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Mr. Simon Foster

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Dear Mr. Simon Foster,

Thank you for your letter of 23 March to the Rt. Hon Grant Shapps MP about vehicle theft in the West Midlands. Your letter was passed to the Neighbourhood Crime Unit at the Home Office, under the Rt. Hon Kit Malthouse MP's portfolio as the Minister for Crime, Policing, and Probation.

I want to assure you that the Government is aware of the national issue of vehicle thefts. The latest police recorded crime figures for England and Wales show a 7% increase in theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle from 94,601 offences in year ending December 2020 to 101,198 offences in year ending December 2021. However, the coronavirus pandemic and resulting lockdowns had an impact on theft offences, with reductions in vehicle-related thefts seen during this time. Recent increases indicate a return to pre-pandemic levels, though theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle offences remain below where they were, with an 11% decrease between 2019 and 2021. We are closely monitoring this situation and will continue efforts to reduce these thefts.

We are also aware of the significant levels of vehicle theft in the West Midlands, which has the second highest vehicle theft rate across all English and Welsh police forces, with theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle offences now above pre-pandemic levels, having increased 13% from year ending 2019 to year ending 2021. You will be aware that the Minister recently commissioned a report from West Midlands Police to better understand why this is. The report provided was helpful in setting out why vehicle-related thefts have been increasing nationally, and details of the operational activity within West Midlands Police.

The Government is working with policing leads to ensure all relevant partners are taking action to tackle this crime, including manufacturers. We continue to take forward a programme of work to tackle vehicle-related theft through the National Vehicle Crime Working Group, which is chaired by the NPCC lead for vehicle crime, ACC Jenny Sims. This group includes motor vehicle manufacturers, as well as police and insurance industry representatives. This work is overseen by the Government's Crime and Justice Taskforce, which is chaired by the Prime Minister and aims to reduce neighbourhood crime. This includes consideration of how to effectively prevent and deter both theft of and theft from vehicles. We are aware of the issue of electronic compromise to steal vehicles and are working with the affected manufacturers. ACC Sims is taking forward discussions with manufacturers about how to further build intelligence to prevent these thefts, in particular keyless thefts targeting Jaguar Land Rover vehicles. ACC Sims is also organising a Summer conference, and will invite law enforcement and industry partners to discuss key drivers of vehicle thefts.

Through the National Vehicle Crime Working Group, we have established a horizon-scanning group with academics, vehicle manufacturers and policing leads to identify potential future trends, threats and vulnerability in vehicle security and vehicle-related crime. Research will be undertaken to develop actions to mitigate future opportunities to criminally exploit technological and design changes in the automotive industry.

We are also working to help police forces increase the knowledge and skills of their officers in relation to vehicle crime. A network of vehicle crime specialists has been established, involving every police force in England and Wales. The Group meets every quarter to ensure forces can share information about emerging trends in vehicle crime and better tackle regional issues.

Alongside this, we are committed to reducing the ability for criminals to profit from crime, making it less attractive for offenders to steal property. We have established a group of expert policing and academic partners who are taking forward work across a number of themes. These include actions to identify where and how stolen goods are commonly sold; examining ways to ensure property is marked, identifiable and traceable; and exploring ways to share best practice between forces, such as the We Don't Buy Crime initiative. This initiative has proved successful in West Mercia and Gwent police forces; it enables police to work closely with second-hand goods traders to reduce the sale of stolen property.

Both the stolen goods and vehicle crime programmes of work feed in to the NPCC serious and organised acquisitive crime portfolio, led by DCC Amanda Blakeman. This ensures the organised element of vehicle-related and other acquisitive crime receives the appropriate response across forces nationally.

We welcome the action you and West Midlands Police are taking to publish data on the vehicles most at risk of theft. I note your suggestion that the Government begins publishing national data on this, similar to that published until 2006. We feel the work we are doing with motor manufacturers through the NVCWG is the appropriate means to explore options to improve vehicle security and reduce the opportunities for theft. In addition, Thatcham Research conducts a National Vehicle Security Assessment for new vehicles which is applied to the group rating for insurance companies. Thatcham work with law enforcement, the automotive industry and insurers to assess potential physical and electronic vulnerabilities in vehicles. Manufacturers proactively engage with this process to make their vehicles more secure. Vehicle owners can check their vehicle's insurance grouping, including a security rating, on the Thatcham website here: <https://www.thatcham.org/what-we-do/security/my-vehicle-search/>.

Thank you for raising this important issue. I hope I have assured you that the Government takes these matters seriously and is determined to drive down crime.

Yours sincerely,

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Neighbourhood Crime Unit

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