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PRESS RELEASE

CCPAS WELCOMES END TO 'POSTCODE LOTTERY' OF POLICE DISCLOSURE OF KNOWN SEX OFFENDERS TO PLACES OF WORSHIP

'significant step' in fight to tackle child abuse in churches, says CCPAS

The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS), one of the UK's leading experts in advising and training Christian and secular organisations in child protection practices, today welcomed the ending of the absurd position, whereby neighbouring police services can adopt totally different policies about disclosing details of known sex offenders to local churches and other places of worship.

Alongside today's announcement by the government of the setting up of four pilot areas for giving relevant information to parents and guardians of children, the government's review proposals also include disclosure to places of worship and other community groups, forming a key plank in their measures to improve arrangements for protecting children from sex offenders.

The pilot scheme arrangements have been strongly backed by Sara Payne, whose eight year old daughter Sarah was murdered by a paedophile in 2000. Sara Payne has been working closely with the Home Office, CCPAS and other organisations in the drawing up of these proposals.

The emphasis on MAPPA* agencies considering disclosure where not to do so could place children at risk has been welcomed by CCPAS, which has been campaigning on this key issue for more than 10 years. CCPAS believes this is a significant step in the fight to tackle child abuse in places of worship as it will enable faith leaders, working closely with police and other statutory agencies, to put in place effective measures ensuring the safe supervision of those who might pose a risk to children.

David Pearson of CCPAS commented: “Until now, there has been a major problem in that some police services in the UK have cited concerns about data protection and human rights legislation as reasons for not supplying the names of known sex offenders. Other forces have not taken this blinkered view and have worked in partnership with places of worship and other groups where there have been such concerns. These new measures, based on a presumption of disclosure, clearly establish the principle that the need to protect children comes first”.

“Our helpline deals with many calls regarding individuals posing possible risk to children in family situations and at places of worship attended by children. We are therefore delighted that the current patchy situation is set to end – a postcode lottery that could allow sex offenders to fall through the net, with increased risks of abuse to our children.

“We strongly support these new government initiatives. We also hope that the new measures being rolled out in the four pilot areas will encourage similar responsible disclosure in the parts of the UK not covered by the pilot schemes.

“It is important to recognise the vital role played by places of worship in not only providing for and protecting children but safely supporting known offenders. This support and the safety of children can only be achieved if proper information is made available to clergy and leaders.”

NOTES: *Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) were introduced in 2001 and are a set of arrangements under which the prison, probation and police services (the ‘responsible authorities’) in all 42 MAPPA areas across England and Wales, are legally required to share information and work together to assess and manage the risk posed by dangerous, violent and sex offenders. Similar arrangements apply in other parts of the UK.

In June 2007, the Government published the Review of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenders. Disclosure to Places of Worship and community organisations is a part of the intention covered by Action 3 of the Review. Since October 2007, MAPPA agencies have been required to consider disclosure where not to do so could place children at risk. The disclosure pilots (see below) fulfil Action 4. Further information can be found at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/CSOR/>

The pilot schemes to be announced on Monday 15th September 2008 will be running in Cleveland (Stockton), Cambridgeshire (Peterborough), Hampshire (Southampton), and Warwickshire (whole county). The scheme enables parents, carers or guardians to request information about people involved in their children's lives if they are concerned that s/he might be a registered sex offender – for example, if a single mother wants to find out about her new boyfriend. 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 involved in their family life, specifically if they are concerned a person is an offender. People can, of course, only apply for information on this basis in a pilot area and if they are a parent, carer or guardian of a child involved in an enquiry. Others can initiate the process but information will only be given to the parent, carers or guardian not to any other individual.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

CCPAS is an independent Christian charity providing professional child protection advice and support across church denominations and organisations throughout the UK.

CCPAS was established in 1977. It assists churches, organisations, social services and other child care agencies as well as individual children and families by:

- helping churches and other organisations adopt safe practice in order to protect children from abuse – and youth workers from the possibility of false allegations
- advising on individual cases, giving ongoing help to leaders and others.
- training across the UK and providing “in-house” training and other resources
- acting as external consultants to denominational/organisational child protection advisors
- counselling individual adults or children about past or present abuse.

For more information, please see www.ccpas.co.uk