

The use of VISOR and additional vetting

Position statement by Social Work Scotland

Background

The Violent and Sex Offender Register (VISOR) is a UK wide information sharing tool which can be accessed and updated by the Police, the NHS and Local Authorities. Nationally the governance of VISOR is overseen by a set of standards; performance against these standards, amongst other matters, are considered by Regional User Groups who report to the National User Group. ADSW the forerunner to Social Work Scotland played a significant role in the development and roll out of the afore mentioned standards. For many years the Criminal Justice Standing Committee has had a sub group to consider matters relating to the standards and any other pertinent issues relating to VISOR.

Within the VISOR standards Local Authorities Criminal Justice Social Work has a set of defined responsibilities. Across the 32 local authorities' performance against these standards is variable; with different local authorities placing a differing emphasis on adherence to meeting standards and VISOR usage. Meeting the nationally set VISOR standards is challenging due to poor accessibility of the system, poor performance management information from the system, in addition there is no legislative requirement to use the system. These issues have been regularly communicated to colleagues in the Scottish Government and Police Scotland. Whilst there appears to be a willingness to resolve the issues that constrain the use of VISOR (and indeed small gains have been made in increasing accessibility) there is a significant way to go to resolve the difficulties outlined above. It is the case that we are some way off from securing the optimal usage circumstances of VISOR which best reflect current business requirements; that being the system being made available on desktops and /or social workers mobile devices.

The inability to resolve the barriers to greater use of the system will assure that the aforementioned variable performance of local authorities is likely to continue. It is of note that the recent joint report of the Care Inspectorate and Her Majesty's inspectorate of Constabulary into the performance of MAPPA arrangements in Scotland were **not** critical of the range of methods used by the partners in MAPPA to communicate with each other but did recommend that the Scottish Government,

“Lead on the development and delivery of an action plan in order to overcome the barriers to the effective usage of VISOR by criminal Justice Social Work noting owners and timescales”

In line with the findings contained in the recent evaluation of MAPPA Social work Scotland is of the view that VISOR is only **part** of a system of communication between professionals

involved in protecting the public. We see a significant value in promoting professional dialogue between colleagues involved in public protection, which is complemented and supported by the VISOR system. Social Work Scotland recognises the potential benefits of a shared “real time “computerised system of information exchange between Police officers and Criminal Justice Social Workers and where appropriate colleagues in other parts of the public protection landscape but call on improved **accessibility, clarity of purpose** and **increased resource** to maximise the usage of the system. Social Work Scotland is committed to being an active partner in any construct the Government design to deliver on the action plan to address the above noted recommendation.

Social Work Scotland recognises the **importance of standards** to identify key performance aspects of the system but is of the view that the current and future standards need to be measured against a vastly improved ViSOR environment where issues professional dialogue, accessibility and purpose are more clearly understood by all.

Social Work Scotland notes the position in relation to the implementation of the Non Police Personnel Vetting scheme for criminal justice practitioners who currently use the ViSOR system. This increased level of vetting is in addition to significant personal and professional scrutiny such as enhanced disclosure checks, registration requirements and professional supervision. While we accept the need for a transparent, meaningful and high level of vetting to undertake work in public protection and to maintain and protect the integrity of the VISOR system, the issue of vetting is primarily a matter for employers and secondary to the other requirements identified in this briefing note to improve the effectiveness of VISOR.

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