

Press release: Greater protection for rape victims and children at risk of grooming

- Victims of sex crimes will soon be able to have their cross-examination pre-recorded before trial
- Rollout of the scheme to be fast-tracked and will now begin in September
- New offence of sexual communication with a child will also be introduced
- Groomers face up to two years in prison and will be automatically placed on the sex offenders register

New measures that will spare rape victims the trauma and inconvenience of attending court hearings will be rolled out across the country from September.

Victims of rape and other sex crimes will have their cross examination evidence pre-recorded and played during the trial.

Originally the rollout was not due to begin until next year but will now start in September after Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss and senior judges agreed to accelerate the scheme.

Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss said:

Attitudes to sex crimes and victims have changed beyond all recognition in our lifetime, and rape prosecutions are now at record levels.

With more victims now finding the confidence to come forward, I am determined to make their path to justice swifter and less traumatic.

This will not reduce the right to a fair trial, but will make sure victims of these abhorrent crimes are protected and able provide their best possible evidence.

Work to rollout pre-recorded evidence for child victims of sexual offences has already begun. That followed a successful pilot that showed child victims felt less pressure giving pre-trial evidence and were better able to recall events.

This led to more early guilty pleas, fewer cracked trials and victims reporting a more positive experience of the court process.

The law already includes protections to ensure that questions – including previous sexual history – can be deemed inadmissible. The rollout of pre-recorded evidence offers further protection, as questions can be edited out

of the recording if barristers flout these rules.

The move comes ahead of the Second Reading of [the Prisons and Courts Bill](#) tomorrow (20 March 2017) which included additional measures to protect vulnerable witnesses.

In criminal courts the Bill paves the way for more virtual hearings which means more vulnerable victims can give evidence away from the court room and without having to meet their attacker face to face.

While in family proceedings the government will give courts the power to ban the appalling practice of letting domestic violence abusers interrogate their victim in court. The Bill will bring family courts into line with criminal courts, which have had the power to stop this for some years.

The Justice Secretary also announced today that she is acting to bring in a new offence of sexual communication with a child, with adult groomers facing up to two years in prison and being automatically placed on the sex offenders register.

The new offence will come into effect on 3 April 2017, and will cover both online and offline communication, including through social media, e-mail, and letters.

Ms Truss said:

In a world of mobile phones and social media, our children are ever more vulnerable to those who prey on their innocence and exploit their trust.

This new offence will help to us tackle the early stages of grooming, and nip in the bud those targeting children online or through text messages. My message is clear – any sexual communication with a child could see you behind bars.

1. The three Section 28 pilot schemes for children and adults with a mental or physical disorder took place in Liverpool, Leeds and Kingston-upon-Thames crown courts.
2. Rape prosecutions are at record levels. Recent statistics show that:
 - Rape prosecutions rose to 3,900 in 2015 – up 9% since 2014, up 36% since 2005, and the highest number prosecuted in the last decade.
 - The number of rape convictions reached 1,300 in 2015 – up 11% since 2014, up 63% since 2005, and the highest number convicted in the last decade.
 - Average sentences for rape also rose by over three years since 2005, reaching 117.9 months in 2015.
3. On 3 April 2017 we are bringing into force section 67 of the Serious Crime Act 2015. It will be a criminal offence for anyone aged 18 or over to intentionally communicate with a child under 16, where the person acts for a sexual purpose and the communication is sexual or intended to elicit a sexual response. The offence applies to online and offline

communication, including social media, e-mail, texts, letters, etc.

4. There are a range of offences already available to deal with sexual communication, depending on the circumstances, but many do not automatically attract sex offender registration. The Justice Secretary made enacting this clause a priority and has acted decisively to ensure children are protected from online grooming.

V.O.Chidambaranar Port Handles Record Traffic of 36.91 Million Tonnes

V. O. Chidambaranar Port, has crossed the previous financial year's traffic of 36.85 million tonnes on 17.03.2017, 14 days ahead of the completion of the current financial year.

Yunnan police seize 4 tonnes of drugs over past 5 years

Police in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture in southwest China's Yunnan Province have busted 39 major cross-border drug-trafficking cases and seized a total of four tonnes of drugs over the past five years.

Local police cracked 14 cross-border drug-trafficking rings and arrested 127 drug dealers, the public security bureau of the prefecture announced on Friday.

Xishuangbanna police have established good relationship with parties, governments and armed forces from neighboring countries, which contributed to the achievements.

Xishuangbanna, located in the south of Yunnan, is one of the Chinese border regions most affected by drug use, due to its proximity to the opium-growing Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia.

[Hong Kong's pandas say goodbye to public in mating season](#)

In anticipation of the upcoming mating season of female giant panda Ying Ying and male giant panda Le Le, Giant Panda Adventure (GPA) of the Hong Kong Ocean Park is temporarily closed from Saturday until further notice, the park announced.

Suzanne Gendron, Executive Director of Zoological Operations and Education of the park, said both pandas have recently displayed oestrus behaviors such as water play and vocalizations by Ying Ying, whilst Le Le has shown increased sniffing of Ying Ying's scent.

In terms of physical and hormonal changes, the park's veterinary team and giant panda experts from the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda in Wolong confirmed that the two giant pandas are entering this year's breeding season, which, Gendron said, is considered an appropriate timing for the experts to prepare for Ying Ying's and Le Le's breeding season this year and temporarily close GPA.

This year, the closure period of GPA where Ying Ying and Le Le reside will be longer than previous years so that expert teams from Ocean Park and Wolong will be able to closely manage and monitor the pair's breeding behaviour from the moment they exhibit early signs of breeding to the time they hit the peak of their breeding cycle.

The gestation period for giant pandas can last from 72 to 324 days and pregnancy confirmation can only be detected by ultrasound scan earliest 14 days before birth.

Ying Ying and Le Le, who experienced their first mating season in 2011, are turning 12 years old this August.

GPA will be reopened to the public after Ying Ying successfully gives birth to a panda cub, or after she is confirmed non-pregnant, according to the park.

The Ocean Park, founded in 1977, is Hong Kong's unique home grown theme park and has gained recognition for its animal husbandry, research and relationship with the community.

[Press release: One Year as Secretary](#)

of State for Wales

Exactly one year ago today (19 March), Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns took his seat at the Cabinet table and outlined his ambitions to create a nation which is more ambitious, confident and more outward looking than ever before.

Since then, the Welsh Secretary has overseen a number of key achievements, including:

Wales Act 2017

The Wales Bill received Royal Assent in January 2017, setting in stone a strong package of powers for Assembly members with stability and accountability at its heart.

Fiscal Framework

A new fiscal framework setting out how the Welsh Government will be funded following the devolution of some taxes represents a significant milestone for Wales. The deal provides secure long-term funding for the Welsh Government and gives Cardiff Bay greater visibility when looking at spending decisions.

Severn Tolls

We have announced proposals to see the prices paid at the Severn Tolls for all vehicles halved following the return to public ownership in 2018.

Mobile coverage

Tackling mobile not-spots was an issue highlighted as a priority when Mr Cairns took office with the message that Wales couldn't be left behind the rest of the UK. In January the UK Government and Ofcom hosted a summit to find a solution and commitments were made to improve the situation.

Business support

Over 80 companies joined the Welsh Secretary in Cardiff at the inaugural Wales Business Export Summit in March this year. The event connected firms starting out on exporting journeys with the expertise and support of the UK Government.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

Over the last 12 months I have had the privilege of experiencing the very best of this country – connecting with every corner of Wales, its culture, its history and its people.

The goals we have achieved take us one step closer to achieving

this Government's mission to build a country that works for everyone.

But there is still work to be done. As we prepare to live through one of the most important moments in our country's history, I will not waste a second in getting on with the job. I will provide the leadership to make sure that Wales is in the strongest possible position to prosper when we leave the European Union, to support jobs and growth and to make sure that the UK Government continues to deliver for the people of Wales.