

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE - 20 August 2001

REPORT ON: THE RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT: REDUCING THE RISK: IMPROVING THE RESPONSE TO SEX OFFENDING

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 518 - 2001

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The report informs members of the principal recommendations of the consultation document and authorises the proposed response to the Scottish Executive.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that The Social Work Committee: -

2.1 Notes and approves the response to be sent to the Scottish Executive.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None.

6.0 MAIN TEXT

BACKGROUND TO THE CONSULTATIVE DOCUMENT

An expert panel on sex offending was established in 1998 under the chairmanship of the Honourable Lady Cosgrove following recommendations in the report "A Commitment to Protect: Supervising Sex Offenders; Proposals for more effective practice", by the Chief Inspector of Social Work. This provided an overview of the arrangements for sex offenders in the community and a broad assessment of their strengths and weaknesses together with recommendations for improvement.

The panel's membership was drawn from a variety of organisations which have dealings with sex offenders including representation from the judiciary, the prosecution service, the police, the prison service, social work and health, children's and psychological services. Dundee City Council made a significant contribution to the work of the Cosgrove Committee.

The remit of the expert panel was to: -

- Take forward work on the recommendations of the report "A commitment to Protect" as directed by the Chairman of the panel.
- Advise the Secretary of State or any other relevant issues relating to sex offenders

- Provide, for the Secretary of State, an annual summary of its part and planned future workings
- Conclude its work three years after its first meeting

The expert panel has presented its final report to Scottish ministers and comments are invited on the panel's recommendations.

6.1 Reports Recommendations

The report makes 73 recommendations across six thematic areas:

- Community and Personal Safety and Prevention
- Risk Assessment
- Access to Personal Change Programmes
- Monitoring of Sex Offenders
- Housing Provision for Sex Offenders
- Information management

Community and Personal Safety and Prevention

The long term, pro-active, preventative measures of the first 12 recommendations are especially welcomed.

Recommendation 1 and 2:

- 1 The Scottish Executive, with the local authorities, should issue guidance to ensure that each local authority has in place personal safety programmes that include addressing the risk from sex offending.**
- 2 Learning and Teaching Scotland and Community Learning Scotland should prepare comprehensive personal safety materials that are specific to Scotland and include material which addresses issues of child sexual abuse and child safety.**

Guidance from the Scottish Executive will be useful in maintaining consistency across Scotland.

Recommendation 3:

- 3 As an important preventative measure and to assist early indication of, and intervention with, sexually aggressive behaviour, schools should provide information, education and support to pupils on safe and healthy relationships.**

There will be the need for specific basic awareness training for education staff. It is essential that any planned information material is user-friendly and targeted at different audience groups.

Recommendation 4, 5 and 6:

- 4 Young people looked after by local authorities should receive more targeted support. The Association of Directors of Social Work and the Scottish Institute for Residential Childcare should convene a joint working group to develop a strategy for, and supporting materials on, safe and healthy relationships and assertiveness skills.**
- 5 The strategy for early intervention with young sex offenders and those at risk of sex offending should take account of the needs of those young woman who are particularly vulnerable to this group of sex offenders. These young women should also be a priority for more targeted intervention. For those vulnerable young women in a care setting, materials and a programme should be developed which promote healthy relationships and provide information about sexual health.**

6 Remedial and more intensive programmes and materials should be developed separately for: -

- (i) Children and young people looked after by local authorities**
- (ii) Children and young people with special educational needs or in special schools and**
- (iii) Children identified as living with or affected by domestic violence**

We welcome the plan for targeting intervention for vulnerable groups and matching the intensity of the programme to identified need. We undertake to convene the recommended joint working group with the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care at the earliest opportunity.

Recommendation 7:

7 The Scottish Executive and the local authorities, in consultation with community organisations, should devise a public information strategy on child sexual abuse and prepare and publish information on the following topics: -

- **the incidence of sex offending**
- **the behaviour of sex offenders**
- **the operation of the Sex Offenders Act 1997**
- **the responsibilities of statutory agencies to monitor and supervise offenders**
- **government policy on disclosure**
- **information about the risks which result from the provision of uncontrolled information to the public about individual sex offenders and their whereabouts**

Local authorities and other agencies should draw upon existing expertise in child protection to provide supplementary information.

The proposed public information strategy will sit comfortably within the local structures of Community Safety/Public Protection Forums that already exist in Dundee and publish annual reports.

Recommendation 8:

8 As part of the wider information strategy, the Scottish Executive should publish a leaflet, based on the draft text prepared by the Expert Panel on Sex Offending which provides parents with information on which to base decisions about child safety in groups. It should be widely circulated to parents and carers.

The original leaflet was well received and will be useful in raising awareness for parents. The leaflet should comprehensively bring together advice over the full range of checks a parent might ask in relation to such provision including child protection policy and the criminal records checks that would be made on adult leaders of children's groups.

Recommendation 9:

9 The Scottish Executive should sponsor a national conference and a series of workshops on reducing the risk from sex offending. These should help to facilitate discussion between communities and agencies. Workshops might be integrated into existing child safety awareness initiatives and should include providing information about how to keep children safe from sex offenders.

Attention should be paid to accessibility, targeted publicity and low-cost admission to enable community participation.

Although the concept of a national conference is welcomed, focussing on "local" events within the local authority partnerships will encourage continued multi-agency, collaborative working as well as raising public awareness

Recommendation 10:

- 10 As part of their community safety plan, each local authority should develop a corporate approach (involving all the relevant departments) to the management of sex offenders in the community. This corporate approach should reflect the particular contribution each council department can make to enhancing public safety through the effective management of sex offenders. The plan should also draw on the skills and expertise of other stakeholders, including registered social landlords, voluntary sector agencies, the police and local people.**

Community Safety/Public Protection strategies are being promoted in all areas with the aim of involving of all stakeholders. Local authorities need to develop a clear communication policy which measures risk and places workers in a position where their roles/responsibilities over disclosure/confidentiality are clear and unambiguous.

Recommendation 11:

- 11 The Scottish Executive should provide information and guidance about undertaking a police criminal record check on those adults who work with children in either a paid or voluntary capacity. If the proposed Index of adults unsuitable to work with children is compiled, the Scottish Executive should issue accessible information about its use and interpretation. Information should also be given on the link between the Index and the Scottish Criminal Record Office.**

The provision of up-dated information and guidance on SCRO checks on adults who work with children will be welcomed.

The issue of compulsory criminal record/index checking on all personnel staff involved in working with young people or vulnerable adults, especially within the voluntary sector remains unresolved because although the checks can be made by the voluntary sector at "no fee" there is no legislative compulsion on the agency to do so.

Recommendation 12:

- 12 The Scottish Prison Service should actively develop a robust protocol to address the issue of the protection of child visitors to convicted sex offenders in prison.**

Recommending the development of a protocol addressing the protection of child visitors to convicted sex offenders in prison is highly supported. We feel that this should incorporate a process of full risk assessment and risk management in each individual case.

Risk Assessment

Recommendation 13:

- 13 In all cases prosecuted in indictment where an offender is convicted of a sexual offence, or an offence with a significant sexual element, the Court should be required to obtain both a social enquiry report and a psychological assessment. A social enquiry report should also be mandatory for offenders convicted at summary level or a sexual offence, or an offence where there is evidence of a sexual element or motivation; sheriffs dealing with summary cases should be alert to the possible need for psychological as well as social enquiry reports.**

The broadening out of the offences where a social enquiry report and psychological assessment should be requested by the court is most welcome. This would be further strengthened if the "plea bargaining" out of the sexual component of the offence could be restricted as far as possible.

Recommendation 14 and 15:

- 14 Report writers should consult with each other in order to reach an informed view about the degree of risk presented by the offender and about how best to address and manage the risk**
- 15 The provisions of section 201(3) of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 should be amended so that in sexual offence cases the single period during which the court may adjourn the hearing of the case after conviction and before sentence for the purpose of enabling enquiries to be made is increased. The current maximum of three weeks, where an accused is remanded in custody and four weeks where he is remanded on bail or ordained to appear, should be increased to six weeks in all cases.**

All of the recommendations on the reports to court, from receiving of more information, through to consulting with other relevant professionals, to the longer available period to achieve a more detailed, in depth assessment are positively supported.

Recommendations 16 to 19:

- 16 All agencies involved in work with sex offenders should adopt the structured clinical approach to risk assessment and should use recognised structured tools as part of this approach. Each agency should undertake a regular audit of the use of such tools by its staff.**
- 17 Use of the risk assessment framework promulgated by Social Work Services Inspectorate (SWSI) should be rigorously audited to ensure that it is modified in the light of experience and in the light of future research.**
- 18 Criminal Justice Social Workers must receive appropriate training in risk assessment procedures.**
- 19 The Scottish Executive should issue a national protocol outlining principals of good practice in risk assessment to be binding on all of the key agencies involved in such work with sex offenders.**

We welcome the proposals on risk assessment including the establishment of a core risk assessment approach whilst allowing a degree of flexibility for usage of recognised tools. Training is vital for staff who are working with sex offenders not only in the practice of risk assessment, but in areas such as theory and research, methods of working and coping with the stress of the work.

Recommendation 20:

- 20 Additional resources should be provided to recruit, train and employ more clinical or forensic psychologists and more forensic psychiatrists.**

Increased resources resulting in improved access to psychological and psychiatric services would be of great benefit, not just at the initial risk assessment stage, but for the development of continuing psychometric testing which could support personal change programmes. They are also invaluable where the offender has a learning disability.

Recommendation 21

- 21 The Scottish Executive should provide guidance in relation to what constitutes high, medium and low risk.**

National guidance on definitions of risk will be positively received.

Access to Personal Change Programmes

Recommendations 22 to 24

- 22 All local authority criminal justice social work services should make available specialist intervention programmes for those sex offenders who are subject to supervision in the community and are deemed suitable. All criminal justice social work services should review the skill mix of staff involved in the management of sex offenders and make formal arrangements with adjacent authorities to ensure that specific sex offender programmes are available as close as possible to the offender's domicile. A directory of personal change programmes for sex offenders should be collated, regularly updated and made available to all relevant agencies.**
- 23 Local authorities and the Scottish Executive should produce an agreed 'core' intervention manual for use with sex offenders in the community based on cognitive behavioural principles. STOP 2000 could form the basis for the manual but would require modification for community use and for different types of sex offender.**
- 24 Local authorities should establish arrangements for joint training in programme delivery with the aim of ensuring that, within each local criminal justice social work service, there is sufficient expertise to deliver the core components of personal change programmes based on a cognitive behavioural approach. This identified group should be responsible for developing: -**
- (i) minimum training standards for workers involved in the delivery of personal change programmes for sex offenders.**
 - (ii) a strategy for ensuring adequate supervision and support for programme facilitators and**
 - (iii) a strategy for continuing professional development to ensure skills are retained and enhanced on a regular basis.**

The universal availability of specialist intervention programmes based on cognitive behavioural principles is a positive aim and the concept of a "core manual" for working with sex offenders in the community closely linked to the necessary training of staff is excellent. Although the STOP programme is given as an example within the report there are also several community-based programmes, such as the Tay Project, which are able to demonstrate effective practice.

Consideration should be given to a post-qualification award in working with potentially dangerous offenders/sex offenders that would parallel the Child Protection Certificate.

The issue of compatibility between prison and community programmes is an important one and the involvement of the Scottish Prison Service along with experienced project staff in the development of the "core manual" will be imperative.

The training of Scottish Prison Service staff who run programmes should also be considered.

Recommendation 25

- 25 Sentencers and the Parole Board should be provided with regularly updated information about the available provision of community based programmes for sex offenders.**

Within the recommendation for regular updated information for sentencers, report writers and the parole board, there is a need for this to be collected into and disseminated from a central point. For ease of access and the reduction of publishing/distribution costs consideration should be given to use of information technology.

Recommendation 26:

26 Consideration should be given to identifying and securing funding for risk assessment and personal change programmes for: -

- **individuals who have admitted sexually offending behaviour but without providing sufficient information to secure a conviction**
- **individuals who admit concerns that they may be at risk of sexual offending and convicted sex offenders who remain at risk but are not subject to statutory supervision**

and who require ongoing support/intervention to reduce the risk they present to the public.

The development of services for sex offenders or those at risk of offending who cannot access current programmes is another vitally important area within the preventative strategy. There may be some merit in looking at their equivalent within domestic violence.

Other countries have progressed services within a public health umbrella and this would be usefully considered for those adults seeking help voluntarily, or where there is no conviction.

Where the person is previously convicted and known to a community-based project and is motivated to work within that service, there should be sufficient resources made available to support this work.

Recommendations 27 to 33:

27 HM Inspectorate of Prisons should, towards the end of 2002, undertake a thematic inspection of the current availability and provision of personal change programmes for sex offenders who are in custody.

28 The Scottish Prison Service should ensure the availability of sex offender intervention programmes for every convicted sex offender including those given a custodial sentence of two years or less. The Scottish Prison Service should also set out a timetable for achieving this and key performance indicators should be put in place to monitor progress towards achieving this target.

29 The Scottish Prison Service should build on its existing training strategy for staff involved in the delivery of personal change programmes for sex offenders by developing a strategy for continuing professional development. The Scottish Prison Service should also develop enhanced training to support those delivering programmes to sex offenders who deny their offending or who refuse to accept any responsibility for their behaviour.

30 The Scottish Prison Service should identify an individual (or group of individuals) to take responsibility for co-ordinating all the intervention programmes which are available to sex offenders. This should take place both at central strategic level and within individual prisons. The role should include the following responsibilities: -

- (i) identifying which interventions are required and which should take priority**
- (ii) monitoring waiting lists**
- (iii) monitoring completion and drop rates**

(iv) monitoring the overall effectiveness of the programmes through the use of standard psychometric tests.

- 31 The Scottish Prison Service should develop a strategy for the management of offenders who deny their sex offending and/or refuse to participate in personal change programmes.
- 32 The Scottish Prison Service should establish a working group to consider how best to monitor personal change and, with external agencies, how best to disseminate that information
- 33 Sentencers and the Parole Board should be provided with regularly updated information about the programmes available for sex offenders in a custodial setting.

All the recommendations regarding programme delivery and availability within prisons are welcomed, especially the issues of training for prison staff delivering the programmes, and the assessment of the change/progress made by prisoners. This detailed assessment information is often lacking at present yet is vital for the community-based workers on release both in ensuring compatibility of interventions and in the shaping of the risk management plan.

Recommendations 34 to 39:

- 34 The Scottish Executive should review current provision in relation to assessment and intervention programmes and provision for children and young people who have committed a sexual offence or who are displaying sexually aggressive behaviour.
- 35 The Scottish Executive should develop a national strategy for a specialist assessment and intervention service for children and young people who offend or who display sexually aggressive behaviour.

This service should include access to a robust and comprehensive risk and needs assessment and to offence-specific personal change programmes to be available both in the community and in secure and non-secure residential settings. The national strategy should specify the skills mix of staff which would be required to deliver the service and should set out rigorous standards for training, competence, supervision, continuity and professional development and programme content and evaluation.

- 36 All children and young people identified as at risk of sex offending or who are displaying sexually aggressive behaviour should have access to an appropriate change programme.
- 37 The Scottish Executive should produce a specialist resource pack following the review for use with sexually aggressive young people. This pack should be piloted in a few centres.
- 38 Local authorities should examine the interface between children and family services and criminal justice services to ensure that those children and young people who are sexually aggressive or at risk from sex offending get a service determined by their need and not by their point of access to the system.
- 39 There should be a national programme of training for staff in young offenders institutions and Secure Units who deliver personal change programmes. The programme should build on the proposed universal developments in schools and community education.

All the recommendations covering working with children and young people who offend sexually or display sexually aggressive behaviour are welcomed.

The importance of preventive work that might stop a young person going on to more serious offending has to be one of the main strands of any preventative strategy. This should include children who are subject to, or witness domestic violence as research indicates this may be a key factor with children and adults who sexually abuse.

Work in this area, including research into risk factors, is considerably behind that of adult offenders. Consideration should also be given to working with young people with special needs.

Monitoring Sex Offenders

Recommendation 40 to 43:

- 40 Section 2 of Schedule 1 of the Sex Offenders Act should be amended to broaden the scope of offences to which the notification requirements apply.**
- 41 The requirement to provide notification under the Sex Offenders Act 1997 should be extended to include any offender convicted of any crime containing a sexual element, at the discretion of the sentencing judge.**
- 42 Offences under sections 106 and 107 of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 should be included in Schedule 1 to the Sex Offenders Act 1997.**
- 43 The notification requirement should be extended to include: -**
 - (i) any British national convicted of a relevant sexual offence outside the UK who returns to the United Kingdom and**
 - (ii) any foreign national, similarly convicted, who has come to the United Kingdom following conviction.**

The proposal to extend the offences to which the notification requirements apply, especially to any crime where there is a significant sexual element would fill an important gap in the current provision.

Recommendation 44 to 47:

- 44 Sex offenders who are subject to the notification requirements should be required to attend in person at a police station in order to provide the appropriate notice and should at the time of doing so also be required to furnish reasonable proof of identity.**
- 45 Sex offenders who are subject to the notification requirements should be required to notify the police within five days: -**
 - a) when they intend to be away from their home address for more than five days, and**
 - b) of any address in the UK where they reside or stay longer than five days**
- 46 Sex offenders who are subject to the notification requirements and are of no fixed abode should be required to report to a police station every seven days.**
- 47 Where an offender has failed to register timeously, the Court having jurisdiction in the place of his last known address should have the power to grant a warrant for his arrest in respect of the commission of an offence under section 3 of the 1997 Act.**

Changes have already been progressed within the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, which strengthens the notification process as recommended

Recommendation 48:

- 48 Sex offenders, whether or not subject to the notification requirements of the Sex Offenders Act 1997, should be required to comply with the risk assessment process to the extent of making themselves available to the appropriate agencies for interview and of allowing access to their home for the purpose of risk assessment.**

This will be improved further should the requirement to comply with the risk assessment process be agreed, as the voluntary nature of the process has been a major weakness.

Recommendation 49:

- 49 A statutory duty should be placed upon Chief Constables and Chief Social Work Officers to establish joint arrangements for assessing, monitoring and managing risk.**

Many areas, including Dundee City Council, have local joint police/social work protocols for working with sex offenders.

Recommendation 50:

- 50 Hospital managers and the Scottish Prison Service should be required to give notification to the police on the release or transfer of patients or prisoners subject to the notification requirement of the Sex Offenders Act. The Scottish Executive guidance should be amended to reflect this change and should also take account of the situation where a detained patient is granted leave of absence from hospital. The area of notification to the police on the release or transfer of prisoners or patients has been one that has caused some concern in the past. A positive amendment would be to change "on the release or transfer" to " a minimum of 14 days prior to release or transfer".**

There is also an issue about sharing the risk assessment information used to make the release decisions with the police and relevant agencies.

Recommendation 51:

- 51 The Scottish Executive should give further consideration to providing a legislative base to allow for the use of electronic monitoring for the highest risk offenders on their release to assist in the monitoring process.**

The proposed consideration of the use of electronic monitoring within the range of risk management methods for high risk sex offenders is awaited with interest.

Housing Provision for Sex Offenders

Recommendation 52:

- 52 The Scottish Executive, Scottish Homes, the local authorities and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations should develop a national accommodation strategy to assist the management of sex offenders in the community. This strategy should be based on the key principles articulated in the guidance issued by the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland (CIHS) and on the explicit expectation that sex offenders will be accommodated outwith their home area *only in exceptional circumstances*. A central clearing house arrangement should be established to deal with these exceptional cases in the interests of community safety.**

The national accommodation strategy is has only recently been issued and more time is required to consider the full implications of the strategy.

Recommendation 53 and 54:

- 53 The Scottish Executive should provide funding to enable the local authorities, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the relevant professional bodies to develop and education and training programme on good practice in housing sex offenders in the community. The programme would be targeted to housing providers and their management bodies. This should be based on the guidance developed by the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, should address stakeholders concerns about the responsibilities and limitations imposed on the police, social work and other agencies through implementation of the Sex Offenders Act and should locate good practice within the context of community safety.**
- 54 The Homelessness Task Force should ensure that any new guidance relating to the Housing Bill and the revision of the Code of Guidance on Homelessness take appropriate account both of the need to house sex offenders and of the particular challenges this presents.**

All the recommendations appear entirely appropriate and in line with other developments.

Information Management.

Recommendation 55 to 59:

- 55 In sexual offence cases prosecuted, on indictment, where a plea of guilty is tendered and accepted, the tape recording of the Crown's narrative of the facts of the offence upon which the plea has been agreed, together with anything said on the accused's behalf, should be transcribed and made available to report writers. In summary cases, similar arrangements should be put in place.**
- 56 Where a sexual offence cases has proceeded to trial and conviction, a brief note should be prepared by the trial judge. This should set out the circumstances of the offence as established by the evidence. This note should accompany the request from the court to each report writer.**
- 57 As recommended in chapter 2, for any information from the Court and all material gathered by report writers should be routinely shared by report writers. Those writing reports should prepare their reports in consultation with each other.**
- 58 A system should be introduced for flagging, on an offenders record, the existence of a sexual element in any case where the charge is not itself a sexual offence.**
- 59 The Crown should ensure that in all sexual offence cases it appends to the notice of previous convictions the extract of any previous convictions where it considers that there are factors relating to that previous conviction which ought to be before the court in deciding on the appropriate disposal.**

The recommendations covering the quality of information available to the court and report writers are most welcome and will (when linked with Recommendation 15 regarding extended timescale for the completion of reports) result in improved risk assessments.

Recommendation 60 to 62:

- 60 The Scottish Prison Service, local authorities, hospitals and the Scottish Court Service should build on their existing liaison arrangements to establish effective systems for the transfer of information. Targets for the speed of transfer of information should be set. The effectiveness of transfer arrangements and targets should be monitored.**
- 61 The social enquiry report and any psychological and psychiatric reports should be made to the Scottish Prison Service when a prisoner enters custody. The warrant travelling with the prisoner should clearly set out which reports obtained promptly. The Scottish Court Service should ensure that the trial judge's report is passed on as soon as possible thereafter and the Scottish Prison Service should monitor receipt of these, pursuing outstanding reports as necessary.**
- 62 The Scottish Court Service and the Scottish Prison Service should ensure that staff training procedures cover information transfer and they should monitor the accuracy of recording of information.**

The highlighted problems about the flow of information into and out of the prisons are noted and may have resource implications for The Scottish Court Service.

Recommendation 63:

- 63 The Scottish Prison Service and local authorities should develop a national protocol determining the pertinent information which must be exchanged at the point of release from custody into the community.**

A national protocol determining release information should be developed in line with the Throughcare Standards.

Recommendation 64 and 65:

- 64 Protocols to provide a framework for information sharing and joint working should be developed. These should draw on the best examples of current good practice and should be kept under review to ensure that they do not degrade and become less useful over time. The development of these protocols should involve liaison with relevant voluntary organisations.**
- 65 The importance of information sharing should be reflected in the key performance indicators of individual agencies.**

Information sharing and management protocols and KPI's "locally" may be best incorporated within the Community Safety/Public Protection frameworks.

Recommendation 66 to 69:

- 66 The potential offered by the greater integration of the IT systems of individual agencies should be fully exploited to improve the overall management of information and to ensure that sex offenders can be readily identified.**
- 67 The management of social work and other files should be improved through: -**
- a checklist of key information sources attached to the front of each file
 - better section headings so that routine correspondence does not restrict access to important documents
 - reduction of redundancy and repetition

- 68 The following terms should be developed and used by all agencies in order to ensure greater common understanding: registered; non-registered; un-registered; potential/suspected sex offenders; vulnerable adult; sexually aggressive young people.**
- 69 Criminal justice social workers should attend meetings of the Parole Board as part of their training and factual information about the Board's functions should be made available to social workers. Supervising social workers should receive, as a matter of routine, the relevant parts of the parole dossier and the relevant sections of the Minutes of the Board.**

The proposed practical measures are welcomed although the fragmentation of IT systems across partnership areas will require action.

Recommendation 70:

- 70 There should be joint training of agencies to facilitate the development of shared understanding and effective communication. Such training should be in the form of modules with clearly defined topics relevant and useful to individual agencies.**

Multi-disciplinary training is already the norm in many areas covering basic awareness training and risk assessment.

Recommendation 71 to 73:

- 71 Information, guidance and training should be provided to prosecutors and the judiciary to increase understanding of the nature and special features of sex offending and its prosecution.**
- 72 The Crown should consider leading evidence to assist the jury in a sexual offence trial to understand the likely behavioural impact on the victim of a sexual crime.**
- 73 Good practice guidance for dealing with young witnesses should be available for the judiciary in sexual offence cases. Similar guidance should also be available for practitioners.**

The recommendations regarding training of the prosecutors and the judiciary and better support for the victims are most welcome.

There is a fundamental difficulty in this area when the sexual component of the charge is removed from the charge accepted by the perpetrator. (E.g. Assault instead of sexual assault). Offenders are obviously more prepared to plead guilty to an offence that does not require them to register as a sex offender.

Guidance for practitioners should include workers who support victims in trials (e.g. Victim Support, Witness Support).

7.0 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The Director of Housing, Director of Corporate Planning, Director of Personnel & Management Services and the Director of Education have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

9.0 SIGNATURE

Director of Social Work

Date

8 August 2001