

# **Change is required if Online Offenders are going to be caught**

**# Government policing cuts means that's many sex offenders offend without the fear of getting caught.**

**# Set up 5 regional 'Hubs' and use volunteer as 'covert investigators'.**

**# NCA & Police need to urgently change its risk assessment model.**

**# Industry needs to play a far bigger role in fighting child abuse.**

The Government has consistently reduced resources and funding to the police so much so that many online child sex offenders can now offend without the fear of getting caught. It is sadly the reality that up until now no senior police officer has been bold enough to say.

Although let's be clear this is not something new - the police & the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) long before they became part of the National Crime Agency in 2013 have been losing the online battle against child sex offenders.

Last week (20/10/2014) the Head of the National Crime Agency, Keith Bristow admitted that 'if' 50,000 online offenders who have downloaded child abuse images exist - then currently many will not all be prosecuted.

I think its many more than 50,000 in UK alone that exist and recent operations and intelligence would look to confirm this.

Put simply – *'some offenders that are downloading child abuse images although known to the police won't be brought to justice.'*

The problem is at an epidemic level, however I believe with a new approach, the fight against online child sex offenders can be won.

I have huge respect for Mr Bristow the Head of the National Crime Agency. His bold approach and straight talking is refreshing- but he is wrong to say they just have to go after those that are committing 'contact offences' by risk assessing through images.

I understand the reason that this has been decided as the 'risk model' because it enables them and police to prioritise. However in my experience, the massive danger, and it is a very real danger, is those who download the lower level of child abuse images, are often the most high risk contact offenders. This is also the opinion of many others working in this field.

It is a risk assessment model that needs to urgently change because it is wrong.

A far better risk assessment model applied to each suspect would be to undertake a quick assessment to establish what access the individual may have to children. This could be either in work, family or leisure environments.

With the advances in information gathering through technology, obtaining such detail through open source (Internet) as well as police, local authority housing, health and social services can be achieved very quickly.

The key to offending behaviour in this area is 'Access' to a child and 'Opportunity' to offend. My proposed risk assessment model is a far better tool to use to identify 'contact' child sex offenders.

The NCA and police need to urgently stop prioritising cases on images found - but instead focus on the 'Access' the offender has or may have to children.

So what can be done? I think a dynamic victim centric approach is the answer and as such I would propose the following all of which are achievable - but do require a commitment to really want to effect change.

### **Regional Hubs & International Operations**

I would break up the Child Exploitation & Online Protection service (CEOP) and create 'five regional hubs': one in Wales and four in England to cover the North, East, West and South.

One hub would take the role of being the central point for International referrals – making quick assessments on intelligence and passing simple packages to the relevant regional hub.

I would give each hub the responsibility to pro-actively investigate and respond to international and national large scale operations. For example Operation Slade and Notarise would have been sent out as packages to each region to act upon and NOT to local police forces.

As of this week (28/10/2014) Operation Notarise which was a peer2peer based operation - had resulted in the arrest of 704 individuals. Although the NCA will not confirm how many IP addresses and subsequently nominal's have been identified during this pro- active operation - it is likely to be anywhere between 5,000 and 30,000 separate IP addresses.

In the same way that Op. Slade has now blown up and identified significant law enforcement failings- sadly on the current risk assessment model it is only a matter of time before Op. Notarise will do the same.

Operation Slade now shows - the existing and currently used risk based assessment failed. Because is assessed risk on the nature of the images found linked to each individual - rather than on the 'access' the individual had to children. This meant that a teacher, doctor and sports coach were amongst those allowed to continue offending until they were finally arrested and prosecuted.

## **Hubs**

I would recruit and train up volunteers who would become 'covert investigators'. They would be responsible for pro-actively engaging with and targeting those offenders who are using the Internet and social media to exchange child abuse material or are grooming who they think are children to meet up with and abuse. They would be managed by a very small number of employed experienced former police officers.

In addition each hub would have 30 police officers and warranted specials whose role it is to go and arrest and process offenders. They would do all in house investigations and forensic analysis, linking in with individual police forces when necessary.

The hubs would employ 20 dedicated intelligence officers (civilians). These can be both paid and volunteers to put together the packages using the new risk assessment model that I propose above.

Crucially each hub would have 10 forensic examiners with the necessary equipment provided free by industry to undertake their own examinations.

The hubs would utilize the existing funding the NCA receives for online child abuse and be additional funded by a five year Home Office commitment. Industry would also provide the vital resources for all the equipment as well as a financial commitment.

## **Police Forces**

Each police force would continue undertaking its own re-active and local proactive intelligence led operations. They would however no longer take on any national or international packages.

Forces would be able to call on their own respective 'hub' if the investigation becomes or requires a larger national focus. Each force would have a designated intelligence officer that would meet regularly with other local forces and his/her own hub to share information and intelligence.

No additional funding would be required by police forces and the creation of the hub would allow forces to have a much more targeted approach to developing their own investigations.

## **Criminal Justice System**

Every offender prosecuted for downloading child abuse material will receive an immediate minimum one year term of imprisonment. On conviction for a second time the sentence will increase to a minimum of three years.

Many will argue prisons are already overcrowded but there is an argument for non violent offenders to be released or given community service which would dramatically reduce numbers overnight. I would make community sentences far more effective with those convicted wearing high visibility orange jackets and carrying out far more useful roles.

I would provide a two year treatment programme for every offender of which they initially commence whilst in prison and then continue in community based programmes. This desire is probably the most difficult to achieve because it really would require a joined up approach with the criminal justice and probation systems at the same time when the probation service is under the threat of huge cuts and privatisation.

### **Known 'Hash Value' of images**

A picture has a unique "Hash Value" which once identified and collected can be used to digitally match the same image wherever it is distributed.

We need to pull together the various databases of hash values and create one global list of known child abuse images hash values thus ensuring it is regularly updated and circulated

I would make this global list more available in order to prevent and deter offenders from being able to access child abuse images. I would also ensure all computer manufacturers are provided with the known hash values and regular updates which would be automatically updated to all computers.

A built in programme would mean that if the user downloads a known child abuse image then the computer would go to 'blue screen' with a warning and stop working.

This would be a very simple effective control of images from being downloaded.

The circulation of a global list of hash values to the social media sites such as Vine, Twitter and Facebook would also help. If the user tries to upload or share a known child abuse image then the user's account would be blocked. To unblock their account they would be required to contact an administrator who will already know the reason for the blocking.

The same would apply to all major Internet search engines to help prevent searching for an uploading known child abuse images.

Policing is vital in this area but they will need to work closely with Industry and the Criminal Justice System in order to fight this epidemic. We need online child sex offenders to be aware that every time they go online to download an image or chat with a person they believe is a child they run a **very real** risk of being caught.

And finally the most controversial method of disruption would be to infect users computers who have downloaded or distributed known child abuse material via a Trojan horse. This would of course contravene our human rights and upset the

liberals. But it would be a very effective way of targeting the many thousands of people identified as abusers on peer-2-peer.

If the Government and police chiefs are really serious about tackling online child abusers, most of whom are also contact offenders, then we need to change the way we police offenders urgently.

### **Preventative**

Sadly in this country we are very bad at implementing preventative methods – for example: we wait until a number of very serious accidents occur or people die - before we take action on a stretch of road.

Yet some people will have a desire to offend or a fantasy to offend which they have not yet carried out – also some offenders will know they are about to re-offend – yet for these people little or nothing exist. I would like to see centers locally funded to help those people who are about to offend against children allowing them to receive treatment and close supervision - an intervention to stop them from offending.

We need to move to an approach of saving children before they are abused – rather than responding afterwards - as is the current model.

### **Summary**

We will not police are way out of this epidemic – police need to adopt a new risk assessment model – a new approach through regional hubs – a change in the criminal justice sentencing and treatment programmes and vitally a preventative strategy.

This is not pie in the sky thinking – it is all achievable – but what we need is policing chiefs and the Government to start listening and making changes.

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