

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE- 14TH SEPTEMBER 2009

REPORT ON: TAYSIDE PILOT OFFENDER DISCLOSURE SCHEME

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 428-2009

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To inform Committee of the forthcoming pilot Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme, led by the Scottish Government and Tayside Police, which will be operational across the Tayside Police Force area between 21 September 2009 and May 2010.

1.2 It is anticipated that further information, as well as an opportunity to ask questions relating to the pilot, will be provided by Tayside Police at a briefing event which is being planned for Dundee City Council elected members.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Social Work and Health Committee:

- o note the Disclosure Scheme to be piloted by Tayside Police;
- o note the potential implications for Dundee City Council Social Work Services, in particular, child care and protection services.
- o note that a presentation on the Disclosure Scheme was presented to elected members on 8 September 2009.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 None.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 Background

4.1.1 The Scottish Government is represented on a group of key stakeholders formed by the Home Office to consider progress of the Home Office Review of the Protection of Children from Sex Offenders (2007). That Review identified the need to pilot models of disclosure of information about sex offenders living in the community to further strengthen efforts to keep children safe. Disclosure Pilot Schemes were subsequently established in four designated police force areas across England and Wales: Hampshire, Warwickshire, Cleveland and Cambridgeshire. Initial evaluation information has been positive and the pilots are being considered for a national roll out in England and Wales.

4.1.2 In May 2009, the Justice Secretary announced plans for a Scottish disclosure scheme pilot. Tayside was subsequently identified as the force area for the pilot which will "go live" on 21 September 2009 and run to May 2010. An interim evaluation report is scheduled for March 2010 with a full evaluation report expected in the summer of 2010.

4.1.3 The pilot will be supported by a media publicity campaign sponsored by the Scottish Government; development of the communication strategy is ongoing and involves key stakeholders.

4.2 Disclosure Scheme Details

- 4.2.1 The Disclosure pilot will enable members of the public to register with Tayside Police, a child protection interest in a named person who has access to their children.
- 4.2.2 Where checks indicate that the person is a Registered Sex Offender with previous convictions for sexual offending against children, there will be a presumption that relevant information will be disclosed to the parent, guardian or carer.
- 4.2.3 Where, on the basis of information received, a child is considered at risk Tayside Police will utilise the range of child protection measures under existing arrangements as appropriate. Any disclosure will occur in full consultation with partner agencies through existing Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).
- 4.2.4 The pilot also enables third parties such as grandparents, neighbours and friends to register an interest and provide information however, on those occasions, any disclosure would be limited to the parent, carer or guardian.
- 4.2.5 The Disclosure Scheme does not introduce uncontrolled disclosure of information regarding convicted sex offenders. It provides an opportunity for legitimate concerns to be reported to a single point of contact within Tayside Police and ensures that parents, carers or guardians will be informed of relevant information when a risk is identified.
- 4.2.6 Whilst the Disclosure Scheme is designed with a specific remit around the disclosure of information relating to offenders with sexual convictions against children, it is entirely possible that members of the public may use the pilot to report concerns regarding domestic abuse, substance abuse and other concerns they have regarding the care or welfare of a child or children. In addition, officers dealing with an application under the scheme may uncover information which reveals a risk of serious harm from domestic abuse not sexual abuse.
- 4.2.7 In any such case, where a child is considered at risk, Tayside Police will utilise the range of child protection measures under existing arrangements as appropriate to safeguard the child. Disclosure under these circumstances would take place under existing child protection procedures.

4.3 Implications for Social Work

- 4.3.1 Whilst the pilot will be staffed and operated by Tayside Police, there will be a need for the Social Work Department to interface with the Disclosure Scheme at key points. It is anticipated that there will be requests for information to verify details received from applicants to the Scheme. Secondly, the availability of an additional point of contact for the public to report child protection concerns, together with a high profile marketing strategy for the project, may lead to members of the public calling in relation to other types of interpersonal offending or concerns about children. This may effect an increase in referrals to Children's Services by Tayside Police.
- 4.3.2 However, early indications are that the number of applications made to schemes operating in England and Wales have been fairly low, with each pilot scheme receiving 15-25 disclosure requests a month, only a small proportion of these resulted in a disclosure.
- 4.3.3 In England and Wales police have received information that has:
- helped to close intelligence gaps around known sex offenders;
 - helped to protect children from sex offenders through supporting risk management;
 - helped parents protect their own children;
 - helped to identify sex offenders.

- 4.3.4 One concern commonly noted in discussions around Disclosure Pilots is that offenders will move to areas not covered by the scheme (known as displacement). There has been no evidence of displacement of sex offenders from the pilot areas in England and Wales. In order to manage any offender anxiety, all registered sex offenders are being advised of the scheme in advance of the go live date.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This Report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management.

There are no major issues.

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 6.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Depute Chief Executive (Finance), Head of Finance and Tayside Police have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Home Office Review of the Protection of Children from Sex Offenders (2007).
MAPPA Guidance Version 4 (2008), particularly Part 4, Section 1.

ALAN BAIRD, DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

DATE: 03/09/2009