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Press Release

DISCLOSURE PROJECT LAUNCHED IN TAYSIDE

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EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01hrs, 14 September 2009

A pilot project to provide parents with improved access to information about known sex offenders who may be in contact with their children is launched in Tayside today (14 September 2009).

The Scottish Government selected Tayside Police to run the pilot until the end of May 2010.

This will provide a formal route for parents, carers or guardians of children under 18 years old, through which they can ask Tayside Police to tell them if a person has a record for sexual offences against children, or other offences that might put their child at risk.

Police will be more readily alerted to concerns, with a presumption that they will inform the parent, carer or guardian if the named person has convictions for sex offences. If the child is found to be at serious risk of harm then child protection measures will be instigated.

The project will be supported by a publicity campaign which will be rolled out throughout the pilot. As of Monday 21 September, callers to Tayside Police on 0300 111 2222 who have concerns about the safety of a child will be directed to a dedicated line where the information will be acted upon by specialists in the field of child protection.

Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill will visit Tayside Police today to officially launch the project. He said,

“Devolution has enabled the Scottish Parliament and our criminal justice agencies to make significant changes to the management of sex offenders – building on three expert reviews and a cross-party committee inquiry.

“With this pilot the Scottish Government is going further still as we make good our commitment – shared right across Parliament – to continuously review how best to further safeguard our communities.

“Our statutory agencies have considerably strengthened how they work together to protect communities from the potential risks posed by offenders but the public too has a role in assisting the authorities.

“While we must all rightly be alert to ‘stranger danger’, most sexual offences against children are committed by individuals known to the child’s family - adults who abuse a position of trust with that child.

“This project provides another link which will assist in identifying vulnerable children and families who are unknown to police and care agencies to ensure that correct help and advice are provided.”

Tayside Police Assistant Chief Constable Bill Harkins added,

“We are pleased that Tayside Police, along with its community and criminal justice partners, will be responsible for the pilot project.

“We have been working closely with the Scottish Government in advance of the pilot project’s implementation. Clearly good partnership working already exists in relation to the management of sex offenders in Tayside and, irrespective of the pilot project, people should always contact the authorities if they have any concerns over the safety of any child in their community.

“Tayside Police successfully piloted the implementation of Fixed Penalty Notices on behalf of the Scottish Government and we will continue to lead where there can be developments in policing that are to the benefit of the wider community.”

Bailie Helen Wright, Convener of Tayside Community Justice Authority, said,

“In Tayside we are committed to working in partnership to increase public confidence in the criminal justice system.

“We want to ensure that public protection concerns are at the forefront of our work in managing convicted offenders who may present a risk to others.

“The pilot scheme in Tayside will operate as one part of a range of public protection initiatives in the area, where criminal justice partners work closely together to safeguard our communities. We welcome the fact that the decision to locate the pilot in Tayside acknowledges these strengths.”

Martin Henry, National Manager of Stop It Now! , is at the fore-front of promoting the prevention of sexual offending against children. He said,

“This is an important contribution to the protection of children in families and communities across Tayside. Stop it Now! Scotland works in close partnership across agencies and government to educate and inform individuals, families and communities about sexual abuse and sex offending. We hope that the evaluation of the disclosure pilot will provide important information creating a real opportunity to

ensure that children across Scotland are properly protected at the earliest stage by their parents together with all relevant agencies.”

Anne Houston from Children 1st added,

“Members of the public are concerned that everything possible is done to ensure that convicted sex offenders do not continue to offend - and rightly so. CHILDREN 1ST welcomes Tayside's pilot of tightly controlled community disclosure of information relating to sexual offenders. The pilot will enable parents and carers to formally check out concerns they may have about a person with significant access to their children. We see this as potentially offering an important additional protection for children.

“Child protection is everyone's responsibility. In previous similar pilots in England people have been encouraged to exercise their responsibility to children by alerting the authorities, with a higher expectation that their concerns will be followed through. This would be a positive outcome for vulnerable children and families.”

NOTE TO EDITORS

A photo / filming / interview opportunity with Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill and other members of the Disclosure Project Board will take place at **1.30pm on Monday 14 September 2009** within the **lecture theatre at Tayside Police's Training Centre, Balunie Drive, Dundee.**

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SENIOR MEDIA RELATIONS OFFICER