

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Director of Community Health & Care Partnership

Community Health & Care Partnership Committee: 6 April 2011

Subject: Sex Offender Community Disclosure: Keeping Children Safe

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise members of plans to implement a more formal mechanism for parents, carers or concerned others to request information regarding individuals who may be child sex offender. The arrangements will be managed and run by Strathclyde Police. Local Authorities will be involved through the existing Child Protection and Multi-Agency Public Protection arrangements.

2. Background

- 2.1 In June 2007, the Home Office published a Review of the Protection of Children from Sex Offenders. One of the conclusions was that more information should be shared with the public about specific Registered Sex Offenders (RSOs) who may pose a threat to particular children. A disclosure scheme was piloted in four English police force areas in 2008/9. In parallel with these developments, the Scottish Government decided to pilot a similar disclosure scheme in the Tayside Police force area between September 2009 and May 2010.
- 2.2 This evaluation's aim was to explore the extent to which the pilot enhanced child protection beyond what would happen anyway under existing child protection measures and Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements. The evaluation also considered how the scheme might be refined and improved before being implemented more widely.
- 2.3 The evaluation of the pilot reported in positive terms regarding the benefits of the scheme; suggesting that it encouraged additional community involvement in and responsibility for child protection; provided a central point of contact for concerned parents, carers and others; and enabled action to protect children who might not otherwise have come to the attention of the Police or Social Work.
- 2.4 The scheme involves a dedicated Police resource to deal with enquiries from parents and concerned others about specific individuals perceived to pose a threat to their children or children known to them. For each enquiry a comprehensive risk assessment using the information provided by the applicants along with existing information on Police, Social Work and NHS systems is undertaken. If the subject of the enquiry is found to be a Registered

Sex Offender or has previous convictions of a sexual nature relating to children and it is assessed that a child is at risk then a range of child protection measures under existing arrangements may be instigated.

- 2.5 If it is proportionate and necessary to protect children, then the relevant information may be disclosed. Whilst third parties such as grandparents, neighbours and friends are able to register an interest any disclosure would only be given to the parent, carer or guardian in order that they can take measures to protect the child or children in their care. However measures will be put in place to ensure that concerned others understand and are reassured that their concerns will be investigated. Disclosures are undertaken following full consultation with partner agencies with a role in Child and Public Protection with regard to existing Child Protection Procedures.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1 It is important to note that this scheme is not public disclosure of the whereabouts of individuals who have committed sexual offences against children (a Mark or Megan's law) nor is it a mechanism by which members of the public can "check out" neighbours. The checks made by the police in collaboration with other agencies and any subsequent disclosure will be in relation to the protection of a specific child or children.
- 3.2 There will be publicity across the various regional and local media leading up to the commencement of the scheme and it is anticipated that there may be an increase in enquiries to Social Work directly from the Police in relation to the scheme and indirectly as a result of increased publicity and exposure of the issue. The nature and extent of any increase in demand is as yet unknown but will be kept under review by the CHCP.

4. Personnel Issues

There are no personnel issues or implications.

5. Financial Implications

The responsibility for implementation, management and resourcing of the scheme falls to Strathclyde Police.

6. Risk Analysis

The responsibilities falling to the Authority in relation to this scheme are entirely consistent with existing duties and responsibilities under Child and Public Protection arrangements. The risks are, therefore, those associated with failing to discharge duties in terms of the consequences for a vulnerable child and consequent liabilities incurred by the Authority.

7. Equalities Impact

- 7.1 No significant issues were identified in a screening for potential equality impact in the introduction of this scheme.

8. Conclusions/Recommendations

- 8.1 The Keeping Children Safe scheme is to be implemented in the Strathclyde Police area on 1st April 2011.
- 8.2 West Dunbartonshire Council will contribute to the outcomes of the scheme under the terms of existing Child Protection and Public Protection procedures and will keep demand arising from the scheme under review.
- 8.3 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

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The full Evaluation of the Sex Offender Community Disclosure Pilot is available on the Scottish Government Social Research website. www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch