



## Manifesto Club Briefing Document

### **32 million CRB checks since 2002:**

### **The best way to spend £1.5 billion?**

In 1988 there were around 540,000 police checks, the vast majority on child professionals such as teachers, social workers and care workers.<sup>1</sup> By 2002, when the Criminal Records Bureau was founded, checks had reached more than a million. Over the next few years this shot up by several hundred thousand each year. In 2011 there were more than four million CRB checks.

The CRB check started as a recruitment check for a small number of child professionals but became a generic 'safe adult card', which almost everybody is expected to hold. Anyone who does anything in their communities now will have several CRB checks.

CRB checks have moved from the professions into increasingly informal areas of life. In 2002, 240,000 volunteers were checked; last year nearly a million were. Manifesto Club research found that councils are CRB-checking parent volunteers at school discos, host families for foreign exchanges, people driving their elderly neighbours to the shops and mothers listening to reading in their child's class.<sup>2</sup> In total, over 6.5 million volunteers have been checked since 2002.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Prior Criminality and Employment of Social Workers with Substantial Access to Children: A Decision Board Analysis*, Joanne M Smith, British Journal of Social Work, 1999

<http://bjsw.oxfordjournals.org/content/29/1/49.abstract>

<sup>2</sup> *Vetting Tree Surgeons: CRB checks and local authorities*, Manifesto Club report,

<http://www.manifestoclub.com/councilcrbchecks>

<sup>3</sup> FOI response from the CRB, 17 April 2012

Our FOI request reveals that there have been 32 million CRB checks since 2002,<sup>4</sup> at a cost of some £1.5 billion. This is a phenomenal investment of time and resources. Yet it is questionable how many children this huge and costly system has saved. A CRB check is no guarantee of safety: many of the shocking child abuse cases of recent years involved perpetrators with clean CRB checks.

We suggest that this money could be far better spent on targeted social work or offender management. The number of convicted child abusers is small, in the thousands;<sup>5</sup> the number of people who work or volunteer with children or vulnerable adults is in the millions. Rather than require every grandmother to prove she is not a sex offender, would it not be sensible to monitor the small number of convicted child abusers?

The vast majority of these CRB checks (over 29 million) are enhanced checks, which involve a search of the police national computer, local police files, and other relevant agencies. Thus a mother holding several voluntary positions is subjected to a level of security vetting akin to that of the secret services. This is intrusive and a totally unnecessary use of resources.

No doubt CRB checks started from the best of intentions, a desire to protect children. But over time, these checks have become more about institutions protecting their backs, ensuring they have all the boxes ticked and the correct forms on file. This is the exact opposite of taking responsibility for children's welfare.

Still worse, mass vetting can actually leave children more vulnerable. CRB checks spread an atmosphere of mistrust, and people start to think that helping children is a state-licensed activity, rather than something we all do as a matter of course. For the first time, there are cases of adults walking past injured children, fearing that their act of help could be misinterpreted. The truth is that children are safe when the majority of decent adults are looking out for them. There is simply no replacement for vigilance.

The coalition government has announced that it wants to scale back CRB checks to 'commonsense levels'. A government review projected a halving of CRB checks, to around 1.7 million a year.<sup>6</sup>

Yet it is difficult to see how this will be achieved. The Protection of Freedoms Bill contains few limitations on unnecessary CRB checks. It will still be possible to request checks on those who do not fall within the new definition of 'regulated activity'.<sup>7</sup>

A recent rise of the fee for an enhanced CRB check, to £44, meant that the CRB took an estimated £131 million in fees in 2011-12 - an all-time high. This casts government promises in a sober light.

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<sup>4</sup> FOI response from the CRB, 17 April 2012

<sup>5</sup> In January 2009, the ISA inherited a list of 16,000 people barred from working with children.

<sup>6</sup> Statement by Lord Henley in the House of Lords, 21 March 2012

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201212/ldhansrd/text/120321-0001.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Letter by Lord Henley, 'Scope of Regulated Activity':

<http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2012/DEP2012-0285.pdf>

10 years after the founding of the CRB, 32 million checks later, we call for a proper review of the CRB system - to ask whether this is the best use of the resources available for child protection. We do not want this juggernaut to continue unchecked for the next 10 years.

**TABLE 1: NUMBER AND COST OF CRB CHECKS SINCE 2002<sup>8</sup>**

Year	Enhanced CRB checks	Standard CRB checks	Checks on Volunteers	Total CRBs Issued	Fees paid to CRB (million £) <sup>9</sup>	Admin costs (million £) <sup>10</sup>	Total cost (million £)
2001/2 <sup>11</sup>	6	15	18	21			
2002/3	1,258,656	178,327	210,571	1,436,983	14.712	28.74	43.44
2003/4	2,002,161	285,275	414,816	2,287,436	50.175	45.74	95.91
2004/5	2,157,637	275,292	499,354	2,432,929	62.711	48.66	111.36
2005/6	2,462,404	313,959	574,856	2,776,363	75.496	55.52	131.02
2006/7	2,948,794	329,234	668,715	3,278,028	91.65	65.56	157.21
2007/8	3,028,793	294,607	673,561	3,323,400	96.311	66.47	162.78
2008/9	3,459,992	396,586	742,556	3,856,578	112.616	77.12	189.74
2009/10	4,007,147	294,154	902,102	4,301,301	124.146	86.02	210.17
2010/11	4,125,289	187,243	962,528	4,312,532	116.481	86.25	202.73
2011/12	3,755,885	256,952	922,141	4,012,837	131.547	80.26	211.807
	<b>29,206,764</b>	<b>2,811,644</b>	<b>6,571,218</b>	<b>32,018,408</b>	<b>875.845</b>	<b>640.34</b>	<b>1,516.17</b>

**TABLE 2: COST OF STANDARD AND ENHANCED CRB CHECKS<sup>12</sup>**

	22 Mar 2002	1 Jul 2003	1 Apr 2004	1 Apr 2005	1 Apr 2006	1 Apr 2007	1 Apr 2008	1 Apr 2009	1 Oct 2009	6 Apr 2011
<b>Enhanced</b>	£12	£29	£33	£34	£36	£36	£36	£36	£36	£44
<b>Standard</b>	£12	£24	£28	£29	£31	£31	£31	£31	£26	£26

<sup>8</sup> FOI response from the CRB, 17 April 2012

<sup>9</sup> Years 2002-4, and 2011-12, calculated from CRB fee data. Other years provided by CRB FOI response, 17 April 2012

<sup>10</sup> Calculated using average admin cost of £20 per check

<sup>11</sup> CRB not fully operational, so data for this year is incomplete

<sup>12</sup> FOI response from the CRB, 17 April 2012