

Stopping unwanted prisoner contact with victims of domestic abuse

Protecting victims from further abuse, intimidation and coercive behaviour from perpetrators in prison by blocking communication channels.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Reoffending
Topic	Crime prevention Offender management Violence against women and girls Vulnerability and safeguarding
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Region	North East

Key details

Partners	Police Community safety partnership Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Government department
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2020
Scale of initiative	National
Target group	Adults Offenders Victims

Aim

The aim is to prevent contact between the perpetrator of domestic abuse and their victim while the perpetrator is in prison. This scheme can be applied to all, irrespective of any protected characteristic.

Intended outcome

The intended outcome is to allow victims of domestic abuse space and time away from any abuse, intimidation and coercive behaviour from the offender while they are in prison.

Victims free from such pressures can work with partner agencies to help them move on from their abusive relationship.

Target hardening measures can be put in place to increase their safety. For example, they can receive assistance with applying for other protective orders to prevent further abuse can be sought while offenders are serving custodial sentence.

Description

It was observed that prisoners were still contacting their victims of domestic abuse from prison. Information sharing between police and prisons was not always as efficient as it could be.

A meeting with His Majesty's Prison (HMP) Hull was arranged – where most of North Yorkshire Police's domestic abuse perpetrators are sent – to discuss alternative solutions to the problem. The discussion involved governors, heads of security and members of the offender management unit (OMU). A framework and process was agreed at this meeting.

Any address, telephone number and e-mail address of a domestic abuse victim would be sent to a single point of contact (SPOC) at the prison. The SPOC would arrange to block access the same day. Prisoners often ask other prisoners to contact their victims, so the block had to be across the whole establishment. This prevented any prisoner from making contact with a specific victim. It was agreed that this measure was cost neutral and it was the responsibility of the OMU to protect victims. This has become part of HMP Hull's daily regime with no cost implications.

Evaluation

After this initiative was set up in North Yorkshire for domestic abuse, a pilot scheme ran in two police service areas (Kent and Thames Valley) in 2022. Focus groups conducted in August 2022 gathered feedback on this pilot. The focus groups reported positive experiences of the unwanted prisoner contact service.

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) wrote a report on the unwanted prisoner contact pilot scheme. The report suggested there had been more submissions for successfully prevented unwanted prisoner contact in the first five weeks of the pilot than HMPPS received in the whole of the previous year.

Overall impact

This scheme was soon rolled out to eight prisons in the Yorkshire area with interest shown from South and West Yorkshire Police forces. This has expanded to all Yorkshire prisons and West & South Yorkshire Police forces. Minister Victoria Adkins heard about the scheme and wanted it to be national policy. To that end a steering group was formed that created the Stop Prisoner Contact web page on Gov.uk where anyone can request a prisoner not to contact someone in the community. Prior to this there were around 40-50 requests for non contact annually. This has risen

to over 4000 per year as a result of this national process.

A pilot of the newly agreed process began, trialled by Kent and Thames Valley Police forces and the prisons in their areas. It proved successful and was rolled out nationally, with a press release confirming this from the Ministry of Justice.

Learning

HMPPS focuses on delivering services for prisoners as well as protecting victims. This balance has led to several in-depth and lengthy discussions on how best to implement the scheme.

It's vital to consider the wording of documents and forms, to avoid any potential litigation claims from prisoners.

Victims of crime need protecting while perpetrators are in prison.

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Tags

Domestic abuse Domestic violence