

ENGLAND AND WALES / JUDGMENT

R v Daniel Williamson

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R EX

- v – DANIEL WILLIAMSON

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Mr C Jeyes appeared on behalf of the Appellant

J U D G M E N T

Thursday 23 April 2026 LORD JUSTICE DOVE: I shall ask Mrs Justice Brunner to give the judgment of the court. MRS JUSTICE BRUNNER:

1. We make an order under section 11 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 in relation to the ten complainants in this case. Nothing is to be published, whether on regular media or social media which would be likely to lead the public to being able to identify any of them until further order.
2. On 24 March 2024, in the Crown Court at Cambridge, the appellant pleaded guilty to ten counts of blackmail, contrary to section 21(1) of the Theft Act 1968. On 20 November 2025 he was sentenced to seven years and four months' imprisonment on each offence, to be served concurrently. The delay between his guilty plea and sentence was largely the result of a co-accused awaiting trial.
3. That co-accused was the appellant's partner, Leanne Potter-Williamson. She pleaded guilty on re-arraignment at a late stage to three counts of blackmail upon which she was jointly charged with the appellant.
4. The appellant now appeals against his sentence with the leave of the single judge.
5. The ten offences occurred over a four month period between September 2023 and January 2024. The first nine counts related to threats to expose men's use of sexual services. Ms Potter-Williamson would meet men on an online escort services platform. Through that process she obtained names and contact details. In relation to most of the complainants she provided sexual services. The men subsequently received threats that the sexual activity would be disclosed and received threats of violence unless they paid money. These threats would be sent primarily by the appellant, but at times from Ms Potter-Williamson, using WhatsApp messaging and, at times, telephone calls. The appellant used his own number and numbers of telephones belonging to children of the household. The men were directed to pay money into various accounts linked to both defendants and a third-party. The total amount demanded from the ten victims was £1,420, of which £610 was paid. Some of the complainants then alerted the police.
6. The appellant made clear in messages to the complainants that he had personal information about them. He used the full names of the men and indicated that he had their home addresses as well as their telephone number in most cases. He sent one man a photograph of that man and his dog. He said things like "Do not delete this, I know everything about you". At times he would pretend that he provided security to the woman who had provided sexual services, with messages such as: "We need to have a little chat. I'm not very happy. It's Bill, security". Demands for money were made in terms such as: "You've been messing my girls around. I want £250, I will send the guys round". The appellant threatened to turn up at their homes or to send people to their homes. By way of example, he messaged one man saying: "Listen fella, we know what you've been up to. We will tell your family, we will send

people round. We know roughly where you live". He told another by telephone that he would come to the house with his friends and rough him up, and that he would "take care" of him. He messaged another: "Give me £100, otherwise me and the boys will get you".

7. Messages were sent by Ms Potter-Williamson in some instances. On one occasion she told a complainant to listen to the appellant's demands because he was a loose cannon "and he would go nuts". In some cases the contact from the appellant was limited to a day; in others the contact took place over a few days.
8. The complainants described feeling threatened and intimidated. Three made victim personal statements setting out the profound effect that the threats had upon them. One complainant described his distress at the calls. He said that for months afterwards he was nervous at home, fearful that someone would come round, and on edge when he went out. He became unsociable, irritable and had sleepless nights. A second complainant said that when the messages became more intense, they became frightening, particularly the threats to come to his address. He was living with his parents at the time and feared for them. He said: "I then started getting the contact from them via WhatsApp and looking at some of the pictures they had on their profiles made me think wow, this is really bad and serious now, as they had profile pictures as guns and some nasty sayings". He felt intimidated, distressed and threatened and was worried about whether they might do something to his partner, or affect his job. A third complainant set out the impact on him in a statement made a month after the events, explaining that he suffered from anxiety and depression and "this incident made my anxiety even worse and for a couple of weeks I was looking behind me all the time in case someone had come down like they said that they would. Or that they would find my home and break in. I started getting paranoid and thinking that everyone I walked past was watching me. It made me feel bad as I should be able to feel safe. This has eased off a bit recently, but I do find myself looking over my shoulder from time to time".
9. The appellant was arrested. He appeared in court in October 2023. He was charged and he was bailed.
10. The tenth offence was committed while on bail – two months after appearing in court in relation to the earlier offences. The appellant made the same sort of threats of violence, but had branched out into a new type of blackmail. This time he threatened a plumber on the basis that he had purportedly not carried out work. He sent a text in late December 2023 mentioning the complainant's full name and saying, "We need to talk". On 4 January 2024 the appellant sent a WhatsApp message and made a telephone call at 4.30 am saying that the complainant had ripped him off on a job. He demanded £60, saying "I'm going to fuck you up really bad if you don't give me the money. I know your address and will be round when you least expect it". That complainant said that the harassment and blackmail had a big impact on his work and he was fearful for the safety of his family when he was not at home.
11. The appellant made no comment in interview. He indicated guilty pleas at the magistrates' court and pleaded guilty at the plea and trial preparation hearing on 4 March 2024.

12. The appellant was aged 40 at the point of sentencing. He had two previous convictions for disorderly behaviour and obstructing a constable.
13. The following material was before the sentencing judge:
 - (a) A pre-sentence report dated April 2024, in which it was recorded that the appellant minimised the offences and was unable to recognise the full impact on the victims. He had a long history of employment, before becoming unemployed in January 2023. At the time of the offending he was living with Ms Potter-Williamson and three children of the household. He was now living with his mother who had cancer, and he helped with caring for her. The risk of general re-offending was predicted to be low. However, the author of the report identified a high level of risk to the public from further threat and intimidation offences.
 - (b) Letters from the appellant saying that he takes full responsibility for his extremely poor choices, acknowledging the pain he had caused others, and setting out the progress that he had made in custody.
 - (c) A letter of a job offer to the appellant in a fencing company.
 - (d) Character references.
 - (e) Documents about the health of the appellant's mother.
 - (f) Certificates showing the appellant's achievements while in prison and a letter confirming that the appellant had acted in prison as a peer mentor, showing significant empathy and compassion.
 - (g) A sentencing note from the prosecution in which it was submitted that culpability was Category A because of repeated conduct and sophisticated planning. Harm was said to be Category 2 because of the substantial distress caused to the victims.
14. The appellant was sentenced on 20 November 2025. In his sentencing remarks the judge described the appellant's behaviour as "vicious attempts at extortion". He noted that "it was your aim to have such a severe emotional effect on each of them that they would simply hand over to you their money that you had no right to".
15. The judge applied the Sentencing Council Guideline on Blackmail ("the Guideline") and put each offence in Category A2. He said that that meant a starting point of six years, and a range of four to ten years' imprisonment. That was an error; under the Guideline, an A2 offence has a starting point of four years' imprisonment, as had been correctly set out in the prosecution sentencing note. The judge identified two aggravating features: the appellant played a leading role in a group activity; and he had made use of his children's mobile telephones. In relation to mitigation, the sentencing judge said that he was impressed with the work that the appellant had done in prison, and accepted that the appellant was remorseful. He treated him as a man of good character. The judge did not identify the sentence that he would have passed on each count, noting that the task at hand was to impose a sentence which was proportionate to the overall criminality, in line with the

Sentencing Council's Guideline on Totality. The judge said that the sentence would have been 11 years' imprisonment after trial, reduced by one third for the guilty plea, to seven years and four months' imprisonment.

16. The judge sentenced the co-accused, Ms Potter-Williamson to a term of three years and one month's imprisonment for her part in three of the offences. He found her culpability to be lower than that of the appellant.
17. The grounds of appeal are, in essence, that the judge identified the wrong starting point for A2 offences, and that the sentence was manifestly excessive because the judge miscategorised the offence under the sentencing guidelines, and failed to give sufficient weight to mitigation.
18. We can deal shortly with the submission that the judge's reference to the wrong starting point demonstrates that he applied an incorrectly high starting point for A2 offences. Within the written advice on appeal, Mr Jeyes, counsel for the appellant, properly informs us that the judge's reference to an incorrect starting point of six years' imprisonment for an A2 offence was raised with the judge following sentence. The judge explained at the time that he made a slip in his sentencing remarks when he referred to a six year starting point, but that he had the correct starting point in mind for an A2 offence when determining the sentence. We accept that.
19. We turn to categorisation under the Guideline. It is accepted by the appellant that harm was properly assessed as level 2, but it is submitted that culpability of each offence should have been assessed as B at the highest, rather than A. We accept that submission, which has been well advanced by Mr Jeyes in front of us today, although, as we explain later, we do not consider that the overall sentence was manifestly excessive.
20. Features of Category A culpability within the Guideline include: "conduct repeated or prolonged over a substantial period of time". As the prosecution identified in their sentencing note, all of these offences had an element of repetitive conduct. The Culpability A factor requires repetition or prolongment "over a substantial period of time". Whilst that certainly applies to the offences when looked at together, the individual offences were generally carried out over the course of a day or two. We do not consider that to be a substantial period of time, and so we do not find that this Culpability A factor applies.
21. The prosecution had suggested in their note that another Culpability A factor applied, in that there was "sophisticated planning". It is not clear whether the judge accepted that, in relation to the appellant. There was certainly some complexity to the appellant's activities, in the use of various telephone numbers and bank accounts, as identified by the prosecution in their sentencing note. That does not, in our view, indicate sophisticated planning. The prosecution note does not, for example, assert that the whole enterprise of offering escort services was planned as a trap in order to blackmail clients. We are not satisfied that this feature of Culpability A was present either.

22. We consider that each offence, looked at alone, is best described within the Guideline as Category B culpability. A Category B factor is that violence was threatened, rather than used, which is the case here. Category B2 carries a starting point of two years' imprisonment, and a range of one to five years, which we note overlaps with the range in Category A2.
23. We turn to the judge's treatment of aggravating and mitigating features. As the judge identified, the three offences of which the appellant and his partner were both convicted were each aggravated by the appellant's leading role. The appellant's use of his children's telephones was a further minor aggravating feature.
24. In terms of mitigation, the sentencing judge gave particular weight to the progress which the appellant had made in custody, which we also find impressive. The judge took into account other mitigation raised both in documents and orally. He fairly accepted that the appellant was remorseful, which must have involved preferring the appellant's recent letter over the older pre-sentence report. He treated the appellant as of good character. All of that mitigation had to be balanced against the aggravating features. The judge's approach to aggravating and mitigating features was entirely proper and we reject the appellant's submission to the contrary.
25. We turn to the overall sentence. We consider that, if categorised as a B2 offence, the sentence for each offence would sit comfortably above the starting point of two years. Even if the repetition and planning in this case do not meet the Culpability A threshold, they are plainly features of the conduct which increase culpability. As well as the aggravating features identified by the judge, we consider that in relation to many of the counts there was a further aggravating feature of "conduct intended to maximise distress and/or humiliation", such as making a telephone call at 4.30 am to one complainant, and sending another complainant a photograph of themselves to show that the blackmailer knew what they looked like. We also note that count 10 carries a further serious aggravating factor in that it was committed while the appellant was on bail for similar offending. In the light of the mitigating and aggravating features, there could have been no valid complaint if a sentence for one of these highly unpleasant offences after trial was around three years' imprisonment.
26. There was, of course, not one but ten such offences. They involved ten different men and took place over many months. This can properly be characterised as a sustained campaign of blackmail, which was being run akin to a small business. As the judge noted, the central task in the sentencing process was to identify the just and proportionate sentence to reflect all of the offending, and the offence-specific guidelines are just the starting point in that process. As we have found that the appropriate sentence for each of the ten offences was in the region of three years' imprisonment, there can be no valid criticism of an overall notional sentence after trial of eleven years' imprisonment.

27. In conclusion, although we have found that each offence is best categorised as B2 rather than A2 under the Guideline, we consider that the total sentence which was reached by the judge was not manifestly excessive. The judge gave full credit for the appellant's guilty plea, and reached a sentence which we consider to be just and proportionate for this offending as a whole.
28. Accordingly, it follows that the appeal against sentence is dismissed.

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