David* has been a police officer for 15 years. For the last four of these, he’s worked in the offender management unit.

“Before Keeping Children Safe began, there were some concerns the scheme would make it more difficult for us to monitor and engage with registered sex offenders.

“Those fears have proved unfounded, essentially because the disclosure process is so controlled: information is only given to the parent, carer or guardian involved, and they sign assurance that they won’t pass on any of the information. This has prevented the vigilantism that has happened in some American states, where full details are given out.

“For members of the public, the process opens data protection doors that are normally closed. This puts the parent or carer in a more informed position when thinking about the safety of their child.

“One case I worked on began with a phone call from the mother of two small children, who was worried about a man who had regular contact with them. It transpired that man had served a four year sentence for sexual offences, and had only been let out on licence. The man was reported to the parole board, and sent back to prison.

“Where there are no concerns identified, it gives the person peace of mind, that they have done all that is legally possible to protect the child they were concerned about.

“However, in this instance, if the Keeping Children Safe request had not been made, the children might have become victims of crime before the man was discovered.”

*Identities within this story have been changed.
How Keeping Children Safe Works

Step 1
Only the parent, carer or guardian of a child aged under 18 can receive information under the scheme. However, anyone can make an enquiry about someone they’re suspicious of.

Step 2
The applicant must contact the police by:
- Phoning the police, 24hrs a day, on 0131 311 3131
- Visiting a police station
- Speaking to a police officer.

Step 3
After initial checks, they will then be asked to fill in a form with a police officer, giving information about themselves, the child, and the person they have concerns about. They will need proof of their identity, their address (including photo ID), and their relationship to the child.

Step 4
The police will then carry out two types of checks on the person:
- Priority checks (to find out if there are any immediate issues of concern about the safety of a child), and
- Full risk assessment

This can take up to six weeks, but the police will act immediately if, at any point, the child is considered to be at risk and in need of protection.

Step 5
The police will then either:
- Contact the applicant in person
- Contact the applicant by letter (if there is no information to provided)

Step 6
If the person has a record for sexual offences against children, the applicant may be given relevant information about that person, necessary and proportionate to protect their child. The police will also provide further advice and support.

If the person has a record for other offences that may put the applicant’s child at risk (such as domestic violence), or is showing worrying behaviour, the police will again provide further advice and support.

If the person has no previous record of sexual offences against children, the applicant may not be given any information.

Step 7
If the applicant does receive information from the police it must be treated as confidential, unless they have spoken to the police and agreed how it should be shared.
Q. How many registered sex offenders are there in the Lothian and Borders Police area?

A. There are currently 585 in the community. These figures are available via the Lothian and Borders Police website.

Q. Are registered sex offenders being notified of the scheme?

A. All the registered sex offenders living in the Lothian and Borders Police area are being informed of the scheme. If a disclosure takes place concerning them, they may be informed.

Q. Could the scheme result in difficulties for the police in respect of ongoing monitoring of registered sex offenders?

A. This should not be the case, as strict measures are already in place regarding the management of registered sex offenders. Other schemes in Scotland and England have been running for a considerable time and they have not encountered any problems of this nature.

Q. Will the scheme have an impact on the time police officers spend on other duties?

A. No - protecting children always has been a core business for Lothian and Borders Police and their partner agencies. A dedicated police officer will be dealing with Keeping Children Safe enquiries and any issues that may arise.

Q. How are registered child sexual offenders in the community usually managed?

A. Currently, the police are responsible for managing all sexual offenders while they are required to register with the authorities. Existing Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in each local authority area ensure police work closely with partner agencies as part of this management. This will not change under the scheme.

Information from a MAPPA meeting might be given to another person or group of people in order to protect them from the offender, or for them to protect others. This is called disclosure and an example of this would be when agencies become aware that a registered sex offender has a new partner and may possibly have contact with children.

Q. Would Lothian and Borders Police make a disclosure if a person had been charged with a child sex offence but never convicted?

A. This could not be disclosed under the scheme, however any such situations would be assessed on a case by case basis and we would ensure all lawful steps were taken to protect children.
The Scottish Government has created three booklets for the launch of Keeping Children Safe.

- Information disclosure about child sexual offenders
  (A guide to the new disclosure scheme)
- What we all need to know to protect our children
  (Protecting children from sexual abuse from adults)
- Preventing abuse among young children and young people
  (Protecting children from sexual abuse from other children and young people)

These can be picked up from various venues around the Force area, or downloaded from Lothian and Borders Police website.

To contact Keeping Children Safe in Lothian and the Borders,
 t: 0131 311 3131
 w: www.lbp.police.uk/keepingchildrensafe

This is the second of four newsletters. Other issues cover:
- Issue 1: The Basics
- Issue 3: The Public
- Issue 4: Social Work

Other partners involved with Keeping Children Safe include:

City of Edinburgh
Council Children and Families Social Work Department
 t: 0131 200 2323
 w: edinburgh.gov.uk

East Lothian Council
Education and Children’s Services
 t: 01875 824 090
 w: eastlothian.gov.uk

Midlothian Council
Education and Children’s Services
 t: 0131 270 7500
 w: midlothian.gov.uk

West Lothian Council
Children and Families Social Work Department
 t: 01506 777 400
 w: westlothian.gov.uk

Scottish Borders Council
Integrated Children’s Services
 t: 01835 824 000
 w: scotborders.gov.uk

Scottish Prison Service
 t: 0131 244 8745
 w: sps.gov.uk

NHS Lothian
 t: 0131 536 9000
 w: nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

NHS Borders
 t: 01896 826 000
 w: nhsborders.org.uk