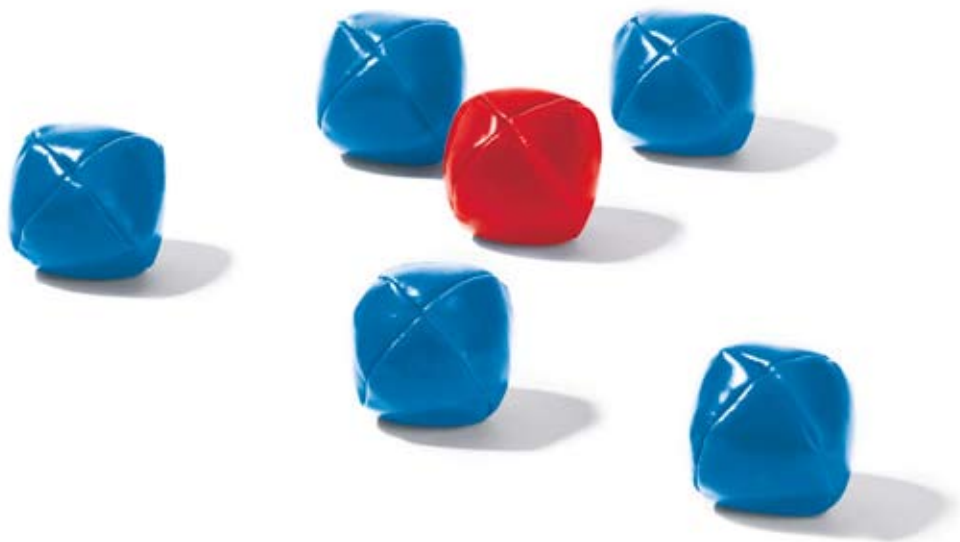


Keeping Children Safe



**Information disclosure
about child sexual
offenders**

There is a pilot scheme running in this area where parents, carers or guardians of children and young people can ask the police to tell them if a person has a record for child sexual offences.

If police checks show that they have a record for child sexual offences, or other offences that might put the child at risk, the police will consider sharing this information with the child's parent, carer or guardian.

1. How will this scheme do more to protect children? I thought anyone working with children had to be checked for child sexual offences?

This pilot scheme enables parents, carers or guardians to request information about people involved in their children's lives if they are concerned that he or she might be a registered child sexual offender – for example, if a single mother wants to find out more about her new boyfriend.

It does not replace checks done by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) or the new Vetting and Barring process run by the Independent Safeguarding Authority.

2. How does this pilot help?

The aim of the pilot is to test the effectiveness of giving parents, carers or guardians a more formal mechanism for requesting information about people that are involved in their family life, specifically if they are concerned that a person is a child sexual offender. Your local police force will discuss your concerns with you and decide whether it is appropriate for you to be given more information, and whether this will help protect the child involved.

Only 20 per cent of child sexual offences are carried out by strangers. The majority of child sexual offenders are known to their victims. They are often a member of the family, a friend of the victim, or a friend of the victim's family.

This is why this pilot may allow you to better protect your child from harm.

3. Can I participate in this pilot?

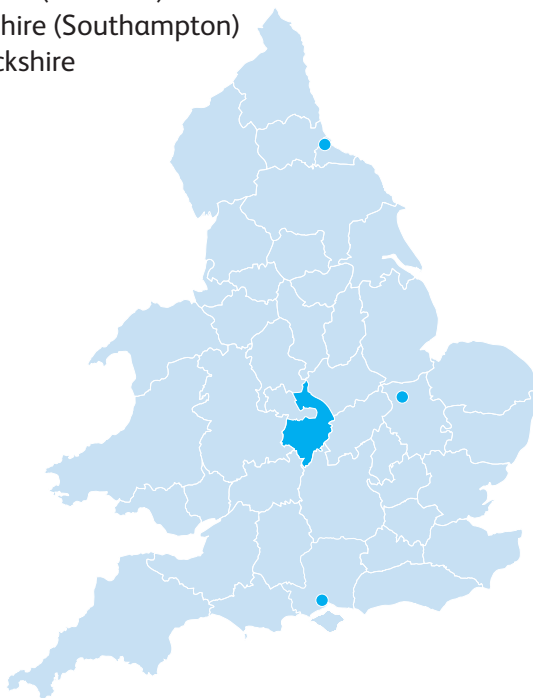
You can participate if:

- both you and the person you are asking about live in the pilot site area; and
- you are the parent, carer or guardian of the child involved in the enquiry.

If you have any concerns about a child's wellbeing – even if you are not a parent, carer, or guardian – you can report them to any police force in the country and the reports will be fully considered in accordance with safeguarding children procedures.

4. Where are the pilot areas?

- Cambridgeshire (Peterborough)
- Cleveland (Stockton)
- Hampshire (Southampton)
- Warwickshire



How can I access the pilot?

Step One:

Anyone can register an interest about an individual and/or child with the police.

Step Two:

There are many different ways to contact the police.

You can:

- visit a police station;
- phone the police;
- speak to a member of the police on the street; or
- email the police (Warwickshire only).

Step Three:

To be given any information about a person under the pilot you must be a parent, carer, or guardian. You will then be asked to fill in a form with a police officer. This will happen when you first contact the police if you go to the police station, or at a later time if you contact the force in another way.

You will need to provide proof of your identity and address if possible, including a photo ID. You will also need to show documentation that shows your relationship to the child in question.

Ideally, you will need to show two forms of identification (one of which must be a photo ID if you have one). These can be:

- your passport;
- your driving licence;
- a household utility bill;
- your bank statement;
- your benefit book; or
- your birth certificate.

Step Three (continued):

To establish your relationship with the child you will need to show one of the following:

- the child's birth certificate;
- the child's passport; or
- the child's benefit book.

However, if photo ID is not available, the police will consider other forms of ID.

Step Four:

The police will run two types of checks on the individual that you have concerns about:

a. Priority checks

These initial checks will take place within a maximum of 24 hours. The purpose of these checks is for police to establish if there are any immediate safeguarding children issues and take appropriate action. **If the police believe children need protecting, they will take immediate action.**

No disclosure of information will take place at this stage.

b. A full risk assessment

The police will run more detailed checks and work with other agencies including Children's Social Care services, the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and the probation services (if applicable).

The full risk assessment should be completed within 10 working days of contacting the police. They will work as quickly as possible to complete the checks but, in rare circumstances, some checks may take longer for the results to be received by the police force requesting them.

The maximum target time it should take to complete the investigation, including possible disclosure to the applicant, is six weeks but even then there may be some delays due to factors beyond the control of the police.

The police will act immediately if at any point during the investigation a child is considered to be at risk and in need of protection from harm.

Step Five:

The police will contact you once they have completed the priority checks, the full risk assessment and a careful decision-making process has been completed.

They will either:

- a. contact you in person (the police will visit you, or invite you to the station); or
- b. contact you by letter (this will only happen if there is no information for the police to provide you with, and you have previously agreed to be contacted by letter).

Step Six:

What kind of information might be given

If the checks show that the person you are asking about has a record for child sexual offences, you may be given information about that person's record that is relevant, necessary and proportionate in order to protect your child.

If the person enquired about does not have a record of child sexual offences then there won't be any information given because there is nothing to disclose.

The police will give you advice on safeguarding your children, and make sure you are aware of what local and national support is available.

It may be the case that the subject is not known to the police for child sexual offences but is showing worrying behaviour, or is known for other offences that might put your children's safety at risk – such as serious domestic violence.

In this case the police will work with you to protect your children and provide advice and support under safeguarding children procedures.

Step Seven: After you are given information

Can I tell my family and friends about this? I really need to talk to someone.

If you do receive information from the police it should be treated as confidential. It is only being given to you so that you can take steps to protect your children. You must not share this information with anyone else unless you have spoken to the police, or person who gave you the information, and they have agreed with you how it will be shared.

Subject to the condition that the information is kept confidential, you can:

- use the information to keep yourself and others safe;
- use the information to keep your children safe;
- ask what support is available;
- ask who you should contact if you think you or others are at risk; and
- ask for advice on how to keep yourself and others safe.

The police may decide not to give you information if they think that you will discuss it with others.

The police may take action against you if the information is disclosed without their consent, which could include civil or criminal proceedings.

Step Eight: The end of the investigation

Nothing was found on the searches, but this has really made me think about protecting my child. Is there anything else I can do?

There are a number of support groups providing information about child sexual abuse, how to spot it and how to work with the authorities to intervene.

Part of the process of the pilot is to make sure that each applicant has information about local and national services.

The applicant can also keep in regular contact with the police.

Even if a subject doesn't have a record for child sexual offences it doesn't mean that he or she is not potentially a risk.



Support helplines

Stop it Now! 0808 1000 900

This confidential helpline operates from 9am – 9pm Monday to Thursday and from 9am – 7pm on Friday.

www.stopitnow.org.uk

Stop it Now! is a confidential freephone helpline for people worried about their own sexual thoughts and feelings towards children or the sexual behaviour of others; parents and carers of young people with sexually worrying behaviour; and professionals needing help with difficult cases.

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline: 0808 800 5000

If you think a child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999.

If you're worried about a child's safety or welfare or if you need help or advice, ring our helpline on 0808 800 5000.

We can provide help by email, with response within 24 hours. If you are emailing us from Northern Ireland, please email talk@nspcc.org.uk.

From the rest of the UK please email help@nspcc.org.uk

- Textphone: 0800 056 0566
- Asian Helpline service in English: 0800 096 7719
- Bengali/Sylehti: 0800 096 7714
- Cymru/Wales: 0808 1002524
- Gujarati: 0800 096 7715
- Hindi: 0800 096 7716
- Punjabi: 0800 096 7717
- Urdu: 0800 096 7718

How are registered child sexual offenders usually managed?

Across the country, the police, probation and prison services work with other agencies to keep track of registered child sexual offenders. This process is called Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).

MAPPA is responsible for managing registered sexual offenders, including child sexual offenders, during the course of the time which they need to report to the services, as well as violent offenders and other dangerous offenders.

Information from a MAPP meeting might be given to another person or a group of people in order to protect them from the offender, or for them to protect others. This is called disclosure.

For example, leisure staff might be alerted where a local offender is felt to pose a risk to those using the centre.

The difference with this pilot is that it provides a more formal mechanism for a parent, carer or guardian to **ask** for information about a person who has contact with their child, and for police to deal with this request. It may alert them that an offender may be having contact with a child or may be showing other worrying behaviour of which they had previously been unaware.

Example scenarios

Scenario 1:

“I’m a single mum and I’ve got a new partner. I don’t know very much about his past and I want to make sure my children are safe with him. What can I do?”

If both you and your partner live in the pilot site, you can ask the police to investigate whether your partner has a record for child sexual offences.

If it turns out that your partner has a record for child sexual offences, and the person is thought to be a serious risk to your children, the police will take appropriate action to protect you and your children. This may include disclosure of information to you.

If the investigation does not reveal any record of child sexual offences, but there are other reasons which mean the police might be worried about the safety of your children – for example, if the person has a record of domestic violence – the police will take steps to safeguard your family which may include considering disclosure of the domestic violence offences.

If at any time the police are concerned about the safety of your children, or you, they will act very quickly to protect you.

However, you should be aware that police checks are not a guarantee of safety because not all child sexual offenders have been detected.

Scenario 2:

“My daughter’s new boyfriend wants to look after her child all the time – so much so that I never see my grandson any more. I’m worried. It doesn’t feel normal. Is there anything I can do?”

The pilot sites will check out the concerns of grandparents, friends, and those associated with the family as well as from family members under normal safeguarding children procedures. This happens in all police forces in the country.

Scenario 3:

“I don’t like the look of my neighbour and she is rude to me. Can I check her out?”

Not unless you are concerned about your neighbour’s relationship with certain children. The purpose of the pilot is to protect children. The police will want to know on what grounds you want to check out your neighbour, and which children he or she has access to. The police also have a duty to explore why this is being requested to ensure that it is not malicious.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. You mention safeguarding children procedures. Does this mean my child can be taken away from me?

A1. Children are only ever removed from their families in rare circumstances where they face a risk of serious harm if they remain in that environment.

This is a process to help parents, carers or guardians better safeguard their children. Children will not be taken away from the family home if the parent, carer or guardian works with the police, Children's Social Care and other involved agencies to safeguard their child against any risk identified.

Q2. Will the police investigate more fully if there is more than one report about the same person?

A2. The police investigate every enquiry fully. If more than one person reports an individual, the investigation checks will be duplicated.

They will always consider whether safeguarding children measures are appropriate.

Part of the pilot is taking full details from every individual requesting that the police check someone out. This will help the police detect any malicious use of the system.

Q3. Will the person I am asking about know they are being investigated?

A3. No, unless they are found to have a record for child sexual offences or offences relevant to safeguarding children. In such cases the police will decide the best way to proceed to protect you and your children. This may involve the police working with the person to encourage disclosure.

Q4. Will the person I am asking about know I started the investigation?

A4. No, your confidentiality will be maintained unless it is decided that a disclosure should be made. In this case, the offender may be informed that you are to receive information about them but this will depend on the circumstances.

Q5. Will the person investigated have any sort of record just because I've asked about them?

A5. The police will keep a record of the enquiry in order to help with the evaluation of how successful the pilot has been and also for policing purposes. This is NOT a criminal record of any kind but it will allow police to identify any safeguarding children concerns if a pattern develops in relation to a particular person.

Q6. How were the pilot site areas selected?

A6. The pilot areas were chosen because the police forces volunteered. They are keen to trial any new service which could lead to greater protection of children and further strengthen their existing child sexual offender management and safeguarding children procedures.

The pilot sites are in Warwickshire, Hampshire (Southampton), Cambridgeshire and Cleveland (Stockton). The pilot may either be force-wide (Warwickshire) or located in specific Basic Command Units which are: Stockton BCU (Cleveland); Southampton OCU (Hampshire) and Northern Division including Peterborough and surrounding villages (Cambridgeshire).



Q7. My friend lives in a pilot area and she can check out her new boyfriend to see if he has a record of child sexual offences. I can't because I don't live in a pilot site area – that doesn't seem fair. Why should one area have this privilege?

A7. This is a trial to see how effective the pilot is, and we need to carry it out in a limited area in order to be able to understand and measure what is successful, and what isn't.

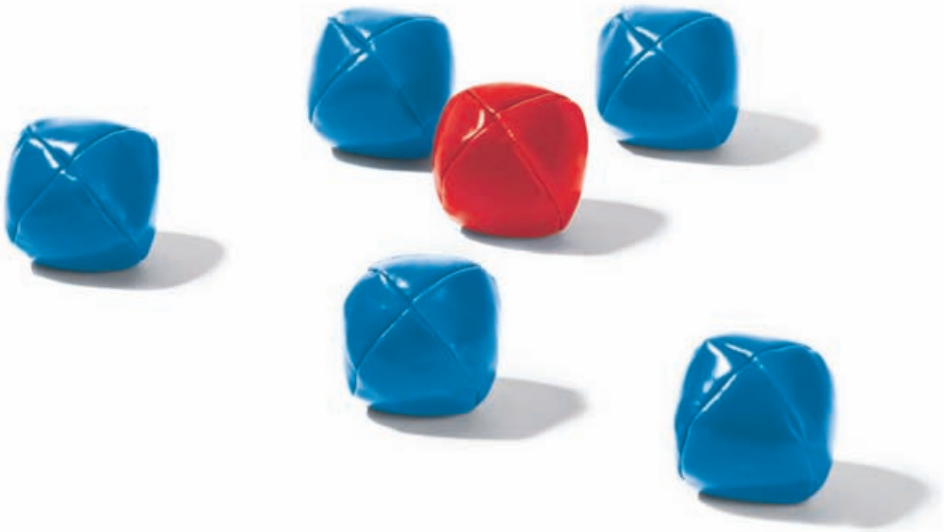
The results of the pilot will be reviewed and then a decision taken as to whether to roll the pilot out nationally.

If you have a concern about an individual who has contact with your child, even if you are not living in a pilot area, you are not prevented from raising these concerns with the police.

They will decide whether they need to make further enquiries and, in appropriate circumstances, they may give you information regarding that person's convictions.

Safeguarding children procedures underpin all the child protection work the police do, and there are measures in place in all areas to ensure your child is protected from child sexual offenders.

The difference in the pilot areas is that there is a more formal mechanism for raising your concerns and the police will carry out certain checks on the named person with a view to deciding whether you should be told about any convictions.



This is a Home Office pilot carried out by Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Cleveland Police, Hampshire Constabulary and Warwickshire Police, managed in association with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) with advice gratefully received from NSPCC, NCH, Barnardos, Sara Payne and Lucy Faithfull Foundation: Stop it Now!