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14 JUN 2019

Thank you for your correspondence of 29 May to the Home Secretary on behalf of your constituent about police trials of facial recognition technology trials. I am replying as the Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service.

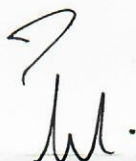
The Live Facial Recognition (LFR) is a rapidly improving technology. We recognise that the use of this new technology raises legitimate privacy concerns, which should be debated in a democratic society. We note that the London Policing Ethics Panel report on facial recognition published last month showed that 57% of those sampled supported Metropolitan Police use of facial recognition generally and over 80% supported its use to identify potential terrorists and people wanted for serious violent crimes.

The trial deployment referred to in your constituent's letter was part of the final trials the Metropolitan Police Service carried out in January 2019. We know that LFR trials are intended to commence to find missing and vulnerable persons, which is a collaboration between the Home Office and police forces (Kent and West Midlands; British Transport Police).

We are not aware of any more police forces planning on trialling LFR but if a police force is considering trialling LFR technology they will put forward proposals to the Law Enforcement Facial Images and New Biometrics Oversight and Advisory Board for their advice. There has been Parliamentary activity regarding LFR such as oral and written Parliamentary Questions, an enquiry by the Science and Technology Committee and a Parliamentary debate on LFR was recently held in Westminster Hall.

Images of passersby being retained to build up a database. Facial images that do not create a 'match' are deleted immediately and the CCTV feed is deleted from the system after 31 days. The use of LFR technology by police must be exercised in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and we believe it is.

More generally, there is a legal framework for the use of LFR. The police have broad common law powers to prevent and detect crime, which allow them to use surveillance cameras and LFR in public places. These powers must be exercised in accordance with the law, including the Surveillance Camera Code of Practice, the Data Protection Act, the Human Rights Act and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. A judicial review hearing was held in May of South Wales Police's use of LFR. We will consider that judgement when it is handed down.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'N. Hurd'.

Rt Hon Nick Hurd MP