

Press release: Home Secretary gives £20 million boost to tackle online grooming

The funding follows a successful regional pilot, led by Norfolk police, which saw dedicated officers operating online in forums and chatrooms, to identify and disrupt offenders.

The year-long pilot led to 43 arrests and 19 people charged, nine of whom were identified as repeat offenders and 11 of those arrested were registered sex offenders. Police estimate that at least 25 children were safeguarded because of their intervention. Among those charged was a male, who travelled from the south coast to London with the intention of raping a 8-year-old girl. He was arrested and charged through the work of the pilot and sentenced to over 5 years' imprisonment.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

Child sexual exploitation has a profoundly devastating impact on the lives of its victims, and it's a national policing priority to take on the threat it poses. We believe this project has shown early promise in tackling these complex crimes through an innovative approach.

Crime as traditionally measured by the independent crime survey for England and Wales is down by more than a third since 2010. However, we know that the nature of crime is changing, and through projects such as this we can help the police to adapt and develop the tools they need to respond to the challenges of the future.

The project will now be rolled out across the country and forms part of a renewed effort to tackle child sexual exploitation and increase protection for vulnerable people in society. This will allow police to build a greater intelligence picture and develop a coordinated approach across the law enforcement network.

National Police Chiefs Council Lead for Child Protection, Chief Constable Simon Bailey said:

The internet is not a safe or anonymous place for abusing children. In collaboration with the National Crime Agency Child Exploitation and Online Protection command, the police service is doing more than ever before to stop the sexual abuse of children.

We are already arresting over 400 offenders and safeguarding over 500 children each month. This increased investment will enable us

to consistently target predatory offenders intent on using the internet to facilitate their criminal behaviour and intervene earlier to prevent children being abused.

This increase in our undercover capability will send a clear message to so-called paedophile hunters: if you have information about child abuse, tell the police. Don't try to take it into your own hands, you could undermine police investigations creating more risk for the children we all want to protect.

If any member of the public has concerns about online grooming, they should report them to their local police, to CEOP at www.ceop.police.uk, or to Crimestoppers. If you think a child is at immediate risk of harm call 999.

The funding is part of £52 million awarded by the Home Secretary from the police transformation fund, which through a police-led process, allocates extra investment to continue the job of reform and shape policing for the future. As well as tackling child sexual exploitation, the funding is focused on greater digitisation and efficiency across policing, making more than £24 million available over three years to help increase productivity and to enhance cyber security. Some of the police-led projects funded include:

- up to £12.4 million for the digital policing programme, including the Digital Evidence Transfer Service. This is designed to allow forces to rapidly transmit the increasing body of digital evidence across the criminal justice system.
- up to £10.5 million for national enabling programmes to deliver a joined up approach to flexible IT access and back office software.
- £3 million for the specialist capabilities programme, which will examine the potential of greater force-to-force collaboration across specialist policing capabilities.