

New sex offender scheme rolled out this week

A scheme giving parents the right to ask if a sex offender has access to their children will be rolled out across the country from this week.

Following a successful pilot in Tayside earlier this year, parents, carers and guardians in Fife and Central Scotland will also now be able to formally register their concerns and will be informed if a named individual has a conviction for sex offences against children.

The scheme comes into effect on Wednesday, with other police forces in Scotland set to follow in a matter of months.

The news comes as an evaluation of the Tayside pilot published today concludes that the scheme has enhanced existing child protection arrangements, with parents reported to be 'very positive' about the pilot.

In one case, the disclosure scheme resulted in one registered sex offender being returned to prison for breaching his conditions of licence.

The report shows:

- * There were 53 enquiries made over the course of the 36 week pilot – the majority by parents
- * 25 Child Concern Reports were raised and specific actions taken as a result
- * There is no evidence to suggest the scheme had a negative impact on the behaviour of Registered Sex Offenders
- * There were no reports of vigilante attacks or other negative outcomes

Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill said:

“Scotland is one of the leading countries in the world in terms of its approach to the management of sex offenders and we will continue to strengthen our approaches for dealing with them.

“That’s exactly why we introduced this pilot in Tayside and it has been a real success. Today’s report shows that it has enhanced existing child protection arrangements whilst giving parents greater reassurance and peace of mind.

“The feedback from parents, carers and guardians has been extremely positive and we have no hesitation in rolling the scheme out right across the country.

“This initiative provides another link which will assist in protecting children from harm. As with any pilot, there will be improvements to processes which can be made and any lessons learned will now be taken on board by Scotland’s police forces and fed into the disclosure scheme as it is rolled out in other communities in Scotland.

“It is encouraging that the report finds that Scotland is using the system responsibly – and for the reasons the pilot was intended. We said when we launched this initiative that this would not be a snoopers charter but a means to protect communities, and the Scottish public have responded.

“Working with Scotland’s police forces, we will continue to look at new ways of protecting the public which will deliver benefits for the wider community.”

Assistant Chief Constable Iain Livingstone, Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland lead for Public Protection, said:

“The police service in Scotland welcomes the implementation of the sex offender disclosure scheme in Fife and Central Scotland.

“The scheme adds to existing child-protection measures, increasing the intelligence police have in relation to monitoring offenders, adding to our ability to protect children and other vulnerable members of our community.”

Anne Houston, Chief Executive of CHILDREN 1ST, said:

“We have been helping the Scottish Government to develop this initiative for a number of years now. The Tayside pilot proved to be effective and we fully support the introduction of this scheme across Scotland.

“To protect Scotland’s children we need to improve the monitoring and supervision of people who have harmed children before and this is a significant step in the right direction. This scheme empowers parents and carers by providing them with relevant information about individuals who have access to their children in a fair and responsible way, which in turn helps them to protect their children.”

The Scottish Government provided £112,500 for the Tayside pilot. A further £17,000 was provided for related publicity materials, which will be reused in the national roll out.

On 28 May 2010 Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill, announced at the annual conference of the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents in Dunblane that £300,000 was being provided to Scottish police forces to help them roll out the pilot throughout Scotland.

The project is continuing in Tayside beyond its initial pilot phase. Since September 2009, Tayside Police have received 74 applications for information from the public, 14 of which have resulted in disclosure of information to the parent who can best protect the child.