

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE: 8 NOVEMBER 2001

REDUCING THE RISK : IMPROVING THE RESPONSE TO SEX OFFENDING

Report by the Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise the Committee of the above report and the East Ayrshire Council response to the recommendations it contains.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Under the Chairmanship of Lady Cosgrove the then Secretary of State for Scotland established 'The Expert Panel on Sex Offending' in 1998. Drawing its membership from a wide range of relevant disciplines including the judiciary, the prosecution service, the police, the prison service, social work and health the Panel's principal remit may be summarised as:

- take forward work on the recommendations of the Social Work Services Inspectorate report 'A Commitment to Protect: Supervising Sex Offenders: Proposals for More Effective Practice' (1997);
- advise on any other relevant issues relating to the management of sex offenders in the community.

- 2.2 The purpose of the report was to set an agenda for the future where the protection of communities is paramount. Primarily a report for Scottish Executive Ministers it was, in recognition of the legitimate interest of an extensive range of bodies, widely circulated for comment.

- 2.3 In formulating the response comments from the Council's Department of Homes and Technical Services were incorporated.

3. THE REPORT

- 3.1 In setting out the purpose of their report the Expert Panel acknowledged that the problem of sex offending is one which cannot be eradicated. However, they further acknowledged that there were steps which can and should be taken to make communities safer.

- 3.2 In its overview of current provision and delivery the Expert Panel recognised a range of difficulties in dealing with sex offending. These included difficulties in discerning the extent of sex offending, under-reporting, and in securing convictions. The general private nature of sexual offending and the need for and difficulty in obtaining necessary corroborating evidence were also considered obstacles to understanding the full extent of the problem. In addition there was recognition of the problems faced in dealing with convicted sex offenders, both in attempting to change their behaviour and in seeking to reintegrate them into the community.

3.3 The Expert Panel are very clear in stating that, while communities should be at the centre of efforts to combat sex offending there was convincing evidence from the research undertaken that public disclosure of information about convicted sex offenders does not promote community safety. Consequently the Expert Panel did not support the general notification of such information to communities.

3.4 The Expert Panel identified a number of measures, which they felt would strengthen the response to sex offending, and to provide a framework to deliver a change for the better. Amongst a range of measures they identified a need for:

- improved understanding within communities about sex offending and the positive involvement of communities in the development of local strategies for the management of sex offenders;
- better protection through the development of education based programmes and the provision of public information which deals with the dangers of sex offending;
- a more consistent approach to risk assessment through the use of the structured clinical approach;
- wider provision of personal change programmes and greater monitoring of their effectiveness and availability.

3.5 The six chapters of the report reflect the following thematic areas:

- Community and personal safety and prevention;
- Risk Assessment;
- Access to personal change programmes (for both children and adults);
- Monitoring sex offenders;
- Housing provision for sex offenders;
- Information management.

4. RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The Expert Panel have made 73 recommendations across the six thematic areas identified at 3.5. The response provided has considered each of the recommendations individually.

4.2 East Ayrshire's response supported the greater proportion of the recommendations across the six thematic areas, but many of the responses suggest ways in which the recommendations may be strengthened. In addition the response took account of the procedures and practice embodied in the Council's existing policy document "Managing Sex Offenders in the Community", approved by Social Work Committee of 1st December 1998 (Item No. 15, Page No. 4018), particularly in relation to risk assessment, monitoring, and housing provision.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 An Expert Panel on Sex Offending was established three years ago to consider ways in which the management of sex offenders in the community could be improved. The Panel reported in July of this year to the Scottish Executive. The report, which contained 73 recommendations across six thematic areas, was widely circulated for consultation purposes. The response developed was a broadly supportive one with a number of accompanying suggestions to strengthen the recommendations made.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications for the Council.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 It is recommended that Social Work Committee:
- (i) note the response to the report of the Expert Panel on Sex Offending.

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services
22nd October 2001
DF/MD
Enc (1)

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Response to the Report of the Expert Panel on Sex Offending: 'Reducing the Risk: Improving the Response to Sex Offending';

A copy of the report will be available in the Members Information Point.

For further information please contact Donal Flannery, Service Unit Manager (Criminal Justice), Tel: 01563 576907

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AGENDA