



Judiciary of England and Wales

THE HONOURABLE MR JUSTICE MURRAY

In the Crown Court at Chelmsford

R v Gavin PLUMB

Sentencing Remarks

12 July 2024

1. Gavin Plumb, you may remain seated for the moment.
2. You are here today to be sentenced following your conviction on 4 July 2024 by a jury at this court of the following offences:
 - a. soliciting murder (count 1 on the indictment);
 - b. encouraging or assisting the offence of kidnapping (count 2); and
 - c. encouraging or assisting the offence of rape (count 3).
3. All three of your offences were committed against Holly Willoughby. With considerable courage, Ms Willoughby, has waived her statutory right to anonymity in relation to the third offence so that details of all of your offences can be reported.
4. Holly Willoughby is a well-known and well-loved public figure. There is, as a result, a heightened public interest in this case. Like everyone else, however, she is entitled to respect for her private and family life.
5. As Ms Morgan KC, leading counsel for the Crown, said earlier today, Ms Willoughby has cooperated fully with the prosecution in this case and provided a victim personal statement. Its contents, however, are private. It has been shown only to those who need to see it, including the prosecution, you and your legal team, and me as the judge who presided over your trial and who will be sentencing you. Ms Willoughby does not wish for her statement to be read out in court or otherwise made public. That is her right, and we have respected that wish.
6. The purpose of a victim personal statement is so that the court is informed of the impact that the relevant offending has had on that victim. I have carefully read Ms Willoughby's statement. Out of respect for her wish for its contents to remain private, I simply note that I am satisfied that these offences have had life-changing consequences for her, both privately and professionally.

7. In assessing the impact of your offending, I bear in mind the broader effect of this type of offending on women generally, who should not be made to feel unsafe as they go about their daily lives.
8. On Tuesday, 3 October of last year, you were on-line participating in a public group chat on the Kik messaging app. Although the word “chat” suggests something benign, this particular group chat was called “Abduct Lovers” and involved people with an interest in abduction, rape, torture, human trafficking, and murder of former partners, ex-colleagues, neighbours, or others, including celebrities. The group had 100 members. The profile picture for the group was of a young blonde woman with a distressed expression, a male hand covering her mouth.
9. Your personal profile picture on the Kik app was an image of Holly Willoughby. Your username was “BigBear341987”. During your evidence you admitted that you had been an active member of the “Abduct Lovers” group chat for some time, although you could not, or would not, say how long.
10. On 3 October you posted four pictures of Ms Willoughby to the group with the caption “the one in the public eye I want”. Another user in the group, with the username “David Nelson”, responded, “nice”. You then posted the message saying that you had a lot of information about her, you knew when she does and does not have security, you knew that she did not have CCTV at home, and you knew when she got up in the morning.
11. David Nelson sent you a private message, and you then exchanged over 300 private messages on the Kik app during the next 30 hours or so. You discovered that David Nelson was based in the USA, and that he had never heard of Holly Willoughby. He asked you why you had posted about her in an abduction group, and you said, “why do you think?”
12. You told David Nelson that you had identified Ms Willoughby’s home address, and you sent him an image of it from Google maps. You made it clear that you were planning a nighttime home invasion of that address, and that you had been studying access points and other practicalities. David Nelson asked if you were looking for help, and you made it clear that you would welcome it. You had been discussing your plan to kidnap and rape Ms Willoughby with others, but they had got cold feet. You said you would carry out your plan on your own if you had to.
13. During your exchanges you talked about possible dates for the home invasion, flights from New York to London, details of Ms Willoughby’s car and how you planned to use it for the plan, and the road route from Ms Willoughby’s home to yours. You even fixed on some dates for the commission of the offences within the few days of conversation with David Nelson. Neither of you had a valid driving licence, but, of course, that would not have stopped you driving. You had been taking driving lessons. You also discussed trying to recruit a third person to drive the car. The plan was to take her to your flat initially and then to an abandoned building.

14. You talked about the use of chloroform to incapacitate Ms Willoughby and her husband, and you sent David Nelson photos of the bottles you had bought online. You sent David Nelson a video showing your restraint kit, which included handcuffs, ankle restraints, gags, an eye mask, ropes, and metal cable ties, as well as other BDSM equipment, including a whip. You had bought the ropes in February 2022 and the four packages of metal cable ties in April 2022. You told David Nelson that you planned to use knives in the attack, including kitchen knives and a utility folding knife that you bought on 1 August 2023.
15. David Nelson said that he lived in New York, and he would only spend the money to travel to the London if “this was a serious thing”. You said, “Definitely serious for me anyway.” You made a number of other statements to the same effect. I have no doubt that this was all considerably more than a fantasy to you. You told David Nelson that you had been planning this for about two and a half years.
16. Your plan was hopelessly unrealistic for a number of reasons, including your poor physical health, but you clearly thought it was feasible. Although you talked about carrying out the plan on your own, I am sure that this was simply bravado. You always intended to carry out your plan to kidnap, rape, and kill Ms Willoughby, but only if you could find the right man or men, the right “crew” as you sometimes called it, to help you do it. That was one of the principal purposes of your participation in the “Abduct Lovers” Kik group and other online chat groups.
17. After years of frustration, talking about your plan online with a number of others, you thought that you had finally found in David Nelson someone who would really help you. At one point you said, “... it’s actually happening”. You exchanged live videos with David Nelson, during which each of you said the date (3 October 2024) and the code word “Holly” to prove to each other that you were real.
18. Unfortunately for you, David Nelson was an undercover police officer, based in Minnesota. “David Nelson” is not his real name, but I will continue to use it in these sentencing remarks. His role is to carry out on-line investigations, using various fake identities, looking for instances of human trafficking, murder for hire, kidnapping, rape, drugs conspiracies, and other serious crime. “David Nelson” was one of his fake online identities, which he had been using for about three years. I permitted him to give his evidence anonymously during the trial to protect his personal safety and that of his family as well as to protect the public interest by preserving his ability to continue his important undercover work.
19. In evidence, David Nelson said that what you had posted in the public chat of the “Abduct Lovers” group went beyond what was typically posted, and he was immediately concerned that you posed an imminent threat to the woman you had named. He asked you various questions to draw out details of your plans and to assess whether you were just fantasising or posed a real danger. The vast majority of online messages that he monitored during his professional work did

not go beyond dark, twisted fantasy. His rapid professional assessment was that your messages were of a different order and revealed a real danger.

20. During the trial, the jury had all of your private Kik messages with David Nelson in a document entitled the Sequence of Events, which set out the text of each message in chronological order. It is clear early on during that exchange that your plan was to kidnap, rape, and otherwise sexually abuse Ms Willoughby. When David Nelson asked you whether she was “going to be returned”, you said no. Later in the exchange, when David Nelson asked what would happen when you were “done”, you said “slit her throat, clean her out and dispose of her”. Later still in the exchange, you made it clear that when you were finished, the plan was to slit her throat, wash her in bleach, and dump her body in a lake.
21. You introduced the idea of murdering Ms Willoughby into your exchanges with David Nelson, and you clearly sought to persuade him to participate in this part of the plan, whether it was to be David Nelson who actually slit her throat or you with his participation, assistance or encouragement. That is the basis of your conviction for soliciting murder.
22. Another deeply unpleasant aspect of your exchanges with David Nelson was your saying that you had another potential victim to “practice” on, namely, a neighbour of yours. You sent images of your neighbour to David Nelson.
23. You also suggested to David Nelson that your 15-year-old son was interested in participating in the plan and sent an image of him to David Nelson. The police found no credible evidence that this was true or, indeed, that your son knew anything about your plans. It was deeply disturbing that you should have made such a suggestion. You even made the bizarre suggestion that your son’s involvement, as an underage male, would give you some sort of leverage over Ms Willoughby.
24. Finally, to prove that you were serious, you boasted to David Nelson about your prior convictions for attempting to kidnap two young women in August 2006 and for false imprisonment of two other young women in December 2008. I will come back to those prior offences in a moment.
25. Your criminal interest in Ms Willoughby went back much further than the two dates in early October when you were chatting on the Kik app with David Nelson. You told David Nelson that you had been planning to abduct and rape Ms Willoughby for about two and a half years. In a WhatsApp message to a person we knew during the trial as “Marc”, who asked you on 28 December 2021 how long you had wanted to rape Ms Willoughby, you replied, “about 3 years but people claim to want to then back out”. So, your criminal interest in Ms Willoughby dated from at least 2018.
26. The police found that you had downloaded millions of images. They were only able to view about 10% of the total. They found thousands upon thousands of images of Ms Willoughby, including not only genuine images of her but also “deepfake” porn images, in other words, images that had been digitally

manipulated to impose Ms Willoughby's face on the body of another woman in a pornographic situation.

27. At the trial, the jury saw over 900 WhatsApp messages that you exchanged with Marc between 28 December 2021 and 7 June 2023. The messages included both text messages and voice notes, many of which were played for the jury. It appeared from the messages that Marc was Irish, lived in Ireland, and had previously been convicted and sentenced for stalking a woman. During your exchanges with Marc, you exchanged numerous images of Ms Willoughby, mostly genuine, but at least one deepfake porn image, as well as images of other women, including porn images showing women tied up and/or wearing gags.
28. You also discussed with Marc plans to kidnap, rape, and otherwise physically abuse Ms Willoughby. Many of the messages about what you planned to do to Ms Willoughby were so horrifying, shocking, and graphic in detail that they were not read out in open court. The jury, however, read every single message during the trial. Accredited members of the press were also given access to the full set of messages. During your exchanges, you boasted to Marc about your own convictions for your offences in 2006 and 2008. As when you boasted to David Nelson, I am sure that you did this in order to make clear to Marc that you were not a fantasist but someone who had a proven record of sexually-motivated violence against women and that you fully intended to carry out the offences you were discussing against Ms Willoughby.
29. Quite a bit of your chat with Marc was devoted to the pragmatic details of planning the abduction and rape of Ms Willoughby, including reference to others with whom you were discussing your plans and whom you hoped to recruit to participate in it. As DC Belsham told us during the trial, the police were not able to recover all the messages you exchanged with others.
30. You make numerous statements during the nearly 18 months of your WhatsApp exchanges with Marc that indicate the seriousness of your intent and your disappointment that others whom you had tried to recruit had let you down by getting cold feet. On 29 December 2021, for example, Marc asked you, "What's the closest u got to Holly". You responded, "Planning to track her movements [...] the last guy pulled out then told me it's just fantasy despite finding out all the information we did on her".
31. During the trial, there was evidence of your chats about Ms Willoughby with others on the Kik app, including persons with the usernames "davetomcat", "joshgreen977", "Carisbrookeone", and "dubliner1975". These four were saved in your phone's contacts as "Dave Tom", "Josh Green", "Alfie Noakes", and "Marc B", respectively. During your exchanges with Marc, you referred to conversations with others about your plan to abduct Ms Willoughby, including persons referred to as "Ryan", "Rob", "R" (which may be a reference to Ryan, Rob, or some third person), "tab00knk" and "the other guy". On 17 February 2022, you referred to having five persons in total "on board" to carry out your home invasion plan, including Marc and you. By 28 March 2022, you were back down to

three persons, Marc, Ryan and you, and Ryan “was getting cold feet”. In June 2022 you were discussing getting a new crew together.

32. Throughout the nearly 18 months of your WhatsApp exchanges with Marc, you refer to your discussions with others about your plan, with you often expressing disappointment that someone you had thought was seriously interested had got “cold feet” or had blocked you on the relevant app.
33. You discussed with Marc on WhatsApp many of the same topics and details of your home invasion and abduction plan that you later discussed with David Nelson. These included Ms Willoughby’s home address and how best to access it, restraint of Ms Willoughby and her husband using ropes, cable ties, and other items from your restraint kit, and the use of chloroform to incapacitate them. It was during this period that you purchased online the rope, the metal cable ties, the utility folding knife, and the two bottles of chloroform. On 6 May 2023 you sent Marc the same video showing your restraint kit that you later sent to David Nelson. On 14 May 2023, you sent two photos to Marc of various realistic-looking imitation firearms available for purchase online, although there is no evidence that you did actually purchase them.
34. You carried out various web searches on chloroform that were primarily concerned with the legality of purchasing or owning it and its ability to incapacitate a person. The police subsequently discovered upon analysis of the contents of the bottles, which were unopened when the police seized them, that they did not, in fact, contain any detectable level of chloroform, but only ethanol and water. You, however, clearly believed that you had purchased chloroform when you bought them online from a homeopathic pharmacy. Your claim in your evidence that you had bought the chloroform to clean a stubborn stain on your living room carpet was a particularly clumsy and obvious lie.
35. At various times during your WhatsApp exchanges with Marc, you discussed looking for an abandoned property outside of London where you could hold Ms Willoughby. On one occasion in June 2022, you forwarded to Marc a photograph that had been sent to you of a room on an abandoned stud farm that you thought might be suitable for this purpose.
36. One particularly deeply unpleasant aspect of your exchanges with Marc, which did not appear in your exchanges with David Nelson, was your discussion of restraining Ms Willoughby’s children and using her fear for their safety as leverage with which to control her.
37. Your exchanges with Marc together with your exchanges with David Nelson, and related evidence, form the factual basis for your offences of encouraging or assisting the commission of the offences of kidnap and rape with the intention that these offences be committed.
38. You have previously been convicted of sexually-motivated offences against women, involving the threat of violence and/or unlawful restraint.

39. On 14 August 2006, when you were 19 years old, you approached a young woman on the Stansted Express and gave her a note saying that you had a gun and that she was to get off at the next stop with you or you would shoot her, yourself and “everyone else”. Other passengers noticed her distress, and you got off the train at Stansted Mountfitchet. Two days later, you approached another young woman on the Stansted Express and gave her a note saying that you were a police officer and that she was to get off with you at the next stop for a “quick chat”. She refused, and you got off at the next stop and sat on the platform, where you were arrested later that day. When arrested, you were found to have on you an imitation firearm and three rope ligatures.
40. On 16 March 2007, for these offences of attempted kidnapping to which you had pleaded guilty, you were sentenced for these offences to a term of imprisonment of 12 months, suspended for two years, with supervision and activity requirements.
41. On 11 December 2008, when you were 21, while you were working at Woolworths in Harlow, you approached two 16-year-old girls who were also working there with a box-cutter/Stanley knife-type instrument and threatened them, telling them to get to the back of the stockroom. After failing to untangle a piece of rope you had intended to use, you took out some tape and began to bind the hands of one girl behind her back. The other girl escaped, and the alarm was raised. The police attended, and you were arrested.
42. On 15 June 2009, for these offences of false imprisonment to which you had pleaded guilty, you were sentenced to a term of imprisonment of 32 months.
43. There is no offence-specific Sentencing Council guideline in relation to any of these offences. I have had regard to the guidelines on Overarching Principles and Totality.
44. In relation to the offence of soliciting murder, I have considered the decisions of the Court of Appeal referred to in the sentencing notes provided by the prosecution and the defence. I bear in mind, however, that the facts of those cases are quite different to this one. I have had some limited regard to the guideline on Attempted Murder, however I bear in mind the decision of the Court of Appeal in *R v Franks*,¹ which delineates the clear differences between soliciting murder and attempted murder.
45. In relation to the offence of encouraging or assisting the offence of kidnapping, I bear in mind, in relation to the underlying offence of kidnapping, the principles summarised by the Court of Appeal in *R v Saqib*.²
46. In relation to the offence of encouraging or assisting the offence of rape, I have had regard to the Sentencing Council guideline on rape.

¹ [2023] EWCA Crim 319, [2023] 2 Cr App R (S) 29.

² [2022] EWCA Crim 213.

47. Given that all three of your offences were part of a single plan to kidnap, rape, and murder Holly Willoughby, the correct approach in this case is to pass concurrent sentences that reflect the totality of your offending.
48. Although not all of the detail of the plan discussed by you with Marc over the course of 18 months was discussed with David Nelson during the 30 hours or so of your Kik message exchanges with him, the plan that you revealed to David Nelson was, in its fundamentals, the plan discussed with Marc.
49. Accordingly, in assessing culpability and harm, I have regard to the evidence about the plan that emerges from the WhatsApp exchanges between you and Marc. The key point in this regard is that the plan to murder Ms Willoughby was the endpoint of a plan, developed over a considerable time, to kidnap and falsely imprison her for the principal purpose of raping and otherwise sexually abusing her over a sustained period of time in ways that, judging by your discussions with Marc, would have been particularly sadistic, brutal, and degrading. It was, in short, the context in which you solicited David Nelson to murder or assist you in murdering Ms Willoughby.
50. I have no hesitation in concluding that each of your three offences is one of very high culpability, having regard, in particular, to the sexual motivation for your offending and your intention to inflict extreme and gratuitous degradation on your victim.
51. The intended harm of each offence was, in each case, of the highest category for the relevant offence. There is no doubt that if you had genuinely found one or more accomplices who were seriously interested and had been willing to join you in carrying your plan through, then you would have put this plan into action.
52. Turning to the aggravating factors in this case and taking care to avoid double-counting, I find that your offences are aggravated by the following factors:
 - a. your prior convictions for violent, sexually motivated offences against women by way of attempted kidnap and false imprisonment;
 - b. the lengthy and detailed planning of your intended offences against Ms Willoughby over the course of nearly two years;
 - c. the purchase of items to be used in the commission of the offences, including your restraint kit, a knife, and chloroform;
 - d. the research you conducted into the personal life of Ms Willoughby;
 - e. the fact that you sought to encourage more than one person to commit these offences with you;
 - f. the fact that you intended to commit these offences in Ms Willoughby's home and to involve her husband and children; and

- g. your plan to carry one or more knives to the scene to be used in the attack and to be used to murder Ms Willoughby.

53. I do find that there is some mitigation in this case:

- a. Your plan was unlikely to succeed given:
 - i. your physical limitations (in particular your gross obesity and the accompanying health aspects);
 - ii. your lack of a car and a driving licence (although you were taking driving lessons, and having no driving licence would not have prevented you from driving Ms Willoughby's car); and
 - iii. the difficulty you would have had in practice of bringing Ms Willoughby to your own flat undetected, and your lack of any alternative premises in which to keep her, although you had researched various possibilities.
- b. But the essence of your offences was the soliciting of murder by another and the encouraging or assisting of another to kidnap and rape. It is fortunate that you did not succeed in finding others who might have been considerably more physically able than you were at the time of your offending.
- c. You were born on 25 February 1987. You are now 37 years old.
- d. I have borne in mind your background of physical ill health, including increasing struggles with obesity to the point of gross obesity from the age of 13, as well as the social difficulties and physical and mental health issues that have accompanied that.
- e. I have borne in mind that all of your research regarding Ms Willoughby was done online, and that you never went to her house or stalked her in person, although it is clear that you considered and discussed doing so.

54. All three of your offences fall within Schedule 19 of the Sentencing Act 2020. Given all that I know about you having presided over this trial, I do not consider it necessary to have had a pre-sentence report for purposes of assessing whether you are a dangerous offender.

55. I am required, first, to consider whether I must impose a sentence of imprisonment for life given the seriousness of each of these offences. Although the offences of which you have been convicted concern only one woman, it is clear from the evidence, including your prior convictions, that you pose a significant risk to women generally of serious harm occasioned by the commission of sexually-motivated acts of threatened and actual violence. I find that you are dangerous.

56. Having regard to the seriousness of each of your offences individually and together, as well as everything else I know about you, including the facts of your prior convictions for similarly sexually-motivated violent offending against women, I conclude that I must impose on you a sentence of imprisonment for life. It will, in fact, be three concurrent sentences of imprisonment for life.
57. This is not a case of such extreme seriousness that it is necessary to impose a whole life order. Accordingly, I must determine the minimum term that you must serve for each of these offences. If I had been sentencing you to a determinate sentence, taking account of the numerous aggravating and limited mitigating factors in this case, after a trial I would have sentenced you to concurrent sentences of 24 years' imprisonment for each offence. Because you would have served up to two-thirds of that sentence in custody, I fix the minimum term which you will serve at two-thirds of 24 years: that is, 16 years.
58. Finally, I reduce that minimum term of 16 years by the number of days which you have spent on remand in custody: 280 days. This means that the minimum term which you will serve before the Parole Board may consider your possible release is one of 15 years and 85 days.
59. It is most important that you and everyone concerned with this case should understand what this means. The minimum term is not a fixed term after which you will automatically be released but is the term that must be served before the Parole Board can undertake their first review of the case. They will review the risk that you then present and will consider whether you can properly be released from custody subject to licence at that stage and, if so, on what terms.
60. If and when you are released, you will be subject to licence; and this will remain the case for the rest of your life. If for any reason your licence is revoked, you will be recalled to prison to continue to serve your life sentence in custody.
61. It follows that unless and until the Parole Board consider that your release is appropriate, then you will remain in custody, possibly for the rest of your life.
62. In order to protect Ms Willoughby from further harassment, you will be subject to a restraining order prohibiting you from contacting or attempting to contact Ms Willoughby directly or indirectly, including via social media, email, telephone, post, or text message, and prohibiting you from entering an exclusion zone shown in a map attached to the restraining order. The restraining order also prohibits you from attending as an audience member or for any other purpose any television show or other public event that Ms Willoughby is presenting or appearing in or at. This order will last indefinitely.
63. Given that I will be imposing a life sentence for each of your offences, it is not necessary for me to make a sexual harm prevention order against you as the risk that you pose will be adequately managed through the management of your life sentences.

64. I certify that you have been convicted of a sexual offence so that you must for the rest of your life keep the police informed at all times of your personal particulars, the address at which you are living and any alteration in the name you are using. You will be given full details of these requirements on a form at the end of this hearing.
65. The offences of which you have been convicted are ones that will make you subject to barring from working with vulnerable adults. You will be told of the restrictions under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 by the Disclosure and Barring Service.
66. The statutory surcharge provisions apply to this sentence.
67. Gavin Plumb, please stand up.
68. Over a number of years, you pursued an unhealthy sexual obsession with Holly Willoughby that led you ultimately to plan over a number of years to kidnap, rape, and murder her.
69. You researched her home address, her security arrangements, her daily routine, her route to work, and her family. You assembled a restraint kit. You bought what you believed to be chloroform to incapacitate her and her husband. You intended to harm her husband and her children as part of your plan.
70. You attempted to recruit several people to help you. You discussed with Marc and David Nelson, and no doubt with others, in hideous and revolting detail the prolonged sexual violence that you intended to inflict on Ms Willoughby once you had abducted her and had her under your control.
71. You had previously been convicted of terrifying offences involving the threat of sexual violence against four different young women. I found you to be dangerous.
72. You solicited David Nelson to murder Ms Willoughby or to assist you in murdering her. You encouraged Marc and David Nelson to participate in your plan to kidnap and rape Ms Willoughby.
73. The jury saw through the various lies that you told at the trial and convicted you of these offences, for which I now sentence as follows:
 - a. For the offence of soliciting murder, I sentence you to life imprisonment with a minimum term to serve of 15 years and 85 days.
 - b. For the offence of encouraging or assisting the commission of the offence of kidnapping, I sentence you to life imprisonment with a minimum term to serve of 15 years and 85 days.
 - c. For the offence of encouraging or assisting the commission of the offence of rape, I sentence you to life imprisonment with a minimum term to serve of 15 years and 85 days.

74. You may go down.