

The Response to Child Sexual Abuse and Wider Vulnerability Threats

In relation to CSAE, in the context of the above, we consider that the following Themes should be incorporated into the law enforcement and wider 4P response at the national, regional and local level. We consider that CSAE needs to be addressed as part of a wider approach to managing common issues across the range of vulnerabilities threats, including Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, Organised Immigration Crime, County Lines and gang exploitation. By tackling common enablers of these threats such as cultural attitudes that inhibit reporting or enable abuse, the use of the internet and technology, and shared trafficking and travel routes, a more efficient, force multiplier effect will be achieved in addressing them. The Themes also reflect that tackling vulnerabilities is a responsibility that goes wider than law enforcement, and that action is required of other stakeholders to enable the optimum law enforcement response.

Theme 1 – Elimination of Preventable Offending

Eliminating preventable offending is critical to enabling an appropriate law enforcement response. In respect of just one aspect of the current CSAE threat, in 2017, 82,109 individual industry referrals were received by the NCA, a 570% increase since 2014 and a 700% increase since the NCA commenced in 2013. Despite the significant increase in both arrests and the number of children safeguarded as outlined above, this trend shows no sign of abating. Elimination of preventable offending will free up capacity in an increasingly stretched law enforcement system to enable a focus on high risk, hard to tackle offenders such as Matthew Falder. This can be achieved through the following means:

There needs to be a significantly enhanced role for industry, who need to move from a reactive position of making referrals to law enforcement, to a proactive position of preventing offending in the first instance. As I explained to the Committee on 13 March, the following are three simple, technologically achievable measures that can be undertaken, which will make a significant difference in preventing image offences from occurring in the first place:

1. Pre-screening / Pre-filtering of material uploaded and downloaded:
 - a. ‘Known’ Images: the application to technical infrastructure of technology that screens all uploads and downloads of material to platforms, achieved by routing material through screening servers, loaded with the digital signatures (hashes) of indecent images of children or other child sexual abuse material such as a paedophile manual. ‘Hits’ will be quarantined and deleted, so preventing offending from taking place;
 - b. First generation images²: the same infrastructure could run Artificial Intelligence to detect first generation images. These would all be subject of alerts to law enforcement to enable victim identification work to be undertaken, to safeguard children from being abused, and to enable perpetrators to be identified and prosecuted. Once the victims have been identified, the images will be hashed and

² First generation images are images that the offender has taken for themselves and by definition has had access to the child.

incorporated within the known image pre-screening, further reducing offending and secondary victimisation.

2. Industry platforms that have the appropriate safeguards in place could be granted a Kite Mark. In particular, this should be piloted with those platforms that are specifically targeted at children.
3. Industry members to ring-fence a proportion of their R&D budgets to develop and design safeguards into all of their products.

In addition to designing out preventable offending through the use of technology, we also need to increase the resilience of children by educating them about the risks online, including through Personal Social Health Economic (PSHE) education. It is essential that clear, age appropriate education is provided to all children to increase their resilience, with appropriate, targeted information also provided to parents, carers and potential offenders. The current delivery of the education response is fragmented, and comprehensive education needs to be delivered through a coordinated approach across Whitehall Departments and law enforcement, building on, for example, the NCA-CEOP ThinkuKnow programme, which has delivered to over 140,000 professionals.

We also need to enhance our understanding of offending pathways, and we need to ensure adequate capabilities are in place to prevent potential offenders from offending, and offenders from re-offending. For example, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation is involved in an IIOC deterrence campaign, and in IIOC offender early interventions, but this needs to be sustainably funded. There also need to be effective offender management programmes for individuals in prison and on release, to reduce the rate of recidivism.

Theme 2 – A Capabilities-based Approach to Tackling CSAE and Wider Vulnerabilities

We need to be able to proactively target the highest risk, hardest to tackle offenders, using covert and specialist assets as increasingly required, focussing on areas where there is a greater risk of contact abuse such as grooming and live streaming, and high-risk offenders who deploy multiple tactics to avoid detection.

Most critical to addressing these increasing and evolving threats is the need to address previous under-investment in digital investigative capabilities; there is currently insufficient capacity and technical capability within the law enforcement system to monitor all online offending platforms, modus operandi and trends, and to assess and manage identified high-risk and high-end technology-enabled offending at scale, and to provide local policing support to respond to the growing scale of CSAE.

To enable law enforcement to get ahead of the curve, and to ensure that there are no ‘safe spaces’ where offenders can operate with impunity, funding is required for the build of digital capabilities at scale, and also for associated research and development as technology evolves, and for the recruitment and training of officers to ensure they are equipped with the skills to defend the most vulnerable in society. Deployment of the correct capabilities at the appropriate level (national, regional and local), consistently and in line with threat will achieve efficiencies and free up further capacity through the reduction of duplication within the present silo structure.