

Priti Patel publishes new strategy to protect children from sexual abuse

The Home Secretary has today published a first-of-its-kind national strategy to protect children from all forms of child sexual abuse.

The Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy sets out how the Government will use new legislation and enhanced technology to stop offenders in their tracks.

This includes investing in the UK's world-leading Child Abuse Image Database to identify and catch more offenders quicker – for example, by using new tools to speed up police investigations and protecting officers' wellbeing by avoiding them being repeatedly exposed to indecent images.

The Home Office will make it easier for parents and carers to ask the police if someone has a criminal record for child sexual offences as the department commits to a review of Sarah's Law.

These measures are on top of civil orders to stop reoffending and introducing stronger sentencing so that serious violent and sexual offenders remain in prison for longer.

The government will support local areas to improve their response to exploitation with funding for The Children's Society's Prevention Programme initiative, and will introduce the ground-breaking Online Safety Bill to ensure that technology companies are held to account for harmful content on their sites, and do not compromise on children's safety.

The publication comes as new Home Office research estimates that the social and economic cost of the crime over the victims' lifetimes was at least a staggering £10 billion for the victims who experienced child sexual abuse in the year ending March 2019, with the full emotional cost being immeasurable.

The strategy also aims to improve the data that is available on offenders following the publication of the paper on the characteristics of group-based offending which found that it was difficult to draw conclusions about the ethnicity of offenders as existing research is limited and data collection is poor.

This commitment includes working with local authorities to understand and respond to threats within their communities and collecting higher quality data on offenders so that the government can build a fuller picture on the characteristics of perpetrators and help tackle the abuse that has blighted many towns and cities in England.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse have told me how they feel let down by the state. I am determined to put this right.

This first-of-its-kind national Strategy will tackle and respond to all forms of child sexual abuse, relentlessly going after abusers, whilst better protecting victims and survivors.

Crucially, it contains a commitment to collect higher quality data on the characteristics of offenders, so that the government can build a fuller picture of perpetrators, and tackle the abuse that has blighted many towns and cities across our country.

The group-based offending paper demonstrates how difficult it has been to draw conclusions about the characteristics of offenders. That is why the government's forthcoming Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy will commit to improving our understanding of child sexual abuse – including around ethnicity.

This will enable us to better understand any community and cultural factors relevant to tackling offending – helping us to safeguard children from abuse, deliver justice for victims and survivors, and restore the public's confidence in the criminal justice system's ability to confront this issue.

The Strategy drives action across every part of government, across all agencies, all sectors, charities, communities, technology companies and society more widely to stop abusers and place victims and survivors at the centre of the approach.

Rob Jones, NCA Director of Threat Leadership, said:

The NCA welcomes this strategy at a time when the threat to children is more severe than it has ever been. Last year, we released an assessment that there are at least 300,000 people posing a sexual threat to children in the UK.

The NCA in partnership with UK policing will continue to drive the investigation and arrest of offenders. Joint working led to 4,760 arrests and over 6,500 children being safeguarded in just six months. Many offenders feel they can operate with impunity online, but as we have shown we have enhanced our capabilities and remain committed to tracking them down.

These are not just images or videos being viewed online. What we are uncovering here is evidence of the horrific, real-world sexual abuse of children. It's really important that connection is not lost or diluted.

The government remains at the forefront of international efforts combat CSA, working with partners overseas to strengthen child protection systems in countries where children are particularly at risk, and clamp down in individuals who travel abroad to rape and abuse children.

In addition to the ground-breaking Online Safety Bill that will tackle online

harms, the government has also asked GCHQ to work with the tech industry, to identify and develop solutions to crack down on large scale online child sexual abuse.

GCHQ's Director of Serious and Organised Crime said:

GCHQ will continue to bring its unique cyber and intelligence capabilities to bear alongside its technological expertise as part of this cross-government effort to protect families from these awful crimes.

Our work to tackle systemic internet problems, the insight we provide into offender behaviour and our efforts alongside law enforcement to identify and pursue the worst offenders will help to ensure there is no safe space online for these people to operate.

As part of the publication, the Safeguarding Minister virtually visited the NSPCC on Thursday and spoke to staff in Sheffield and Camden about their Letting the Future In service which uses therapeutic art and play to help children move on from abuse and recover with the support of parents and families.

Safeguarding Minister Victoria Atkins said:

Children across the country and beyond, continue to be subjected to horrific sexual abuse which has a devastating impact on their lives.

The public expects the government to do all it can to prevent child sexual abuse, particularly during this difficult period, and we are delivering on this promise by publishing our Strategy.

The publication demonstrates that, as a government, we are committed to tackling this crime on all fronts and will leave no stone unturned to prevent and pursue offenders, and will protect children and young people.

Susie Hargreaves OBE, Chief Executive of the Internet Watch Foundation, said:

We welcome the government's focus on tackling child sexual abuse and exploitation, particularly online.

We have seen increases in online child sexual abuse material coinciding with more people spending longer at home on the internet – due in part to the Coronavirus pandemic. In 2020, we removed more criminal videos and images of children than ever before.

It is important that we not only look at the online element of these crimes but the impact that it also has on communities. At the

IWF, we are committed to working with the government, industry and the third sector to play our part in removing child sexual abuse material from the internet. We welcome the strategy's focus on the importance of safeguarding children from sexual abuse whether that be online or offline.

Project Servator launches at CNC Dungeness – Together, we've got it covered

Project Servator aims to disrupt a range of criminal activity, including terrorism, while providing a reassuring presence for the public. Our officers are experienced and specially trained to spot the tell-tale signs that someone is planning or preparing to commit an illegal act.

We believe that 'Together, we've got it covered', so we work with other police forces, local businesses and the public to protect the Dungeness site and the surrounding area and everyone who lives, works or visits here and to make it a difficult place for terrorists and other criminals to operate. Project Servator has been successful in gathering intelligence that has assisted Counter Terrorism Units across the UK in investigating and preventing acts of terror.

Project Servator's patrols are highly visible and can happen at any time and in any location. Officers will talk to the public and local businesses to let them know what they're doing and remind them to be vigilant, trust their instincts and report any suspicious or unusual behaviour.

Supt Donna Jones, Project Servator lead across the CNC, said: "As a national armed police force charged with protecting civil nuclear sites and materials, counter terrorism and keeping the public safe is at the heart of what we do. We are deploying these additional tactics to further complement the operational activity that exists in and around our Operational Policing Units.

"Project Servator tactics are not new but allow us to have a focus on community engagement and encourage people to be our extra eyes and ears. This is not restricted to the Dungeness site but also extends to the surrounding area. We are aware of the vast amount of information members of our community have and they know if something doesn't feel right in their area. All we ask is that they report any suspicions to us and we'll do the rest.

"Remember, trust your instincts and report any suspicious activity directly to the CNC by calling 03303 138146."

The CNC is the armed police force in charge of protecting civil nuclear sites and nuclear materials in England, Scotland and Wales. We employ over 1,500 highly trained police officers and police staff across the UK. Counter terrorism is a major part of our policing.

We have our own Twitter, Facebook and Instagram page, so keep up to date with recruitment information, Servator deployments or anything CNC by searching for us and giving us a follow. You can also find out about recruitment opportunities at our [CNC Jobs website](#)

Taskforce sets goal to end pollution from storm overflows

A joint industry-government group established last year to tackle river pollution has today (22 January) agreed a new objective to prevent damage from storm overflows.

The Storm Overflows Taskforce – made up of Defra, the Environment Agency, Ofwat, Consumer Council for Water, Blueprint for Water and Water UK – has agreed to set a long term goal to eliminate harm from storm overflows. Following recommendations from the Taskforce, water companies will also increase transparency around when and how storm overflows are used. Storm overflows were designed to be used during extreme weather to prevent sewers becoming overloaded with a combination of sewage and rainwater, releasing diluted wastewater into rivers rather than letting it back up into people's homes. However climate change has led to increased rainfall and water infrastructure has not kept pace with development growth over decades.

Water companies have agreed to make real-time data on sewage discharges available at bathing sites all year round, meaning surfers, swimmers and other water users can check the latest information – especially after heavy rainfall. Water companies will also accelerate work to install monitoring devices to create a complete picture of their activity by 2023.

In addition, the Taskforce has agreed with water companies that they will publish annual monitoring data on their websites about their use of storm overflows so that progress in reducing their use can be tracked. The Environment Agency will compile this data into an annual report that is easily accessible to the public.

The Taskforce update comes as the Government confirms it is also working with Philip Dunne MP on our shared ambitions to tackle sewage pollution in our rivers.

The Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill, introduced by Mr Dunne to Parliament last year, has raised awareness of a number of issues associated with storm

overflows. The Government has committed to continuing to work with Mr Dunne on the best way to make progress in reducing the harm caused by sewage spilling into our rivers.

Since 2010, 884 storm overflows have been improved to reduce their environmental impact and frequency of operation, with a further 798 improvements planned for the period 2020 – 2025.

Philip Dunne, MP for Ludlow, said:

“I have been shocked to discover the extent of sewage routinely spilled in our rivers. Poor water quality has a very damaging impact on aquatic species which depend on clean rivers, and risks healthy enjoyment of our rivers by the public.

“I am really pleased this Government has recognised that this has got to change. I am delighted the Minister has responded so quickly to Covid restrictions interrupting progress of my Private Members Bill by agreeing to work with me to develop measures to improve water quality across England.”

The Storm Overflows Taskforce was set up in August 2020 to bring together water companies, regulators and environmental NGOs to accelerate progress in this area, building on work already underway to improve our rivers and waterways.

Its work covers a series of short, medium and long-term actions focused on the goal to eliminate harm from storm overflows – a generational endeavour that will involve significant change and take time to achieve.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

“Making sure we have clean rivers is an absolute priority and I have been clear that I want to cut down on the water sector’s reliance on storm overflows.

“The Storm Overflows Taskforce, established last year, is working urgently on options to tackle this issue, which demonstrates a collective commitment for change in this critical area.

“Our ambitious Environment Bill already sets out how we will tackle various sources of water pollution. I look forward to working with Philip Dunne and others on how we can accelerate progress in this area.”

The Environment Bill will place a statutory requirement on water companies to produce drainage and sewerage management plans to help deliver more of the actions needed to address the risks sewerage assets may pose to the environment.

It is the responsibility of water companies to ensure serious water pollution incidents do not occur, and they have committed to a significant programme of improvements to the monitoring and management of storm overflows over the next five years at a cost of around £1.1 billion.

As a result of the work of the Taskforce, water companies have identified opportunities to increase the number of overflows they will improve over the next five years.

Work will continue to consider how the guidance given by the Secretary of State to the regulator Ofwat can best reflect the importance of water quality in water companies' activities.

Emma Howard Boyd, chair of the Environment Agency, said:

"Publishing easily accessible data is an important step to reversing the overuse of storm overflows, but disclosure is only ever the beginning. People want to see progress.

"Water quality in England's 240,631 kilometres of river is everyone's responsibility but water companies have a pivotal role in helping the whole country make the necessary big changes. We look forward to working with them, as well as government and MPs, to turn today's ambition into action."

John Russell, Senior Director at Ofwat said:

"The work of the Storm Overflows Taskforce will play a crucial role in protecting precious parts of our ecosystem.

"We are committed to working with Government, regulators and the water industry to meet this challenge and ensure that we leave our rivers in a healthier condition for current and future generations."

Emma Clancy, Chief Executive of CCW, said:

"Increasing transparency around the use of storm overflows is a welcome step but consumers will expect it to result in urgent action where pollution is jeopardising the health of our inland waters and the nature and people that enjoy or depend on them."

"Radical change to a complex sewer system will take time to deliver but water companies should now be looking to prioritise improvements in rivers and streams where the damage caused by the over dependence on storm overflows is already acute."

Christine McGourty, Water UK Chief Executive, said:

"Water companies are passionate about protecting and enhancing our nation's rivers, and over the next five years we will invest £1.1bn in improving storm overflows as part of our £5bn environment programme. Storm Christoph demonstrates how important overflows are in ensuring that sewers don't flood at times of very heavy rainfall. Today's announcement will help ensure that we can continue protecting people's homes and businesses whatever the weather.

"We look forward to continuing the close collaboration with Government and other partners to help enhance the health of rivers even further, for the benefit of our customers, communities and the environment."

Statement from the Environment Secretary on flooding

Government response

The Environment Secretary George Eustice chaired a COBR meeting on the response to Storm Christoph this evening.



Speaking after chairing a COBR on the ongoing response to Storm Christoph, Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

I want to echo the Prime Minister's thanks to the Environment Agency and emergency services for the huge amount of work they've done to protect over 26,000 homes and properties from flooding, keeping families and communities safe.

However, the danger has not passed. The water levels remain high and there is the risk of possible further flooding next week so everyone needs to remain vigilant, follow the advice and sign up for flood alerts.

This Government is committed to tackling the risk of flooding and we will continue to push on with our £5.2 billion programme of investment in flood and coastal defences to protect 336,000 properties over the next five years.

Find out if you're at risk of flooding in [England](#)

Sign up for flood [warnings](#)

Get help during a [flood](#)

What to do after a [flood](#)

Call between COP26 President Designate Alok Sharma and US Special Presidential Climate Envoy John Kerry

Press release

COP26 President Designate Alok Sharma and US Special Presidential Climate Envoy John Kerry spoke today, on Secretary Kerry's first full day in his new role.



COP26 President Designate Alok Sharma and US Special Presidential Climate Envoy John Kerry spoke today, on Secretary Kerry's first full day in his new role.

Mr Sharma congratulated Secretary Kerry on bringing the US back to the Paris Agreement yesterday, noting the great importance of the accord being fully universal again.

They agreed that there is no time to waste on tackling climate change. They noted that our two countries are once again tightly aligned in prioritising this shared challenge and will work together to raise global efforts ahead of COP26 in November.

Mr Sharma said that, as hosts of COP26, the UK had sent a clear message to the world in setting an ambitious new Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in December and that he looked forward to seeing the US's own ambitious NDC in the coming months.

Mr Sharma and Secretary Kerry agreed on the particular importance of international climate finance, and for both the UK and the US to work closely with countries who are especially vulnerable to climate change. They also

noted the encouraging growth in the shift to renewable energy across the world.

The pair agreed that their respective officials should work together closely. They looked forward to speaking regularly in the run up to G7 and COP26, and to meeting in person at the soonest possibility.

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