

World-leading measures to protect children from accessing pornography online

- Online Safety Bill will force pornography websites to prevent underage access including by using age verification technologies
- New measure goes further than the bill's existing protections by bringing all websites offering pornography online into scope
- Children will be better protected from online pornography under new measures to bring all websites that display it into scope of the government's pioneering new internet safety laws.

On Safer Internet Day, Digital Minister Chris Philp is announcing the Online Safety Bill will be significantly strengthened with a new legal duty requiring all sites that publish pornography to put robust checks in place to ensure their users are 18 years old or over.

This could include adults using secure age verification technology to verify that they possess a credit card and are over 18 or having a third-party service confirm their age against government data.

If sites fail to act, the independent regulator Ofcom will be able fine them up to 10 per cent of their annual worldwide turnover or can block them from being accessible in the UK. Bosses of these websites could also be held criminally liable if they fail to cooperate with Ofcom.

A large amount of pornography is available online with little or no protections to ensure that those accessing it are old enough to do so. There are widespread concerns this is impacting the way young people understand healthy relationships, sex and consent. Half of parents worry that online pornography is giving their kids an unrealistic view of sex and more than half of mums fear it gives their kids a poor portrayal of women.

Age verification controls are one of the technologies websites may use to prove to Ofcom that they can fulfil their duty of care and prevent children accessing pornography.

Digital Minister Chris Philp said:

It is too easy for children to access pornography online. Parents deserve peace of mind that their children are protected online from seeing things no child should see.

We are now strengthening the Online Safety Bill so it applies to all porn sites to ensure we achieve our aim of making the internet a safer place for children.

Many sites where children are likely to be exposed to pornography are already in scope of the draft Online Safety Bill, including the most popular pornography sites as well as social media, video-sharing platforms and search engines. But as drafted, only commercial porn sites that allow user-generated content – such as videos uploaded by users – are in scope of the bill.

The new standalone provision ministers are adding to the proposed legislation will require providers who publish or place pornographic content on their services to prevent children from accessing that content. This will capture commercial providers of pornography as well as the sites that allow user-generated content. Any companies which run such a pornography site which is accessible to people in the UK will be subject to the same strict enforcement measures as other in-scope services.

The Online Safety Bill will deliver more comprehensive protections for children online than the Digital Economy Act by going further and protecting children from a broader range of harmful content on a wider range of services. The Digital Economy Act did not cover social media companies, where a considerable quantity of pornographic material is accessible, and which research suggests children use to access pornography.

The government is working closely with Ofcom to ensure that online services' new duties come into force as soon as possible following the short implementation period that will be necessary after the bill's passage.

The onus will be on the companies themselves to decide how to comply with their new legal duty. Ofcom may recommend the use of a growing range of age verification technologies available for companies to use that minimise the handling of users' data. The bill does not mandate the use of specific solutions as it is vital that it is flexible to allow for innovation and the development and use of more effective technology in the future.

Age verification technologies do not require a full identity check. Users may need to verify their age using identity documents but the measures companies put in place should not process or store data that is irrelevant to the purpose of checking age. Solutions that are currently available include checking a user's age against details that their mobile provider holds, verifying via a credit card check, and other database checks including government held data such as passport data.

Any age verification technologies used must be secure, effective and privacy-preserving. All companies that use or build this technology will be required to adhere to the UK's strong data protection regulations or face enforcement action from the Information Commissioner's Office.

Online age verification is increasingly common practice in other online sectors, including online gambling and age-restricted sales. In addition, the

government is working with industry to develop robust standards for companies to follow when using age assurance tech, which it expects Ofcom to use to oversee the online safety regime.

ENDS

Key research and statistics:

Research by the British Board of Film Classification 'Young People, Pornography and Age Verification' in 2020 found:

51% of children aged 11-13 years old have seen pornography and this number is likely conservative.

Many children – some as young as 7 years old – stumble upon pornography online, with 61% of 11-13 year olds describing their viewing as mostly unintentional.

Research published by City University, in a survey of a representative sample of over 1,000 16 and 17 year olds found:

That more of them (63%) had seen pornography on social media platforms than on pornographic web sites (47%).

That while pornography was more likely to be seen on social media platforms, it was more frequently viewed on pornographic websites.

A 2021 poll of more than 2,100 UK adults commissioned by the Christian charity CARE, found:

81% of UK adults agree with the statement: 'The government should implement age verification to protect children from all online pornography'.

79.5% of UK adults agree with the statement: 'There should be an age limit of 18 years for access to online pornography'.

The 2019 research report We Need to Talk About Pornography from the charity Internet Matters finds that:

Nearly half (48%) of parents worry that online pornography gives their kids "improper sex education" and an unrealistic view of normal sex.

Over a third (34%) of parents are concerned their child will become desensitised to brutal or violent content.

53% of mums fear that exposure to pornography will give their kids a poor portrayal of women as subjects of abuse.

Notes to editors:

Since the publication of the draft Bill in May 2021 and following the final report of the Joint Committee in December, the government has listened

carefully to the feedback on children's access to online pornography, in particular stakeholder concerns about pornography on online services not in scope of the bill.

To avoid regulatory duplication, video-on-demand services which fall under Part 4A of the Communications Act will be exempt from the scope of the new provision. These providers are already required under section 368E of the Communications Act to take proportionate measures to ensure children are not normally able to access pornographic content.

The new duty will not capture user-to-user content or search results presented on a search service, as the draft Online Safety Bill already regulates these. Providers of regulated user-to-user services which also carry published (i.e. non user-generated) pornographic content would be subject to both the existing provisions in the draft Bill and the new proposed duty.

Improvements seen in children and young people's wellbeing

Thousands of children and young people in England are benefitting from support for their mental health and wellbeing in education, as new research shows an improving picture in their recovery from the pandemic.

The Department for Education has today (8 February) published its third annual [State of the Nation report](#), providing an in-depth picture of the experiences of children and young people aged 5 to 24 throughout the pandemic during the 2020/21 academic year.

To mark Children's Mental Health Week, the report shows children and young people's wellbeing is gradually improving, despite the challenges that remain.

There is a link between regular attendance at school and college and positive wellbeing across all groups of children and young people, highlighting the positive impact of face-to-face learning.

For the first time it also provides data on their views about wider society and their futures, including their worries about staying safe online.

The new report comes as nearly 400 mental health support teams will be accessible to almost three million school and college pupils in England by 2023, surpassing the commitment made in the 2017 Mental Health Green Paper.

More than 8,000 eligible schools and colleges have applied for a senior mental health lead training grant since applications opened, with an

additional £3 million to be provided to extend this training to more schools and colleges given high demand, so that everyone eligible who wishes to access training before the end of May will be able to.

Children and Families Minister, Will Quince said:

The resilience of children and young people should never be underestimated. Though they have coped remarkably well over the last few years, this report once again highlights that school is often the very best place for their education and wellbeing.

These two things must go hand in hand, which is exactly why we are investing so significantly in mental health services, both by improving access to NHS services and by making tailored support available in schools and colleges, with training for staff to confidently deliver this.

I'm encouraged to see so many schools and colleges taking up this training and am grateful to them for the critical work they do to support their students' wellbeing. It's important that we use this report to reflect the experiences of children and young people in everything we do – whether it's boosting mental health support in schools, our work to improve nutrition, or making the internet a safer place for children to spend time.

Funding for the online platform [Student Space](#), led by Student Minds, will also be extended to July 2022 to support university students' mental health and wellbeing in England and Wales. Since August 2020, it has helped many young people navigate their studies through the challenges created by the pandemic.

Minister for Higher and Further Education, Michelle Donelan said:

University is without doubt an unforgettable experience but even at the best of times it is not without its challenges. Throughout the pandemic, protecting students' mental health and wellbeing has therefore been of the utmost importance to me.

As the country begins the transition from pandemic to endemic, it is vital that students get the support they need. That is why I am pleased the Office for Students will be providing funding for the extension of the Student Space platform through to the end of this academic year.

The Government has also announced additional funding worth £11 million for its Reducing Parental Conflict programme, which funds councils across England to create bespoke relationship support for parents in their communities, helping to improve mental health and wellbeing.

The funding will help develop innovative new projects that target children and parents most in need or continue successful existing projects. It comes as the State of the Nation report found that while the majority of young people had a good relationship with their family on average, children who indicated they had a poorer relationship with their parents were more likely to have a mental health problem.

The new funding can be used by councils to train frontline staff working closely with families in sectors such as policing, schooling, health and social care, so they know how to spot parental conflict and can step in to support parents and ensure children do not suffer as a consequence. It builds on £47 million already allocated to the programme which has supported thousands of families since launching in 2018.

DWP Lords Minister Baroness Stedman-Scott said:

Arguments and occasional bickering might seem harmless but when this kind of conflict is continually aggressive and left unaddressed, it can cause real unhappiness and harm children's life chances.

That's why we're investing millions into helping parents recognise and address potentially harmful conflict so more children can grow up in happier homes. We want every child to have the best start in life and a further £11 million will build on what we've achieved to date.

Other key drivers and trends in the State of the Nation Report include:

- **Education and skills**

Children and young people's happiness with life at school between April and June 2021 remained consistent with previous years. Further supporting a link between attendance and wellbeing, pupils with higher wellbeing ratings were more likely to have regularly attended school.

- **Personal wellbeing**

Evidence suggests that drops in wellbeing occurred most clearly for primary and secondary pupils in February 2021, when schools were closed to the majority of pupils.

- **Physical health and activity**

There are signs that obesity rates increased substantially between 2019/20 and 2020/21 among both reception and year six age children, accelerating a trend which has continued for at least the previous 15 years. However, rates of physical activity have remained relatively

consistent, with rates of children and young people engaging in 60 or more minutes of physical activity per day at similar levels in 2020/21 to 2017/18.

- **Relationships**

On average, young people indicated high levels of happiness with their family relationship, which was consistent with previous years. Relationships with friends also showed signs of recovery in 2021 following a small reduction in 2019 and 2020.

- **Self, society and the future**

Children's happiness with their appearance and future has remained stable in recent years, with signs of improvement in children's average happiness with their sense of choice in life. Young people indicated that some of their biggest worries about the future included the environment, finding a job, homelessness, and crime.

- **Online safety**

5% of 9–17-year-olds were unhappy with their experiences online, with unhappiness with online experiences appearing to increase with age. When thinking about their future, 29% of children and young people were also most likely to be worried about online safety.

The data on online safety is the first time such a theme has been noted in the State of the Nation report and highlights the importance of supporting young people to keep safe online. With today marking Safer Internet Day, the government and organisations across the country are coming together to raise awareness of how to help children and young people navigate the virtual world safely and positively.

Online safety is a key component of the mandatory Relationships, Sex and Health Education curriculum, teaching young people about privacy online, how to protect themselves and about respectful relationships – online as well as in person.

The Department for Education is also working with the Children's Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza to support parents with helping their children use the internet safely. Ministers and the Children's Commissioner recently met with technology companies to ask them to do more to keep young people safe and be more transparent with their data ahead of the Online Safety Bill coming into effect.

Minister for Mental Health Gillian Keegan said:

Children and young people were uniquely impacted by the pandemic

and while they showed incredible resilience throughout, it is right that as we look to the future their mental health is prioritised.

We are investing more than any other government in expanding and transforming mental health services, including rolling out mental health support teams in schools, and it is encouraging to see the positive impact this is having on students' mental health and wellbeing.

Early intervention is key to ensuring good mental health, and it's vital that all children, no matter where they are in the country, have access to these services to ensure every child has the best chance to live a healthier, happier life.

The data presented in the State of the Nation report draws upon published information from a range of government, academic, voluntary, and private sector organisations across the 2020/21 academic year, and therefore reflects the experience of children and young people in England during that time.

Schools and colleges can continue to book onto courses for senior mental health lead training into April and May 2022. More information on funding for 2022/23 will be provided in the spring. Further information on senior mental health lead training is available [here](#).

The Reducing Parental Conflict programme mostly focuses on disadvantaged families, where factors like both parents being out of work, can exacerbate conflict. Current programmes include interventions linking local authorities, health, education and voluntary sectors to tackle poor mental health and issues such as substance misuse which stem from relationship challenges, including Rochdale's award-winning '[Relationship Revolution](#)', a whole system approach to talk about parental conflict and address their community's needs. Their joined-up approach has transformed life for families and has since been adopted by other areas in England. Other successful projects have included online relationship support and [learning videos](#), counselling for parents, and toolkits for frontline services.

Councils will be able to bid for a share of the funding for projects from April 2022. Similar levels of investment in the programme will follow in the financial years up to 2025.

Professor Gordon Harold from Cambridge University who launched a landmark report in 2015 on the importance of reducing parental conflict, said:

The RPC programme aims to reduce the adverse impacts that parental conflict causes to children through the provision of new support for parents, training for family practitioners and better awareness, understanding and coordination of parental conflict related services delivered by local authorities and their partners; all with one core aim – to promote improved mental health outcomes for at-risk children and adolescents.

Cristina Odone, Head of Family Policy at The Centre for Social Justice said:

Unresolved parental conflict can spiral into violence and domestic abuse, affecting children's mental health. The impact is felt long term.

The important role of sanctions in maintaining international peace and security

Thank you Mr President, and let me start by wishing you the best for your Presidency this month. I thank USG DiCarlo and USG Griffiths for their briefing.

The UN Security Council has a unique responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It is right that we make full and judicious use of every tool at our disposal in the pursuit of this goal. Targeted sanctions are one such tool – set out in the Charter, as our briefers said today, they can play an important role as part of a comprehensive approach alongside diplomacy, peacebuilding and peacekeeping.

The value of sanctions has been proven. In Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone they helped end conflict and support the transition to peace and democracy, following which sanctions were duly lifted. In the Central African Republic, they have improved the practices of a mining company. In Somalia, the arms embargo has enabled the seizure of thousands of ammunition rounds, anti-tank guided missiles and sniper rifles reportedly intended for Al-Shabaab.

Today, sanctions are an important means of countering the threat of transnational terrorism and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The Council is deploying them to constrain the activities of some of the world's worst terrorists under the 1267 sanctions regime. We call on all parties to implement fully the sanctions this Council has agreed.

Any use of sanctions has to take account of humanitarian factors. The UK was one of the top 5 humanitarian donors globally in 2021. We champion International Humanitarian Law and humanitarian access in conflict and crisis situations.

The United Kingdom is committed to minimising any unintended consequences of sanctions, including on the delivery of humanitarian assistance. To achieve this, we advocate for carefully targeted sanctions, aimed at specific goals,

as part of a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution. We support a range of humanitarian exceptions and licensing grounds in the application of sanctions.

For example, and it was mentioned by Under-Secretary Griffiths today, we welcomed the unanimous support for the recent adoption of the UN Afghanistan humanitarian exemption, which was a good example of how sanctions regimes can be tailored to address any unintended consequences as they emerge, and ensure they do not hinder the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance.

And domestically, we have a dialogue with banks and humanitarian actors in the Tri-Sector Group to find legal, safe and transparent ways to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches its intended beneficiaries and is not disrupted by sanctions.

Mr President, the United Kingdom believes sanctions are most effective when adopted multilaterally. But where collective UN action is blocked, the UK is prepared to act with allies and partners, or unilaterally, to apply sanctions aimed at providing deterrence and accountability for the most severe behaviours such as gross human rights violations or abuses. For example, the al-Kaniyat militia responsible for the torture and murder of civilians in Libya. For this reason, the UK has its own legally robust targeted sanctions regime that we seek to use as part of a broad international response.

Mr President, let us not forget that conflict, violence and economic mismanagement are the main triggers of humanitarian crises. Sanctions are an important tool of the Council to help change the behaviour of regimes or individuals responsible for those conflicts, and to help us fulfil our collective responsibility to maintain international peace and security.

Thank you.

Closure of media outlets in Hong Kong: Media Freedom Coalition statement

Press release

The UK, along with its partners in the Media Freedom Coalition express deep concern at the closure of media outlets in Hong Kong.



The undersigned members of the Media Freedom Coalition express their deep concern at the Hong Kong and mainland Chinese authorities' attacks on freedom of the press and their suppression of independent local media in Hong Kong. Recent developments include the raid of Stand News offices, the arrests of its staff, and the subsequent self-closure of Citizen News, stemming from concern over the safety of its staff.

Since the enactment of the National Security Law in June 2020, authorities have targeted and suppressed independent media in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. This has eroded the protected rights and freedoms set out in the Basic Law and undermines China's obligations under the Sino-British Joint Declaration. This has also caused the near-complete disappearance of local independent media outlets in Hong Kong.

These ongoing actions further undermine confidence in Hong Kong's international reputation through the suppression of human rights, freedom of speech and free flow and exchange of opinions and information. A stable and prosperous Hong Kong in which human rights and fundamental freedoms are protected should be in everybody's interest.

We urge Hong Kong and mainland Chinese authorities to respect freedom of the press and freedom of speech in Hong Kong, in line with the Basic Law and China's obligations under the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

Signatories:

- Australia
- Austria
- Canada
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- Germany
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Italy
- Japan
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg

- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom
- United States

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[Councils given spending boost to build back better](#)

- Levelling Up Secretary confirms £54.1 billion package of funding for councils
- £3.7 billion available to councils, including access to more than £1 billion for social care
- Provides a one-off 2022/23 Services Grant to councils to spend on vital frontline services, worth £822 million

Councils in England will have access to a share of £54.1 billion in funding for the coming financial year including more than £1 billion of additional money for social care.

This is the largest cash-terms increase in grant funding in 10 years, providing the stability they need to build back better.

This includes a one-off 2022/23 Services Grant worth £822 million for councils to spend as they see fit on local priorities.

The measures confirmed by Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove today (7 February 2022), will allow councils to maintain and improve the services they provide, while protecting residents from excessive council tax increases.

Last week's publication of the Levelling Up white paper set out the government's bold mission to transform the nation. Councils will be at the forefront of this ambition and we are making sure they have the resources to deliver the vital services their communities need.

Secretary of State for Levelling Up Rt Hon Michael Gove said:

Levelling up can only succeed if our local partners have the powers and resources they need to help transform their communities.

Today's £54.1 billion settlement represents a real terms increase of more than 4.5% from last year and will make sure councils can improve local services, protect vulnerable people and build back better from the pandemic.

The [final finance settlement](#) includes:

- **More funding for Social Care:** The government is making more than £1 billion of additional funding available for social care, ensuring councils can improve conditions for carers and those in need. In addition, £162 million will be allocated to help councils and the social care sector prepare for adult social care reform, ensuring the system is fit for future generations.
- **Protecting taxpayers from excessive Council Tax rises:** Residents will continue to have the final say over excessive council tax increases. From next year, the amount council tax can be increased without a vote has been reduced to 2%, plus 1% for councils with adult social care responsibilities, with additional flexibilities for some authorities.
- **New Homes Bonus:** £556 million has been allocated to English councils in 2022/23. This brings the total amount of funding awarded under the New Homes Bonus to £10 billion, which has seen over 2.3 million additional homes being built, of which more than 560,000 are affordable homes. Last year, we published a consultation on the future of the New Homes Bonus and sought views from the sector on a range of issues – from how effective the current scheme has been, to potential changes to how payments are made, ensuring the funding reaches the places that need it most. Our response to the consultation on the New Homes Bonus will be published in the coming months.
- **Lower Tier Services Grant:** Providing £111 million to councils with responsibility for services such as homelessness, planning, recycling and refuse collection and leisure services. The funding floor has been updated so that no council will have less funding available in 2022/23 than this year.
- **Continued support for rural areas:** The Government recognises that there are often additional cost pressures of serving dispersed populations in rural areas. This is why we are maintaining the Rural Services Delivery Grant at £85 million
- **Business Rates Retention pilots:** Continuing the 100% Business Rates Retention pilots in Cornwall, Greater Manchester, Liverpool, West Midlands and West of England and 67% Business Rates Retention for London councils, enabling them to control more of the money they raise locally.

- **Revenue Support Grant:** An uplift to the Revenue Support Grant in line with inflation, worth over £72 million.

Last week, Government also confirmed a £150 non-repayable council tax rebate to households in England in Bands A-D to help with rising costs. The rebate to bills will be made directly by councils to households from April. Councils will also have a share of the £144 million discretionary funding that can be used to target additional support at those most in need. Councils are the best placed to do this, which is why the Government has given this flexibility.

The Mayor of London has requested flexibility to levy an additional £20 on Band D to the Greater London Authority precept to provide extra funding for Transport for London. The Government has expressed ongoing concern about the management of TfL by this Mayor, and it is disappointing that London taxpayers are having to foot the bill for the GLA's poor governance and decision-making. Whilst the Government will not oppose this request, any decision to increase the precept is solely one for the Mayor, who should take into account the pressures that Londoners are currently facing on living costs and his decision to raise council tax by 9.5% last year.

Finally, in recognition of the unique circumstances facing the Isle of Wight Council and its physical separation from the mainland, we are providing an additional £1 million for 2022/23.

This relates to England only.

Further details on all of the above, including allocations for individual councils and our consultation document can be found on the [Final Local Government Finance Settlement page](#).

The final Settlement for 2022/23 follows the announcement of the provisional Settlement on 16 December and consultation, during which we received 148 responses which were given full consideration.

On 27 October 2021, the Government set out the outcome of the multi-year Spending Review. Core Spending Power for local authorities is estimated to increase by an average of 3% in real terms each year, including investment in Adult Social Care reform. The Government is providing around £1.6bn additional grant in LGDEL in each year, including funding for Supporting Families and Cyber Resilience.

The £1 billion for social care comes from an additional £636 million for the Social Care Grant, an inflationary uplift to the improved Better Care Fund worth £63 million and a 1% Adult Social Care council tax precept, including flexibility rolled over from last year.

There will be additional council tax flexibility for shire districts, police authorities and for the 8 lowest-charging fire and rescue authorities.