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Ananova :

Senior judge advocates pre-crime 'protective custody'

Dangerous individuals who pose a clear threat to public safety could be taken into protective custody without being convicted of a crime.

The suggestion comes from the country's most senior judge Lord Chief Justice Lord Woolf.

He has been discussing how the justice system might be reformed to deal with the threat posed by predatory paedophiles, in the wake of the Sarah Payne murder.

Sarah's killer, Roy Whiting, had a previous conviction for snatching and assaulting a young child.

Lord Woolf, in an interview for BBC Radio 4's Today programme, said the law might have to be changed to protect society from such individuals.

"It may well be, and this is a matter of very great sensitivity, that we have got to think, for those who are persistent offenders, of having some form of protective custody," said Lord Woolf.

Paul Cavadino, director of policy at Nacro, the National

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Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, said he believed it would be hugely difficult to assess the threat posed by an individual who had yet to commit an offence.

"There is a good case for indefinite sentences for paedophiles who have committed an offence, and where there is a high risk of reoffending," Mr Cavadino told Today.

But he added: "The suggestion of civil detention for people who have paedophile tendencies but haven't acted on them, begs obvious questions about human rights, and it would probably be unworkable in practice."

Story filed: 09:15 Wednesday 26th December 2001

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