



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

Croydon Magistrates' Court

5 August 2012

R
-v-
Paul Meehan

Sentencing remarks of District Judge (Magistrates' Court) Karen Hammond

Paul Meehan, you have been found guilty by this court of making a false report to DC Seeley on 6th August 2012 as a result of which, valuable police time, energy and resource were wasted during a crucial time of the investigation into the tragic disappearance of 12-year old Tia Sharp.

The consequences of your false report were to lead police down blind alleys, chasing and checking unnecessary detail but significantly in the context of this investigation, delayed Stuart Hazell's interview by 24 hours.

There is no suggestion you were in league with Stuart Hazell. Equally, there is no suggestion your involvement delayed the finding of Tia's body although I accept that the family believe that and will probably continue to do so.

However, in the context of this offence, the consequences of your false report were significant and substantial.

Those were the practical consequences. The emotional consequences, although not intended by you, would have been nonetheless entirely obvious to anyone. You compounded the false hope that all but Stuart Hazell had that Tia may yet be found and returned home safely. It is not possible to underestimate the impact of finding out your report was false would have had and continues to have on the family and wider community.

The maximum sentence for this offence provided by Parliament is 6 months imprisonment.

Albeit that I am entirely clear there is no suggestion whatsoever you were motivated by malice, still less by any desire to help Stuart Hazell in his defence, it was nonetheless, as I have said, a deliberate falsehood.

I do conclude from the circumstances and from the tone of your texts and emails that you did bask, to some degree, in the attention your disclosure brought you.

It may have been a "silly lie" but it was a lie persisted in for 12 months.

It is hard to imagine a much more serious example of wasting police time. Maximum sentences are reserved for the most serious cases such as I find this to be. I have no doubt that this case is so serious that only a custodial sentence is justified.

I accept that the last 12 months have already been a significant punishment. The impact of this case on you, your health, your family, your employment has been nothing short of catastrophic – but you brought this on yourself.

I have to have regard to the objects of sentencing and I have concluded that the public interest does require me to pass a sentence to punish you for this deliberate falsehood but also, perhaps more importantly, to reduce crime by deterring others who may be tempted down this same path in the future.

I have given anxious thought to whether such a sentence can be suspended the light of your good character, family circumstances, employment record and voluntary work. Sadly, I have to tell you, I have decided it cannot.

I have no doubt too that in the course of your life until this point, you have done far more good than harm. However, you pleaded not guilty and whilst I do not sentence you for that decision, it leaves you without the substantial mitigation which would have been available to you if you had pleaded guilty and avoided a trial at which much of the distressing detail of this appalling case had to be once again retold.

I take account of your good character in the widest sense, the fact that you have never served a custodial sentence and that the experience of custody will impact significantly on you and your family. I also take account that you are unlikely to continue to receive psychological counselling whilst in custody.

However, in my view, the sentence will have to be custodial and it will have to be immediate. In all the circumstances, the least sentence I can impose is 5 months imprisonment. You will serve 10 weeks in custody and 10 weeks in the community.

You may go.