# How hidden spy cameras exposed a surge in UK voyeurism and shattered trust



Heidi Marney's experience in a seemingly inviting environment took a harrowing turn when she discovered that she was being secretly recorded in her temporary home. The incident unfolded in 2019 when Marney, having recently become homeless after a tumultuous relationship, accepted an offer of refuge from Robert Holden, a well-respected local councillor in Sowerby Bridge, West Yorkshire. For the first eleven months, everything appeared to be amicable; Holden provided support during Marney's precarious time. However, as her circumstances evolved, intimate breaches of trust within the home came to light.

The unease Marney initially felt intensified after her aunt, a police officer, prompted her to investigate further. What she uncovered—a covert camera hidden as a sensor in the bathroom—was alarming. This device had reportedly allowed Holden to film multiple women over 15 years, ultimately leading to his conviction and a prison sentence of over six years. The sheer scale of his voyeurism reveals a disturbing pattern of abuse and a gross invasion of privacy that extends beyond just Marney's ordeal.

The revelations surrounding Holden resonate with a broader, unsettling trend in the UK. Recently, the nation has seen a sharp increase in voyeuristic crimes, with reported incidents rising by 24% annually as individuals exploit increasingly sophisticated technology to invade others' privacy. One startling case involved a doctor in Glasgow, who was sentenced to 18 months for using hidden cameras disguised as air fresheners in his Airbnb property, capturing the unsuspecting guests in intimate moments. Such instances underscore not only the misuse of technology but also the significant emotional and psychological burdens borne by victims, many of whom—like Marney—grapple with deep feelings of shame and distrust.

Dr Vicky Lister, a researcher at the University of Kent, highlights the irony of voyeurism being treated as a 'victimless crime.' Her research indicates that the actual number of victims might be grossly understated, driven by societal reluctance to openly discuss the trauma inflicted by such invasions of privacy. A 2020 report revealed that, out of over 10,000 reported voyeuristic acts, fewer than 600 were prosecuted, leading experts to assert that many cases go unpunished, and victims remain unheard. This disconcerting reality aligns with testimonies from survivors who describe ongoing mental health struggles and an ever-present paranoia about their safety.

The psychological ramifications can be profound, leading to the hyper-vigilance exhibited by victims like Fiona, who, upon learning she had been filmed without her consent, has radically altered her behaviour in public spaces, constantly checking for hidden cameras. Linda, another victim, recounted a similar story of discovery, feeling trapped in a reality where her movements were monitored by an abusive partner. "It was like living in a television show," she described, revealing the insidious tactics abusers employ to maintain control over their victims.

Legislative efforts are underway to address these growing concerns. Proposed changes to the Crime and Policing bill aim to categorise the installation of hidden cameras without consent as a criminal offence, but critics argue that the existing legal framework is inadequate. Emma Pickering, from the domestic abuse charity Refuge, emphasizes the urgent need for stricter regulations around surveillance technology, which remains too accessible to potential abusers. Current devices are marketed innocuously, often disguised as everyday household items.

Marney’s plea for more rigorous laws encapsulates the sentiments of many victims: "How are those cameras even legal? The potential for abuse is so huge and obvious." The call for change is echoed throughout society, instilling a sense of urgency for action and greater awareness about the implications of technological advancements on personal privacy.

In a landscape where feelings of safety are diminished by the lurking possibility of surveillance, women are left grappling not just with the aftermath of their experiences but also with the anxiety of a world that offers them little assurance of protection from such violations. As the government contemplates new legislation, survivor narratives must remain at the forefront of discussion, urging for a future where personal privacy is not merely an ideal but a protected right.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/27/secret-spy-cameras-voyeurism-uk), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/sep/27/ex-councillor-jailed-voyeurism-hidden-cameras-west-yorkshire)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/27/secret-spy-cameras-voyeurism-uk), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/airbnb-crown-office-police-scotland-b1226590.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1d56n4gyqeo), [[6]](https://www.derbyshire.police.uk/news/derbyshire/news/news/north/2025/april/man-who-set-up-hidden-camera-to-spy-on-victim-jailed/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c6p2rvxz3v6o), [[6]](https://www.derbyshire.police.uk/news/derbyshire/news/news/north/2025/april/man-who-set-up-hidden-camera-to-spy-on-victim-jailed/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[7]](https://www.northantslive.news/news/northamptonshire-news/kettering-pervert-used-hidden-cameras-8387834)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/27/secret-spy-cameras-voyeurism-uk), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/sep/27/ex-councillor-jailed-voyeurism-hidden-cameras-west-yorkshire)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/27/secret-spy-cameras-voyeurism-uk), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/airbnb-crown-office-police-scotland-b1226590.html), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c6p2rvxz3v6o)
* Paragraph 8 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1d56n4gyqeo), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/airbnb-crown-office-police-scotland-b1226590.html)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/27/secret-spy-cameras-voyeurism-uk)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/27/secret-spy-cameras-voyeurism-uk> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/sep/27/ex-councillor-jailed-voyeurism-hidden-cameras-west-yorkshire> - In September 2024, Robert Holden, a former councillor from West Yorkshire, was sentenced to six years and two months in prison for secretly filming 28 women over nearly 15 years. The recordings, which included intimate moments such as showering and undressing, were discovered after a woman found a recording device in a bedroom. Holden's actions were described as 'voyeurism on a vast scale,' and the case highlighted the severe impact on the victims, many of whom felt violated and mortified. The judge emphasized the breach of trust and the extensive duration of the offences.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1d56n4gyqeo> - In October 2024, Simon Garnett from Leamington Spa was jailed for 15 months after being convicted of eight counts of voyeurism. The offences came to light when a guest discovered a hidden camera in a clock radio while showering at Garnett's home. Further investigation revealed multiple victims, all of whom were friends of Garnett. The case underscored the breach of trust and the invasive nature of such crimes, with police describing the offences as 'appalling'.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/airbnb-crown-office-police-scotland-b1226590.html> - In April 2025, Dr Ju Young Um, a Glasgow-based anaesthetist, was sentenced to 18 months in prison for installing hidden cameras in air fresheners within his property rented out on Airbnb. Over a three-year period, he secretly recorded more than 24 individuals. The case highlighted the misuse of technology for voyeuristic purposes and the violation of privacy in private spaces. Dr Um was also placed on the sex offenders register for 10 years.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c6p2rvxz3v6o> - In September 2024, James Denholm, a 34-year-old electrician from Aberdeen, was jailed for two years and eight months after admitting to secretly filming women in their bedrooms and bathrooms over a decade. The offences were discovered when a woman found a recording device under her bed. Denholm's actions were described as 'disgusting' by one of the victims, and the case highlighted the breach of trust and privacy in domestic settings.
6. <https://www.derbyshire.police.uk/news/derbyshire/news/news/north/2025/april/man-who-set-up-hidden-camera-to-spy-on-victim-jailed/> - In April 2025, Jonathan Clark, 59, from South Normanton, was sentenced to two years in prison after admitting to concealing a camera in a clock and charging station to spy on a victim. The hidden device recorded footage without the victim's knowledge. Clark also had indecent images of children on his devices. The case underscored the misuse of technology for voyeuristic purposes and the severe impact on victims' privacy.
7. <https://www.northantslive.news/news/northamptonshire-news/kettering-pervert-used-hidden-cameras-8387834> - In December 2024, Antony Daniel Easton, 41, from Kettering, was sentenced to 15 months in prison after admitting to using hidden cameras to film children in a friend's bedroom and bathroom. Easton had gained the family's trust before planting the devices for his own gratification. The case highlighted the dangers of hidden cameras and the importance of vigilance in private spaces to protect against such violations.