

Joint taskforce relaunched to protect against rise in fraud crime

In light of the 24% rise in fraud during coronavirus (COVID-19), the Home Secretary Priti Patel announced the relaunch of the Joint Fraud Taskforce on 21 October 2021, which will play a vital role in countering fraud through public-private sector partnerships.

A crime that leaves devastating financial and emotional effects on victims will now be tackled jointly in a first-of-its-kind agreement between private sector companies and the government to protect people's hard earned cash.

To coincide with the first meeting of the relaunched taskforce, three new fraud charters, published 21 October 2021, across the [retail banking](#), [telecommunications](#) and [accountancy](#) sectors will commit industry leaders to work with government to deliver new, innovative projects with the ultimate aim of reducing the growing threat and protecting the public.

New initiatives will actively protect livelihoods and savings and include: a pilot dynamic direct debit system that would introduce a banking authorisation step into applications for new telecommunications contracts (including mobile phone contracts) that have been applied for fraudulently or used for fraudulent purposes; a cross sector data breach plan to protect customers who have been subject to a data breach from becoming victims of fraud, and leveraging new technology to tackle the fraudulent practice of sending fake company text messages – known as 'smishing'.

The taskforce will include leaders from across government, the private sector, regulators, law enforcement and victim representatives.

Signatories of the charters include all major high street banks along with many of the new fintech and challenger banks; members of the Communications Crime Strategy Group which include BT EE, Sky Mobile, Tesco Mobile, Three, Virgin Media O2 and Vodafone – and supported by Mobile UK; and twelve leading UK accountancy bodies, including ICAEW.

Delivery of the charters will be overseen by the taskforce, to be chaired by the Minister for Security, Damien Hinds. The first meeting took place on 21 October, where attendees discussed measures to tackle online fraud, increasing fraud awareness and changing public behaviour.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

I am deeply concerned about the devastating impact fraud can have on victims and I will not tolerate criminals lining their pockets at the expense of law-abiding citizens.

Government alone cannot fix this which is why the Joint Fraud Taskforce will bring together key business leaders to work in

partnership to protect the public and tackle this cowardly crime.

Minister for Security Damian Hinds said:

Fraud is a devastating crime that impacts around one in thirteen of us each year, often in life-changing ways.

I am pleased to be chairing this new taskforce, which will bring experts from the most vital sectors together to prevent perpetrators from exploiting vulnerabilities and fraud controls to conduct their criminality.

David Postings, Chief Executive of UK Finance, said:

Protecting customers from fraud and stopping stolen money getting into the hands of criminals is an absolute priority for the banking industry. Banks are fighting fraud on every front, but the sector can't stop all fraud on its own. Only by working together with other key industries and government can we combine our powers to make the UK a safe place to do business.

Michelle Giddings and Elaine Smyth, co-chairs of the Accountancy AML Supervisors Group, said:

Fraud is a widespread and growing crime that causes financial loss, damage and disruption across the UK. The recent pandemic has seen an explosion in the scale of fraud being perpetrated against businesses and consumers alike. As gatekeepers to the financial system, the accountancy sector is committed to playing their part in helping to prevent and detect this ever present crime.

We have worked closely with the Home Office to develop a fraud charter for the accountancy sector to further develop our combined understanding of the threats and vulnerabilities, increase awareness within our firms and develop training materials.

Adrian Gorham, Chair of the Communications Crime Strategy Group (CCSG), said:

The telecommunications industry has been taking action against fraud, including scam voice calls and SMS, for many years. This includes barring and blocking bulk voice calls and SMS where detected, restricting use of calling line and message identities to their owners and restricting financial return paths through our services.

We are committed to working with government, law enforcement and

other stakeholders to reduce the incidence and impact of fraud. We continue to urge customers to remain aware of unexpected or suspicious voice calls or SMS they receive and to report these to 7726 the industry's automated scam reporting service.

The taskforce and charter agreements form part of the Fraud Action Plan Framework agreed at the government's Economic Crime Strategic Board earlier this year.

Their establishment builds on the government's wider work to tackle fraud.

For the 2020 Spending Review, the government committed £63m to the Home Office to tackle economic crime, including fraud. This is in addition to the funding that the Home Office commits each year to the National Economic Crime Centre in the NCA, and police forces, including over £15m each year to the City of London Police as the national lead force for fraud.

We are encouraging the public to forward suspicious text messages to 7726 (which is free of charge) and continue to encourage anyone who has been targeted by a scam to report it to Action Fraud.

It remains vital that victims continue to report fraud to the police through [Action Fraud](#) whilst a new improved system is delivered.

Russia: Media Freedom Coalition statement (October 2021)

The undersigned members of the Media Freedom Coalition express their deep concern about the Russian government's intensifying harassment of independent journalists and media outlets in Russia. Media freedom is vital to the effective functioning of free and open societies and is essential to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This year has seen the Russian authorities systematically detain journalists and subject them to harsh treatment while they reported on protests in support of imprisoned opposition figure Aleksey Navalny. In April, the office of student journal DOXA was searched in relation to spurious charges and four editors were then subjected to severe restrictions on their freedom. On 29 June, Russian authorities raided the apartments of staff members of investigative news website Proekt on the same day the outlet published an investigation into alleged corrupt practices by Russia's Interior Minister. Proekt was added to Russia's list of "undesirable foreign organizations," the first media entity to receive that designation. In addition, Russian occupation authorities in Crimea have held Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reporter Vladislav Yesypenko since March and have reportedly

tortured him in detention. On 15 July, Yesypenko was indicted on specious charges and faces up to 18 years' imprisonment. On 8 October, Russian authorities applied the label of "media foreign agent" to the international investigative journalism project Bellingcat, known for their investigation of the poisoning of Navalny.

In an unambiguous effort to suppress Russians' access to independent reporting, the Russian government introduced onerous labelling requirements for so-called "media foreign agents" last year. Since then, it has charged RFE/RL with more than 600 violations, resulting in fines totalling more than \$4.4 million. Russian authorities rejected RFE/RL's appeals of initial fines in March and froze the local bank accounts of RFE/RL's Moscow bureau on 14 May, placing the bureau at risk of bankruptcy. It increasingly appears the Russian government intends to force RFE/RL to end its decades-long presence in Russia, just as it has already forced the closure of several other independent media outlets in recent years.

In addition to RFE/RL, authorities have applied the "media foreign agent" label to independent Russian outlets operating within or near Russia's borders, Meduza, Important Stories, VTimes, The Insider, Mediazona, OVD-Info, Medium Orient, PASMI news, Moscow Digital Media and TV channel Dozhd, undercutting their ability to operate. As a result of this crackdown, VTimes was forced to announce its closure less than a month after its designation. Over the past few months, Russian authorities added dozens more Russian journalists to their "foreign agent" list. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 10 journalists are currently imprisoned in Russia simply for carrying out their work. We also note the Russian authorities' decision to expel BBC Journalist Sarah Rainsford – a retrograde step that further damages the cause of media freedom in Russia.

The 17-19 September Duma elections in the Russian Federation were preceded by Russian government restrictions towards journalists and media workers. Journalists and media workers were threatened, forcibly expelled from the polling stations and force was being used against them. These actions contradict Russia's international commitments.

While concerns related to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists in Russia have intensified, they are not new. We stand in solidarity with independent Russian journalists who assume personal risk in carrying out their professional activities, and we honour the memory of those reporters whose intrepid work has cost them their lives, including Natalia Estemirova, Anna Politkovskaya, and Paul Klebnikov. We applaud Dmitry Muratov, editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta, for winning Nobel Peace Prize. This award underlines the important work all independent journalists and media workers in the Russian Federation have done for years, fighting for human rights, including freedom of expression.

We reiterate our condemnation of the Russian government's targeting and harassment of independent journalists and media outlets. We urge the Russian Federation to comply with its international human rights commitments and obligations and to respect and ensure media freedom and safety of journalists. We call on the Russian government to cease its repression of

independent voices, end the politically motivated proceedings against journalists and media organizations, and release all those who have been unjustly detained.

Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States.

UK and Canada Space Agencies Sign MOU on Joint Activities and Information Sharing

Yesterday (27TH October) the UK Space Agency and the Canadian Space Agency have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on joint activities and information sharing on Space. The MOU was signed by representatives of both national space agencies in Dubai at the annual [International Astronautical Congress \(IAC\)](#).

The agreement provides a framework for collaborative activities and the exchange of information, technology and personnel between both nations.

British High Commissioner to Canada, Susannah Goshko said:

I'm delighted by this agreement to strengthen co-operation between the UK and Canadian Space Agencies. As the UK's recent Space Strategy made clear, the importance of space to everyday life continues to grow rapidly. It is vital that our two countries work ever closer to understand the risks and opportunities this brings, and jointly benefit from space as a driver of prosperity.

UK Space Agency chief executive, Dr Paul Bate, said:

This alliance will bring further significant benefits to the thriving space industries of the UK and Canada, allowing us to achieve our goals in space through collaborative efforts in research and innovation.

As set out in the UK's National Space Strategy, we are committed to strengthening our international relationships and building the UK's reputation as a partner of choice in space activities.

Yesterday's agreement represents a significant step in growing collaboration between the UK and Canada on space, and will help to grow the capability and competitiveness of domestic space sectors in both countries.

The UK Government recently launched [the National Space Strategy](#) which outlines the long-term plans to grow the UK space sector and make Britain a science and technology superpower, including building on manufacturing and technology capacity, attracting investment and working internationally.

Established in 1989, the Canadian Space Agency employs approximately 670 employees and leads Canada's activities in space, including space exploration, utilization and technology development, as well as scientific research.

Yesterday's MOU signing builds on cooperation in space between the two countries in the areas of space science, technology and applications, space policy, law and regulation and human capital development.

The UK and Canada have a deep history of working together on scientific research. Our collaborations have seen us work on the forefront of global issues, from COVID19 to genomics, AI to Quantum technologies. Together, we have funded and led research to the tune of £65 million over the last 5 years.

About The International Astronautical Congress:

The International Astronautical Congress is an annual meeting of global space agencies and industry which is organised by the International Astronautical Federation, of which the UK Space Agency is a voting member. The United Arab Emirates is the first Arab country to host the IAC since its establishment in 1950.

With the theme "Inspire, Innovate & Discover for the Benefit of Humankind", the IAC 2021 looks forward to making a contribution to humanity and to science by strengthening and enhancing cooperation between all countries in the space sector.

About the British High Commission in Ottawa:

The British High Commission in Ottawa, is the UK government's main diplomatic mission in Canada. Along with Consulates-General in Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver, we work closely with the Canadian government and partners across the country to develop and maintain a wide range of substantive partnerships of real value to both countries. These partnerships cover business, defence, climate change, science and innovation, education, and culture.

Democracy and democratic elections in the OSCE region: UK statement

Madam Chair, I am grateful to the United States for putting this important item on our agenda today.

The United Kingdom has made it clear that democratic societies are the strongest supporters of an open and resilient international order. An order in which global institutions prove their ability to protect human rights, manage tensions, address conflict, instability and climate change, and share prosperity through trade and investment.

Democratic institutions and accountable governments are the foundations on which open, stable, and prosperous societies thrive. We believe it is the system of government that best allows for individual freedom and is the fairest way to govern human societies and states. Democracy rests on foundations that have to be built over time: strong institutions, responsible and accountable government, a free press, the rule of law and equal rights for all people.

However, the democratic world order faces a stark choice. Either we retreat and retrench in the face of malign actors or we work together and advance the cause of freedom. In this regard, the UK sees the role of the OSCE and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) as vital.

ODIHR's approach to elections is the right one. It starts from the simple premise that there should be continuous improvement in the process of holding democratic elections in all countries, as we all strive to achieve the standards to which we have committed as OSCE participating States. ODIHR's impartial and objective approach to each country helps improve its electoral processes in a tailored way, which builds on past success and addresses previous challenges.

We have, as 57 participating states, given ODIHR the mandate to independently observe elections. This includes a mandate to determine what is necessary in terms of size and format of a mission in order to effectively and credibly observe.

Madam Chair, all OSCE participating states must continue to support this mandate in order that ODIHR can continue to work effectively in supporting the development of free, fair and democratic elections. This in turn will enable us to continue to build and maintain democracy across our OSCE region.

Report by OSCE's Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine: UK response

Thank you Madam Chair. I would like to thank Ambassador Villadsen for his detailed briefing on the work of the Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine.

The UK continues to welcome your strategic objectives to support the Government's reform effort, promote a culture of dialogue and help mitigate the effects of conflict. We recognise and value the many and varied projects implemented by your office, but I will focus this statement on three areas: mitigating the impacts of the conflict, dialogue promotion and rule of law and human rights.

The UK appreciates the PCU's ongoing work to mitigate the effects of the conflict. This includes your facilitation of discussion between regions on best practices in providing psycho-social assistance to veterans in the territorial communities – we hope this will contribute to alleviating some of the stress and trauma experienced by veterans. The PCU also continues to do vital work on demining, such as facilitating public involvement in state mine action policy development, as well as providing materials to be used for education activities in schools in conflict affected areas of eastern Ukraine. Education on mines is crucial as we continue to receive tragic reports of children sustaining injuries from unexploded ordnance. We are also grateful to the PCU on efforts to mitigate the environmental impacts of the conflict, including work to support the State Water Resource Agency in planning and management of water resources in eastern Ukraine. The PCU's work on initiating preparation of recommendations for improving interagency co-ordination in cases of water crisis events is particularly important given the water-related risks in eastern Ukraine.

I would also like to highlight your work to promote dialogue by providing training to 204 civil servants and reform managers in dialogue, conflict management and effective communication. This is further supported by your contribution to the Guide on Civil Service Culture prepared by the National Agency of Civil Service, which aims to use dialogue tools to manage conflicts and build organisational culture in state institutions.

On the rule of law, we appreciate the PCU's continued support to the Constitutional Court of Ukraine to enhance access to and improve the quality of constitutional justice. We welcome the working group you have established to develop a guidebook on gender analysis of constitutional issues, which aims to promote a gender perspective in constitutional adjudications.

It is important that gender sensitive approaches are applied across all aspects of the PCU's work, to increase its effectiveness and beneficial impact. We therefore commend your progress on implementation of the 'Action Plan for Implementing the Strategy for the Promotion of Gender Equality at the OSCE PCU (2020–2022)', which I note was 40 per cent complete at the beginning of October. We welcome that this strategy covers a broad range of

areas, including on structure, training, management, coordination and reporting.

We were pleased to see efforts to promote gender equality in several of the projects in your written report, including on combating gender stereotypes and mainstreaming gender equality in education. We also welcome efforts to advance gender-sensitive justice delivery through supporting the National School of Judges to develop a gender competencies framework.

Lastly, I would like to commend the PCU for continuing to adapt your activities in response to the challenges posed by Covid-19. We note that despite these challenges, the PCU has managed to achieve a high overall implementation rate which we are pleased to hear today now stands at 82%.

The UK remains committed to the long-term security, stability and prosperity of Ukraine. We thank the PCU for promoting reform across a broad range of issues, some of which have been highlighted today. We call for the PCU to be given unrestricted access throughout Ukrainian territory, including in eastern Ukraine and illegally annexed Crimea, as is provided for in its mandate. We once again thank Ambassador Villadsen and his team for their work supporting Ukraine, and I wish them continued success.

Thank you.