

Annex C: The Internet Watch Foundation

C.1 The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) illustrates how industry can work to uphold the general law in the new environment. It provides a mechanism to deal with illegal material, particularly child pornography, on the Internet in the UK.

C.2 IWF operates a hotline⁴ to which anyone may report material they encounter on the Internet which they believe may be illegal. IWF checks to see if this is resident on servers within the UK, and tests the material against statute and established case law and precedent. If it is likely to be illegal according to this test and originates outside the UK, an alert is passed through the National Criminal Intelligence Service to the relevant authority in the country of origin. If it originates in the UK, an alert is passed to the relevant Internet Service Provider (ISP) and to the relevant UK police force. Service providers may then ask the user to remove the material or cease the activity on UK servers; or may do this directly themselves. They will also co-operate with the police in the course of any investigation, for example, in identifying the originator of the material or activity.

C.3 As part of the package of measures that ISPs have agreed to adopt and adhere to under this approach, they also promote and develop rating and filtering systems. Tools for filtering, based on the widely accepted PICS standard (Platform for Internet Content Selection), are already present in most browsers. Ratings systems enabled by PICS are available, but have not yet reached a critical mass in terms of content rated. IWF is leading a global consortium involving leading players from the UK, Europe, USA and Australia to develop a PICS-compatible ratings system which is capable of global deployment.

C.4 ISPs have also agreed to work in the technical standards-making processes of the Internet to propose adaptations to existing protocols to close loopholes which currently allow criminals to hide their identity when using the Internet.

C.5 The IWF was established following discussions between the Government, police and the industry and it has now been in operation for over a year. IWF is now fully funded by the industry and overseen by an independent policy board composed of the full range of interest groups including the police, child protection groups and free speech advocates. The Government is very pleased with its work but we recognise that further progress still needs to be made. The Government is commissioning a review of the IWF activities to help identify where further action is needed and set the future priorities for the organisation. These might include greater attention to obscene (and therefore illegal) adult pornography, racist and anti-Semitic material and breaches of copyright, broadening IWF's focus from its initial primary focus on the high priority issue of child pornography. The review will also look at the levels of awareness among Internet users and ISPs of IWF and of rating and filtering tools, and at how far awareness is translated into usage. The review will report to the Government in the Autumn.

⁴The hotline can be contacted by telephone (01223) 236077; fax (01223) 235921; or e-mail (report @ internetwatch.org.uk). For general enquiries, see the IWF Website at <http://www.internetwatch.org.uk>