

Project Shield – improved access to details of non-molestation orders

Making details of orders more accessible to prevent domestic abuse perpetrators moving to another part of the country and targeting new victims.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Independently evaluated
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Domestic abuse Digital, data and analytics Criminal justice
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Region	North East
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	April 2021
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Adults Families Offenders Victims
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Aim

Currently the information flow from the family courts to police services is inconsistent on a national level. This pilot aimed to rectify this by standardising this process. The aim of the pilot was to ensure that details of non-molestation orders are accessible nationally by being uploaded on to Police National Database, therefore ensuring the police have the relevant information available to prosecute reported breaches. This initiative is also known as Project Shield.

Intended outcome

- Create a searchable register of domestic abuse perpetrators which can be used nationally.
- Protect initial victims of domestic abuse, by quickly identifying any order breaches by perpetrators.
- Potentially identify new domestic abuse victims and prevent further offending by offering disclosure to potential new victims if the perpetrator starts a new relationship.

Description

North Yorkshire Police worked with a software company who facilitated the uploading of perpetrators and associated orders onto the Police National Database. Flags were also created on the Police National Database relating to nominals who are applicants or respondents for these orders meaning there would be a searchable register and that expired orders would remain visible. This ensures that the individuals are flagged as having the order and linked to any previously held intelligence.

If a flagged nominal comes to light nationally the domestic abuse team in North Yorkshire Police receive a notification which allows domestic abuse perpetrators to be tracked, even if they move around the country.

Disclosure can be offered to new victims that come to light, preventing further victimisation and breaches can also be quickly identified.

If rolled out nationally, it will allow a searchable register of respondents, which does not currently exist. This may protect the initial victim as well as potentially identify new victims if the perpetrator starts a new relationship.

Evaluation

An independent academic evaluation report was undertaken based on focus groups and surveys including applicants, respondents, and professionals. Ten applicants, 6 respondents and 12 practitioners took part in an online survey. This specifically analysed their perspectives of the non-molestation order process in North Yorkshire, during the Project Shield pilot. While a small sample and limited additional qualitative content was offered, this provided useful insight.

Overall, the pilot was deemed a success in terms of proof of concept, as well as laying the foundations and obtaining wider learning to aid the roll out of Project Shield as a national solution. The team accomplished an in-depth understanding of the landscape and engaged stakeholders, demonstrating both its strengths in, and the importance of, collaborative working and commitment.

The pilot instigated multiple examples of positive changes to practice, relating to the support of applicants and respondents, and the development and use of the Police National Database. This was reflected in the more positive perspective towards the non-molestation order process demonstrated by applicants in the 'pilot' survey, as a higher proportion stated they felt reassured and deemed non-molestation orders to be effective.

Following the pilot, the ability to offer support to respondents was noted (namely, by the Project Shield team). However, due to the small number of respondents in the sample, further work to understand respondent perspectives and experiences would be of value.

Moreover, an enhanced awareness was achieved amongst practitioners, evidenced by a higher percentage of 'pilot' practitioners who reported being familiar with the non-molestation order process, as well as stating they were able to find evidence of service of the order following an alleged breach.

In addition to the surveys, the Police National Database data further evidence a statistically significant increase in the use of the Police National Database and its capabilities. The Project Shield team proposed that such successes resulted in the better management of non-molestation order and subsequent safeguarding, thereby achieving the pilot's aim. Those who were familiar with the pilot recognised an improvement in agency communication and information sharing, as well as the ability to access orders, and to inform and reassure applicants

Yet, whilst the benefits of the pilot are recognised, there are consistent concerns raised, such as:

- the impact of the order on contact with their children
- the response to a breach-analysis of practitioner's responses also highlighted differences in how and when practitioners are notified of a non-molestation order or a breach; practitioners thought the process could be improved, but otherwise shared generally positive views
- perceived bias and lack of consideration of their circumstances

Continued difficulties with data sharing between partners was highlighted, with a proportion of practitioners (almost half of participants) unaware of Project Shield or of the changes implemented, suggesting a need for further awareness raising. While the latter draws into question how well their views are reflective of the pilot, a direct awareness of the pilot may not necessarily impact their experiences of the practical changes made (namely the ability to access an non-molestation orders on the Police National Database). It may also depend on their involvement with the non-molestation orders process. This would benefit from further review.

Overall impact

- To date 240 records have been created on Police National Database.
- The impact has been positive for non-molestation applicants in that they have fed back that they feel reassured following the proactive contact from the domestic abuse team upon receipt of their orders.
- The national roll out is being discussed and progressed at National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) level at present and is a work in progress.

Learning

The evaluation highlighted the following learning which should be considered if the pilot was repeated or scaled out nationally.

- Identifying an NPCC lead.
- Obtaining administrative support.
- Earlier partner engagement, earlier review of the data.
- Identifying all active non-molestation orders.
- Implementing a whole-systems approach.

Additional challenges included manual data transfer for the information from the family court system on to the Police National Database – the ‘national solution’ would automate this transfer on to Police National Computer and Police National Database therefore removing the risk of incorrect manual inputting or delays in the information being accessible to police.

Understanding of other forces’ processes around receipt of information relating to non-molestation orders varies nationally. This was a challenge as there was no consistent process for the sharing of this information nationally. Orders were often not added to the Police National Database as there was no clear process around information transfer from the courts to police.

The key to the success of the pilot was partners working towards the common goal of increasing the safety of victims. Respecting the specialist knowledge and skills that each partner brought to the table and understanding that the pilot could not work if agencies worked in isolation.

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Tags

Domestic violence Violence against women and girls Domestic abuse