

Automating referrals to the unwanted prisoner contact scheme

West Yorkshire Police (WYP) have automated the referral process for the unwanted prisoner contact scheme to increase awareness and uptake, enhancing safeguarding for victims and witnesses.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Violence against women and girls Stalking and harassment Investigation
Organisation	West Yorkshire Police
Region	North East
Partners	Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services)
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	December 2024
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Adults Families General public Offenders Victims Women
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Aim

The aims of the unwanted prisoner contact scheme are to:

- provide safeguarding for victims and witnesses of violence against women and girls (VAWG) offences
- prevent unwanted contact between prisoners and victims, witnesses, or their associates

By automating the referral process, this intervention seeks to increase the uptake and awareness of the scheme to enhance safeguarding opportunities.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- increase the number of referrals made by West Yorkshire Police (WYP)
- raise the workforce and the public's awareness that the scheme applies to all offence types
- reduce the time between remand and court proceedings, minimising opportunities for pressure, intimidation, or persuasion to withdraw a complaint

Description

WYP conducted a review which revealed a lack of awareness of the unwanted prisoner contact scheme and a low number of referrals. The review also highlighted that victims of VAWG offences were receiving contact from perpetrators and, as a result, were not receiving sufficient safeguarding support. Additionally, some prisoners were committing further offences through misuse of the prison

communications system.

In response, WYP approached His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to promote the national unwanted prisoner contact service across West Yorkshire. The scheme prevents individuals from receiving unwanted contact from prisoners by blocking communication with registered names, addresses, and telephone numbers. It is available to anyone, including victims and witnesses, to prevent them from receiving correspondence that is intimidating, harassing, or abusive.

WYP's initial plans focused on promoting the service across the force area through internal communications, briefing notes, intranet articles, and posters. The next stage was to identify internal partners such as the witness and victim care team, who could help raise awareness of the scheme.

WYP imaging unit produced force-specific posters and information cards, which are displayed in prison visitor centres and local police stations. Within WYP, officers and staff are encouraged to promote the scheme by sharing the website, contact details, and QR code. The initiative is also supported by the communications department through regular briefings and intranet articles.

The final stage focused on implementing a referral process to increase awareness and uptake of the scheme without creating additional administrative burdens for the workforce. To support implementation, the digital innovation team were approached to develop an automated referral process. A process definition document was subsequently produced, outlining the proposed solution. This document included:

- an initial process assessment
- business rules and exceptions
- non-functional requirements
- detailed high level process flowchart
- process steps
- exception flow

WYP used Niche (record management system) to create an automated process for all suspects charged and remanded for any offence. This process generates a task notification to the officer in charge (OIC), prompting them to consider making a referral to the scheme and providing a URL link

to the national stop prisoner contact referral form. In addition, an automated entry containing the same information is added to the occurrence enquiry log (OEL). WYP policy requires victims to be updated at the point of charge and remand, with this contact recorded on the OEL.

Using the crime system training programme, the process was mapped and tested, and the proposed workflow was trialled within the force's training environment. During the trial, the IT team reviewed the process flow for cases in which a suspect was charged and remanded. They also identified and extracted relevant case file information, including case reference numbers.

Following the trial, the process was transferred to the live crime system, where it underwent further testing using a selected sample of case files. Once the functionality had been confirmed, the automation was implemented across the force for all suspects charged and remanded into custody.

The WYP unwanted prisoner contact scheme referral process was approved by the senior leadership team and required no additional funding.

Overall impact

Within WYP, there has been a significant increase in the number of referrals to the unwanted prisoner contact scheme. Since implementation, WYP has made an average of 25 referrals per month, with 449 referrals made between June 2023 and August 2025.

The initiative has now been rolled out across the force. Two police forces have since approached WYP, and the process mapping has been shared to support replication.

Feedback from service users has been largely positive, with many commenting that the scheme provides an important safeguarding measure for victims.

Learning

- It is essential to secure buy-in from all departments and teams when planning and implementing the scheme.
- The planning and implementation of the scheme were delayed due to competing priorities and additional responsibilities outside day-to-day roles.
- There was initially a lack of knowledge and understanding of process mapping. This presented a challenge in determining whether the scheme could be implemented and how the automation could be developed effectively.

- Although feedback has been largely positive, some users have reported frustration around the automation process when it is not considered relevant to the offence under investigation.

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