

Children's Charities' Coalition for Internet Safety



Mr Hilary Benn MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary
The Home Office
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Operation Ore and its consequences

As you know, the US authorities have handed over to the British National Criminal Intelligence Service a list containing the names of over 7,200 people, seemingly with UK addresses, who had bought child pornography from a web site owned by Landslide Inc., a company that was based in Texas. The British police then organized Operation Ore to structure and implement their response.

We have been greatly dismayed by the slow pace of Operation Ore, and also we are concerned about apparent inconsistencies in the approach of different Constabularies when they do act on the list.

The priority, or lack of it, that different police forces are giving to how they handle the list is undoubtedly, in part, to do with resources, but we are not sure that is the entire explanation. What happened in Cambridgeshire with Detective Constable Brian Stevens will, we hope, not be repeated elsewhere, but unless and until the list has been gone through from top to bottom, it is not only the police who will continue to have anxieties about the avoidable risks to which some children may be exposed. How many people on the list are currently working in one of the professions where they have daily or ready access to children?

We know there is a significant correlation between those who possess child pornography and those who abuse children. Evidence from the US suggests it may be as high as 1 in 3. Anecdotal evidence from the UK suggests it may be 1 in 5, still a worryingly high proportion. Put either set of numbers against a list containing 7,200 names and it hardly bears thinking about. It underlines, once again, the urgency of resolving this matter. The thought that investigations may be being impeded or delayed because the Home Office and the police cannot agree who should be paying for them is too awful for words.

We understand the possible constitutional concerns in relation to Ministers involving themselves in decisions which, on a conventional reading, seem to be largely operational matters. The police should, of course, be able to

cope with, as it were, a “standard volume” of these, or any other sorts of crimes, out of their standard resource allocations. But the amounts of intelligence involved in Operation Ore are anything but standard. We believe they are entirely unprecedented. Moreover, such reasoning presupposes that what was already in place was adequate, and I think we are all sadly coming to the conclusion that it was not. The recently formed National HiTech Crime Unit is creaking at the seams and the police have just not been able to roll out the development of locally-based expertise anything like fast enough. The need for joint working and sharing knowledge between police personnel engaged in HiTech crime and police-based child protection work, and between all sections of the police and the wider child protection community, is also paramount.

Thus we are writing to you now to urge you to consider, in the first place, making a substantial increase in police resourcing in order to enhance law enforcement’s capacity to deal much more rapidly with the list of 7,200, and for you also to consider maybe new ways of ensuring that, at local level, the issue is given a higher priority and that it is dealt with more consistently across the forces.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Carr', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

John Carr
Internet Adviser

as from:

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