

Geofencing software to direct specialist resources to monitor preventative orders

Using the geolocation alert and intelligence-sharing resources to enforce domestic violence protection orders (DVPO) and ensure the safety of victims of domestic abuse (DA).

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Diversion Prevention
Topic	Anti-social behaviour Offender management Violence (other) Violence against women and girls Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	Greater Manchester Police
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Greater Manchester Police
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Key details

Region	North West
Partners	Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Government department Local authority
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	May 2023
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities Families Offenders Victims

Aim

- to increase the safety and security of victims of domestic abuse
- to better and more proactively enforce DVPOs across the city and wider metropolitan area
- offer reassurance
- deal with breaches robustly across district boundaries

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes for compliance and welfare checks for domestic violence protection notice are to:

- improve victim safeguarding
- increase the number of victims who have the best possible outcomes
- increase Greater Manchester Police (GMP) overall performance in respect of victim welfare and offender compliance
- improve GMP accountability in recording welfare/compliance checks
- increase the number of arrests for perpetrators found in breach of the orders

Description

The crime and security act (CSA) 2010 gained royal assent on 8 April 2010. Sections 24-33 of the act relate to domestic violence protection notices and orders (DVPNs and DVPOs). The criteria for enforcement of an order includes the threat of violence.

GMP adopted the procedure which is locally delivered. This involves first response obtaining authority from a superintendent on the district where the incident occurs. A centrally managed and based DVPN team gather the evidence, prepare the bundle, and attend court to obtain an order within 48 hrs. All contested applications and breaches are dealt with by GMP Legal services. Compliance and welfare checks on the victims are updated by the DVPN team on a domestic abuse record (incident recording within GMP) for district officers to attend over the live period of the order, which can be up to 28 days. The DVPN team will update the domestic abuse record (DAB) with the details of the order granted at court. The district officers who completed the compliance checks will then update the DAB with the checks they complete. The DAB remains open for the duration of the order.

The public protection governance unit worked with legal services, people and development and vulnerability leads on district to upskill officers with the knowledge and importance around policing the DVPOs in line with the policing priorities. Organisational learning dictated a process that all orders granted by the courts are to be served within 24 hours to the perpetrator, and visits should be undertaken throughout the duration of the order to offer reassurance. Breaches should be proactively policed, placing those back before the courts resulting in short custodial sentences or fines. The victims are made aware that the order has been granted with the details of the order.

Since 2022, the applications of DVPN/O have doubled and the average number of applications issued by the courts each month stands at over 100. On 9 May 2023, GMP launched a trial to apply the geolocation alert and intelligence-sharing capabilities of BlackBerry AtHoc to better and more proactively enforce DVPOs across the city and wider metropolitan area. The goal of the trial was to expand the safety and security of victims of domestic abuse, offer reassurance and deal with breaches robustly across district boundaries.

BlackBerry AtHoc is a networked, platform-agnostic critical event management system for fast, safe, and secure crisis response. GMP initially deployed the solution across all mobile devices in 2020 to support staff welfare and resourcing communications during the pandemic. In 2021, the force extended use to its core purpose, major incident reporting and response.

BlackBerry AtHoc's geolocation feature enables officers to check in at locations and automatically receive push, location specific intelligence on their choice of secure mobile device. As the officer approaches the locality the tracking functionality will push a notification to the individual's mobile device that the DVPO is nearby and live, this tasks them to check welfare.

GMP has established a process whereby geo-alerts are set up around the address of victims of domestic abuse. This process has been incorporated as part of the standard operating procedure when a DVPO is issued. The technology improves the service to victims by:

- Equipping officers with the information required to protect the victim, proactively and effectively. Entering a geo-fenced area will push automated alerts to the officer's mobile device, including the DVPO itself to speed up any queries. The alerts can provide intelligence not available when the patrol left the station and update as current information is reported. Primed with this high degree of specific knowledge, officers are equipped to act more proactively, decisively, and effectively to protect DA victims in the community.
- Facilitating regular, initiative-taking welfare checks. Officers driving near to or through a geo-fenced area may be prompted to check in. The alert can include a prompt to run a "welfare check," to visit victims of DA wherever they are residing. This increases the officer's ability to personalise the visit to the victim's specific needs and boosts the confidence of the victim that the police are aware of and actively monitoring the area to keep them safe. It reassures victims in supporting a criminal prosecution.
- Ensuring changing circumstances are identified. This initiative-taking push information to officers' secure mobile devices ensures that regular contact is maintained with the victim, and that levels of

risk are being constantly reviewed as circumstances change or while the case progresses. It ensures that victims assessed at “standard” or “medium” risk, which represents around 90% of all cases, also receive regular attention and that welfare checks extend beyond the high-risk cases that are most closely monitored usually with an enhanced victim service from an IDVA or MARAC.

- Coordination with support teams. The officer will be prompted to acknowledge the push alert message and, on leaving the geo-tagged area, file a report on the AtHoc app that automatically notifies the owning department of the findings of the visit such as the victim’s wellbeing and situation. This can include registering any concerns or assign follow up actions to support teams within GMP units or its partner agencies.
- Automated, auditable history log. AtHoc’s check in/check out functionality creates a detailed audit trail of attendance, which provides a reference log of welfare checks and police attendance in the area.

GMP continues to use specialist operations officers to conduct compliance checks in relation to the courts granting DVPO. The scheme has now been running for 12 months and the Blackberry AtHoc technology has created 1255 DVPO geofenced locations resulting in 680 visits and 13 arrests.

The collaboration between GMP legal services, public protection governance, digital services, and specialist operations enabled breaches to appear before the courts who continue to impose custodial sentences and fines enabling additional safeguarding for victims.

The licence agreements for AtHoc are extending to include neighbourhood policing as GMP transitions to pilot the DVPO. This ensures a consistent service by allowing the technology to be used by additional teams.

Overall impact

AtHoc is a tool to facilitate additional safeguard measures that provide reassurance and support to victims. When courts authorise a DVPO, this initiative supports policing enforcement and provides respite for up to 28 days. Additional welfare checks are conducted on the victim(s), which goes beyond the standard response.

Key aspects include:

- enhanced protection for victims through enforced court orders
- 28-day respite period for victims

- access to additional resources and support
- proactive measures to prevent further breaches
- potential for additional arrests for those who breach a DVPO

This practice prioritises victim safety and well-being, offering a comprehensive approach to safeguarding.

Learning

Duplication

In the initial phases of the initiative GMP encountered issues with duplication of visits by different police teams. District officers completed a welfare visit to the victim, then within 24 hours specialist operations responded to an AtHoc alert and completed a further visit. Some victims were grateful for the extra visit, however, others felt this was unnecessary and unwanted.

To mitigate this duplication, the commencement of the AtHoc alert was delayed by 72 hours to allow district sufficient time to undertake an initial victim engagement visit, address any additional safeguarding and provide the victim with a copy of the order.

The force also factored in a process when officers received a geo-alert, they undertake an enquiry with the force operations centre to determine if a welfare visit had been completed by district officers within the last seven days. If no visits have been recorded on the associated DA record, specialist operations officers attend and undertake the visit. If a recent visit has taken place and been recorded, specialist operations officers do not attend the alert, rationalising district have recently completed a visit. That DVPO welfare alert is then delayed for seven days, to prevent push notifications being sent out.

To further mitigate duplication, the attending officer will respond to the alert by choosing option one, which informs the system the visit has been completed and the victim has been spoken to, this automatically closes the geo-alert and notifies any other officer who may have received the alert but not yet responded, that their attendance is no longer required due to it being completed by a second resource. It also notifies tasking and coordination (Tac) Operations team desk/local admin to review the recurrent period of the alert in line with risk and reset/set if applicable (to go live again in seven days).

Data security

GMP identified that geo alerts activated by work device tracking would notify officers via the work apps but would also notify the officers personal device should they have the app present for resourcing alerts. The force did not want personal identifiable information (PII) being sent to personal devices so created a process to host the PII on a SharePoint site that was added to the geo alert as a link that only work devices can access. New development is underway whereby the app will be split into work apps and personal apps allowing for alert relevance.

During the structured debrief, it was noted some of the special operations officers (firearms officers) felt de-skilled in DA, given their specialist role and time away from district policing. Some felt it would have been beneficial to have a refresher training input in respect of DA, particularly in relation to DVPN/DVPOs.

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