

Franck David
Assistant Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
T6.01
Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

28 November 2010

Dear Mr David,

PE 1169

Thank you for your letter seeking my comments on the contents of Ed Vaisey's letter of 23rd November 2010. I make the following points:

The issues of "giving offense" and "freedom of choice" are not relevant to this petition which is concerned with the harmful effect on children and young people through the mainstreaming of sexualised imagery.

I believe it to be a health issue inasmuch as children are being exposed to material which can be damaging to them emotionally and physically as they absorb it either consciously or subconsciously. Pre-election, David Cameron summed it up when he said "... some businesses are dumping a waste that is toxic on our children. Products and marketing that can warp their minds and their bodies and harm their future; that can take away their innocence..."

Scotland has taken the initiative to ban the display of tobacco products in shops and this was upheld by the Court of Session as it was recognised that it would improve public health. Pornography has arguably a far greater potential to damage public health.

Moving magazines or the pornographic news paper The Daily Sport to the top shelf would not cost anything and they would still be available to those who choose to buy them. Equipment to screen sleeve is widely used in the magazine industry already. The cost of screen sleeves is negligible compared to other production costs.

Mr Vaisey claims that the Government is conscious of people's concerns and that the matter will be kept under review. One wonders how this is being accomplished as we are not given any information.

He quotes that the PPA received no complaints during 2010. The general public has no knowledge of, or access to the PPA. When complaining they will do so in store or by writing to a head office. These complaints are not recorded or collated centrally.

Many MPs are concerned about the issue. There is currently a cross-party Early Day Motion in Westminster (Number 263) which has gathered 89 MPs signatures to date. It states:

That this House welcomes and supports the Front Page Campaign; notes that recommended codes of practice by the National Federation of Retail Newsagents and the Periodical Publishers Association are widely ignored by newsagents and petrol stations; is concerned that this often means that sexually explicit material is displayed within easy reach of children; is further concerned by the practice of publishers paying for so-called best seller spots involving the display of sexually explicit material near check-outs; further notes that seeing such material can cause children confusion and distress and give them a false view of adult relationships; calls on the Government to introduce and enforce measures to ensure that such material is not displayed at or below children's eye-level, near children's publications or without opaque sleeving; further calls for an independent UK regulator to replace out-of-date and ineffective legislation; and also calls for magazines to be assigned age ratings such as are assigned to cinema films and DVDs.

I am encouraged at the Petition Committee's decision to undertake some independent research.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Forbes

Petitioner