

Police promise proportionate approach to protests within Safe Access Zones

Legislation will be introduced from 24 September 2024 that will create Safe Access Zones.

Safe Access Zones aim to protect service users and staff accessing and providing abortion services by preventing activities which could influence or alarm them around hospitals and clinics that provide abortion services.

Under the new legislation, anyone planning to protest in any form within a declared Safe Access Zone is very likely to commit an offence.

Police Scotland say that every incident is unique and officers will respond proportionately to reports of anyone breaching the legislation by engaging with them, explaining the law and encouraging compliance before moving to enforcement if necessary.

Officers said that, for new legislation in particular, policing's approach tends to be proportionate.

A spokesperson said: "This means there will not always be an immediate rush to arrest and we will adopt an approach where officers will be expected to engage, explain the law and encourage compliance before moving to enforcement if necessary. Every incident and set of circumstances is unique.

"Officers apply this considered approach regularly, especially at incidents involving protest where we are required to

balance the protections people have under human rights legislation against other laws.

“We have been working closely with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and will continue to do so.

“Every case will be judged on its merits. In every case, Police Scotland will initially engage with those involved, explain the law to them and encourage compliance before moving to enforcement if necessary.

“Police Scotland will take every step to work with people breaching the legislation to avoid enforcement and ultimately arrest.”