

WDP refuses to bow to police threat

18 June 2004

WDP: right to criticise

When a chief constable demanded a front page apology from the Western Daily Press the paper responded with the splash headline "We will not be gagged".

The paper provoked the anger of Avon and Somerset chief constable Steve Pilkington when it published a report revealing that Home Secretary David Blunkett wanted to get tough with top policemen at low-performing forces.

It used an inside page lead to speculate that Pilkington could potentially be in the firing line because of his force's poor record on tackling violent crime.

The police chief responded by sending a solicitor's letter threatening legal action and asking for his picture to be published on the front page.

The WDP did indeed put Pilkington's picture on the front page, along with two pages of coverage inside under the headline: "Mr Pilkington threatens to sue your paper for simply telling the truth".

WDP editor Terry Manners said: "We can't be pushed around. We were doing what I think is in the public interest and doing what papers are supposed to do.

"Steve Pilkington is not known for his love of the press generally and often hits out, I think it was a shot across our bows.

"The chief constable is in the public eye and paid for by public money.

"He is a decent man and a decent public officer but we have the right to criticise him," said Manners.

Manners said had received no further communications from Pilkington's lawyers.

A spokesman for Avon and Somerset Police said: "We can confirm that following publication of a number of inaccurate news articles the chief constable is considering legal action.

"At present he is in the process of obtaining legal advice. It would be therefore inappropriate to comment further at this time."

Dominic Ponsford

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News

Cop says 'no' to Sarah law pilot



Murdered ... Sarah

A TOP cop has scuppered plans to pilot a UK version of Megan's Law.

Avon and Somerset chief constable Colin Port said the scheme was unsuitable for his area.

The US-style law would give parents and schools the right to know if paedophiles live nearby.

A campaign for its introduction began after the murder of eight-year-old Sarah Payne by Roy Whiting in 2000.

Wansdyke in Somerset was one of three areas recently chosen for a three to six-month pilot.

But Mr Port said: "Any planned change in legislation to allow this will have to be based on properly-evaluated research.

"That has to be done in targeted pilot schemes and I do not believe Avon and Somerset is a suitable area."

Local Labour MP Dan Norris, who has pushed for a Sarah's Law, said: "It's shying away. I'm very disappointed."

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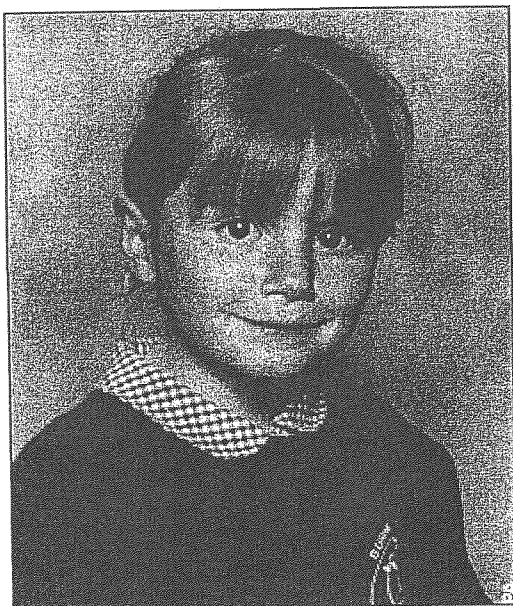
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The Telegraph

Police chief pulls out of Megan's Law pilot



Campaigners for 'Sarah's Law' remember murdered Sarah Payne

By Natalie Paris and agencies

2:41PM BST 22 Oct 2007

A police chief chosen to help implement Megan's Law in the UK has decided to opt out of the pilot scheme saying it was "not suitable".

Plans to trial the US-style legislation in three areas have been put on hold after Colin Port, Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset Police, refused to take part.

The Avon and Somerset area was the first to be picked for the pilot, which would have given parents access to information about paedophiles living nearby.

Campaigners have been calling for a version of the law to be implemented in the UK ever since the murder of eight-year-old Sarah Payne in 2000 by a convicted paedophile.



Pilot scheme will allow parents to find out if paedophiles live nearby

Mothers will have right to know about perverts

Dan Norris, a local Labour MP, said: "I am very disappointed - it is shying away from something very important.

"Knowing that children are suffering every day, we are morally and duty-bound to challenge that.

"I have a lot of admiration for Colin Port but I do not agree with his decision.

"The public expect the police to be on the front line in the battle against paedophiles."

Chief Constable Port said he would implement the so-called Sarah's Law if pilot schemes elsewhere proved it was appropriate and the police force was given extra resources.

He said: "Any planned change in legislation to allow this will have to be based on properly-evaluated research. That has to be done in targeted pilot schemes and I do not believe Avon and Somerset is a suitable area."

The pilot was expected to run for three to six months in 2008 and could then have been rolled out nationwide.

Single mothers, who are felt to be vulnerable to paedophiles who befriend them, were to be the first category of members of the public allowed to ask for information.

The pilot scheme had already been criticised for falling well short of Megan's Law, under which names and addresses of sex offenders are made available.

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