

20 March 2008

MCGIMPSEY ANNOUNCES TOUGH NEW MEASURES TO PROTECT THE VULNERABLE

Further details of a new scheme which will put in place stronger safeguards to protect children and vulnerable adults were announced today by the Health Minister.

The Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS), which is at the heart of a cross-government strategy to increase the protection of the most vulnerable members of society, comes into effect on 12 October 2009. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in co-operation with departments in England and Wales, is leading on the implementation of the VBS in Northern Ireland.

The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Michael McGimpsey said: **“The protection of children and vulnerable adults is a top priority for my Department and the wider Government. Northern Ireland already has one of the most advanced systems in the world for checking those who work in positions of trust with children and vulnerable adults.**

“The extra safeguards which will come into effect from 12 October 2009 will provide even greater protection. Around 125,000 more jobs and voluntary positions, including most jobs in the health sector, will become subject to checks meaning many more people posing a risk to vulnerable people will be excluded from the workplace.”

Additional safeguards starting in October are:

- reduction of red tape - two barring lists will be administered by a single organisation, the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA), rather than the three lists currently maintained by two different government departments;
- the introduction of 'regulated activities' – people included on the new barred lists by the ISA will be barred from a much wider range of jobs and activities than before, particularly in areas of work with vulnerable adults such as the health sector;
- a new duty to share information - employers, social services and professional regulators will have to notify the ISA of relevant information so individuals who pose a threat to vulnerable groups can be identified and barred from working with these groups; and
- improved enforcement – it will be a crime for a barred individual to seek or undertake work with vulnerable groups; and for employers to knowingly take them on. It will also be a crime for employers and professional regulatory and registration bodies not to fulfil a statutory duty to refer individuals considered to be a risk to children and vulnerable adults to the ISA.

From 26 July 2010 all new entrants to roles working with vulnerable groups and those switching jobs within these sectors will be able to register with the VBS and be checked by the ISA.

Registration will include employers being continuously informed of an employee's suitability to work. To ensure robust testing and maximise the safety of vulnerable groups, the mechanism that keeps employers informed of an employee's suitability to work will also be introduced in July next year rather than October 2009.

The legal requirement for employees to register with the VBS and employers to check their status will come into force in November 2010.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Following the murders of Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells by Ian Huntley (a school caretaker) in 2002, the Bichard Inquiry was commissioned. One of the issues this Inquiry looked at was the way employers recruit people to work with children and vulnerable adults. It asked whether the way employers check the background of job applicants is reliable enough. It also asked whether employers should be responsible for deciding whether a job applicant can be safely employed.
2. The Inquiry's recommendations led to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, which recognised the need for a single agency to vet all individuals who want to work or volunteer with vulnerable people.
3. The Independent Safeguarding Authority was created to fulfill this role across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. (Scotland is developing its own similar system, which will work closely with the ISA.)
4. On 13 March 2009 the ISA took over responsibility from government departments for decisions on new cases referred under existing barring schemes, under the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, to ensure a smooth delivery of the scheme.
5. Currently, those whose work requires regular, intensive and unsupervised contact with children, those in schools and those in social care roles require an AccessNI check. Three lists held by the Department of Health (the Disqualification from Working with Children and the Disqualification from Working with Vulnerable Adults list) and Department of Education (Unsuitable Persons List). From October

these lists will be combined into two – one for adults and one for children – administered by the ISA.

6. The new Scheme will have a much broader coverage with an estimated 11.3 million people needing to be registered across the UK (600,000 in Northern Ireland) up from around 6.5million who are checked today.

7. From July 2010, people registering with the scheme to work or volunteer with children or vulnerable adults will apply to AccessNI.

8. The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) (working on behalf of England, Wales and Northern Ireland) will check whether there is any relevant information from the police or referred information from other sources, such as previous employers or professional bodies. If there is relevant information, the CRB will pass this to the ISA, who will decide whether the applicant should be barred.

9. The Scheme will be largely self-financing. From July 2010, individual applicants wishing to seek work with vulnerable groups engaging in regulated or controlled activities will have to pay a fee of £58. Employers will be able to check the registration status of the individuals they intend to employ on line and for free.

10. For more information visit the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups website at <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/svg> or the ISA website at <http://www.isa-gov.org.uk>

11. Media enquiries to the DHSSPS Press Office on 028 9052 0571. Out of office hours please contact the Duty Press Officer via pager number 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.

