it does not know that they exist. Can we be assured that there are no files within the Home Office that have not been sought out, retrieved and provided to the inquiry?

Baroness Williams of Trafford >

(Con)

[Share](#)

If the Home Office is asked for files that it has, it would most certainly have to provide them to the inquiry.

The Lord Speaker >

(Lord Fowler)

[Share](#)

My Lords, all supplementary questions have been asked, and we now move to the fourth Oral Question.