



Home Office

Home Secretary

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Dame Diana Johnson MP
Chair, Home Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
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BY EMAIL ONLY

3 April 2023

Dear Dame Diana,

Announcement of new Police Task Force to Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation

I am writing to you as the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee concerning the announcement made today of a new Taskforce to tackle child sexual exploitation, alongside a package of measure to strengthen our response to child sexual abuse.

I am proud of the UK's status as a world leader in the fight to stop sexual violence against children. However, the Final Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse provides truly shocking insight on the unimaginable abuse suffered by children, and draws out stark failings by institutions, leaders, and professionals to protect them from harm. I have committed to act on the Inquiry's recommendations, and the Government will respond in full as soon as possible.

Sadly, the Inquiry findings have been echoed by several reviews into child sexual exploitation in places like Rotherham, Rochdale and Telford. These have exposed historic local failures to confront a crime which has such a devastating impact on victims. Communities have been badly let down and understandably lost trust in local services which failed in their most basic duties to safeguard children.

That is why the former Home Secretary commissioned His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services to conduct an inspection into the police response to group-based child sexual exploitation. I will not hesitate to act on its findings in its report due this summer.

But I do not need to wait for those findings to take action to stop these evil predators and protect the children they prey upon. And that is why I am today announcing the following measures:

1. The Child Sexual Exploitation Police Taskforce will give practical, expert, on the ground support for local forces investigating child sexual abuse, with a particular focus on complex and organised child sexual exploitation, including 'grooming gangs'. It will support forces to build strong cases in order to bring more offenders to justice.

2. The task force will work hand in hand with the Tackling Organised Exploitation Programme which brings together force-level, regional, and national data and intelligence, and expert analysis to help forces uncover grooming gangs and other networks which are sexually exploiting children. This will help forces pursue more offenders and safeguard more victims.
3. The new Taskforce will also host a Complex and Organised Child Abuse Database which will strengthen what we know about the scale, risk and prevalence of group based child sexual exploitation, and improve the collection of demographic information.
4. The Taskforce will be supported by a network of regional analysts funded by the Home Office, and our recently updated Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit reinforces the importance of forces and local partners using data to develop threat and target profiles to focus resources and operational activity, using the full range of proactive and reactive measures outlined in the Toolkit.

Today, I have also launched updated guidance for the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme, known as 'Sarah's Law', in memory of Sarah Payne, who was murdered by a previously convicted sex offender in 2000. This vital scheme means anyone can request information from the police to find out if someone has a conviction for sexual offences against children. The updated guidance makes the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme quicker and easier to use. This includes the introduction of online applications and a significant reduction in the timeframe for disclosure. Meanwhile, stronger Sexual Harm Prevention Orders and Sexual Risk Orders will make it easier to manage registered offenders and those who pose a risk.

The Home Office is also rolling out new tools linked to our world leading Child Abuse Image Database to support law enforcement to identify offenders and safeguard victims more quickly. This includes Fast Forensic Triage, a tool that enables police officers to identify known indecent images of children on suspects' devices up to 100 times faster than at present.

After listening to the powerful testimony of victims and survivors, and given the catalogue of institutional failure exposed by the Independent Inquiry, I have committed to introducing mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse in England. We know that there are a range of views about the introduction of a mandatory reporting duty, with potential impacts to consider on affected workforces and voluntary sector interests. I want to make sure we get this right. Through a full public consultation process we will work with victims and survivors, stakeholder groups and professionals, in order to design an effective and proportionate duty.

We have also renewed our support for the valuable work of the NSPCC's whistleblowing helpline, which is available to employees who are concerned about how their employer or organisation is dealing with child protection issues. And I am also pleased to be able to announce new support for an NSPCC helpline which is open for calls from any member of the public who has concerns about child sexual abuse, including grooming gang activity. I would urge anyone who has concerns to call so we can defeat these evil criminals and protect our children.

Finally, building on this government's commitment to ensure the most serious sexual and violent offenders spend longer in prison, the Ministry of Justice have announced that they will introduce legislation to create a statutory aggravating factor for offences committed as part of a grooming gang. Current sentencing guidelines for child sexual offences already include grooming behaviour as a high culpability factor, which means the court is required

to increase the starting point for sentencing where this applies. This measure would put this requirement on a statutory footing. This will require primary legislation and would be introduced when parliamentary time allows.

A copy of this letter will be placed in the libraries of both Houses.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Suella Braverman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP

Home Secretary