



Force self-assessment survey on the police response to stalking

**An annexed report to the super-
complaint investigation into the
police response to stalking**

September 2024

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Introduction

In November 2022, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust submitted a [police super-complaint](#) about the police response to stalking on behalf of the National Stalking Consortium. The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), the College of Policing and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) jointly investigated this super-complaint and [published a report](#) setting out our conclusions and recommendations.

The IOPC, College of Policing and HMICFRS jointly issued a self-assessment survey to all 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales as part of this super-complaint investigation.

The self-assessment survey asked forces to provide information on their approach to handling stalking crimes, covering the areas of concern set out in the super-complaint. Forces were asked to provide details about training, investigation processes, use of stalking protection orders and services to support victims. Forces were also asked about what steps they had put in place to improve the police response to stalking in their force and to provide suggestions about what else could be changed, improved or put in place to improve the police response to stalking.

The survey took place between 4 August 2023 and 4 September 2023.

Responses were received from all 43 forces. One force provided an updated response to some questions in April 2024, because their initial response was inaccurate. The amended response was accepted.

The responses we received were comprehensive and show a commitment from forces to engage with this super-complaint and work to improve the police response to stalking. This annex is a summary report of the survey responses.

Methodology

The survey was conducted using the online SmartSurvey tool. Each force was asked to provide one response on behalf of the force. One force provided two different responses. An agreement was reached with the forces about which response to use in the analysis.

This report summarises the responses provided. Where forces were asked to provide an opinion or examples, the summary text reflects the range of responses received as well as highlighting commonly raised themes. Individual practice examples are highlighted throughout the report. These are drawn directly from the survey responses provided by police forces.

The information provided by forces through the self-assessment survey, including the quoted examples, has not been tested or evaluated as part of this super-complaint

investigation. For this reason, individual forces have not been identified throughout the summary report. The exception to this is where forces provided examples that are already included in the [College of Policing practice bank](#) as promising practice. In these cases, the relevant force has been named and links have been provided to the relevant practice bank entry.

Force priorities

Each police force in England and Wales has an elected local policing body. This includes Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and mayor equivalents. These bodies set the police and crime objectives for their area through a police and crime plan. Forces were asked in the self-assessment survey whether the police and crime plan for their force included specific reference to stalking. We also asked forces to explain where stalking featured in the plan. For example, as a standalone priority or under another broader priority area.

A total of 33 out of 43 forces stated that their force police and crime plan included specific reference to stalking.

A small number of forces reported that stalking was a standalone element of their police and crime plan. For most forces, stalking was referenced under a broader priority area such as protecting vulnerable people or tackling high-harm crime.

For many forces, the strategic focus on stalking was linked to or located within the wider strategic focus on violence against women and girls. Stalking was also often listed alongside or under the force priority around domestic abuse.

Training

All forces reported providing some type of training on stalking to some officers and staff. However, the scope and coverage of training delivered varied considerably across forces. While forces provided detailed information about different types of training, it is difficult to get a clear understanding of what training is provided due to the different approaches taken.

The College of Policing has developed a stalking or harassment e-learning product which complements the public protection national policing curriculum. It is aimed at police officers, including police specials, PCSOs and police staff (such as contact management staff who are the first point of contact in incidents which include elements of stalking or harassment). The e-learning can be used as standalone training or as part of a package of training. Further details about this training are included in the [super-complaint investigation report](#).

Some forces relied on the College of Policing stalking or harassment e-learning product and estimated that a high proportion of the officers and staff they required to complete the training had done so.

Alternatively, some forces that did not use the College of Policing stalking or harassment e-learning, described locally developed standalone training that appeared to cover relevant learning areas.

Some forces provided examples of using a range of different approaches to training on stalking. This was tailored to different levels of expertise required across different roles. Below is an outline of one of the more comprehensive approaches to training on stalking provided in the survey responses.

Example of an approach to stalking training

The force reported that the College of Policing stalking or harassment e-learning is required to be completed by call takers, response officers, neighbourhood officers, PSCOs, special constables and investigators/detectives in their force. The force estimated that between 75-100% of these people had completed the training.

The force also reported that the additional e-learning packages from the College of Policing that cover stalking are made available to public protection officers. Specifically:

- public protection initial response e-learning
- abusive relationships e-learning
- Hollie's story (case study on Hollie Gazzard) e-learning

Additionally, the force reported that investigators/detectives are required to complete a short standalone training. This has a 75-100% rate of completion. They described this training covers:

- identifying stalking – types of stalking behaviours
- differences between section 2A and section 4A stalking offences
- cyber stalking and changes in technology / how much stalking occurs online
- stalker typologies
- force policy around responding to stalking, including arrests, search and warrants
- local victim advocacy services
- safeguarding including safety advice
- impact on victims, asking the right questions, being believed, the swan effect
- stalking protection order applications
- force multi-agency stalking clinic
- stalking protection order management meetings

The force also described providing additional continuous professional development (CPD) training for a network of more than 90 stalking single points of contact (officers and staff at varying ranks that are available to provide advice and support to other officers and staff on stalking). This included a whole day's input from a local stalking advocacy service. The training was described as covering stalking in more depth, with the aim that it is followed by further CPD days annually.

However, the responses from some forces did not provide assurance that training on stalking is being delivered to all relevant officers and staff. Some force responses suggested that limited training on stalking was required for officers and staff, or poor completion of the training that was available (less than 50%).

Some forces appeared to require training relating to stalking but did not know how many officers or staff had completed the training that had been set.

Further details of the responses provided by all forces about their use of College of Policing e-learning products and standalone training is below.

College of Policing stalking or harassment e-learning

More than half (24 out of 43) of forces stated that they did not require their officers or staff to complete the College of Policing stalking or harassment e-learning.

Of the 19 forces that did require officers and staff to complete this e-learning, the training was commonly set as one-off, required learning for officers providing initial response (response officers, neighbourhood officers, special constables) and investigators/detectives. Nine forces required call takers to complete this training. Some forces also reported that the e-learning was required for other officers and staff, including student officers and front counter staff.

Of the forces that required their officers and staff to complete the College of Policing e-learning:

- five forces reported completion rates of 76-100%
- three forces reporting completion rates of 51-75%
- five forces reported completion rates of 26-50%
- six forces reported that they did not know or did not hold information on what percentage had completed the training

Other College of Policing e-learning relating to stalking

Forces were asked about their use of some other College of Policing e-learning packages which also cover some content relating to stalking.

- 26 forces reported using the public protection initial response e-learning
- 23 forces reported using Hollie's Story (based on the tragic case of Hollie Gazzard who was murdered after being stalked by an ex-partner)
- 21 forces reported using the abusive relationships e-learning

Standalone force training on stalking

Almost all forces (41 out of 43 forces) reported that they made at least one standalone stalking training package available to their officers and staff, in addition to or instead of using the College of Policing e-learning.

The descriptions of the standalone stalking training referred to by forces varied widely. The range of training packages included one or two-day in-depth training for stalking specialists or single points of contact, to shorter inputs delivered widely across the force by in-force trainers or stalking leads, or small video inputs and other stalking awareness sessions. Some forces also referred to training on stalking being delivered as part of their domestic abuse training.

Forces provided details of the topic areas covered in the standalone training packages. These generally included:

- misidentification of stalking
- investigating stalking
- support for stalking victims
- the victim's perspective
- applying for stalking protection orders and dealing with breaches of orders

Around half the standalone training packages included enhanced service under the [victims' code](#) as a topic area. However, entitlements under the [victims' code](#) are also covered in separate police training. This is not currently part of the public protection national policing curriculum learning outcomes on stalking.

Forces commonly used police personnel with specialist stalking expertise or police trainers to deliver their standalone training packages. A total of 25 forces also referred to using or involving external stalking specialists to deliver some of their stalking training. Examples of external input into stalking training include:

- [Alice Ruggles' story](#) was used by several forces. This is one of two case studies in the College of Policing stalking or harassment e-learning package. Some forces also mentioned having input from Alice's father Professor Clive Ruggles.
- Training delivered by Professor Jayne Monckton-Smith on her research around stalking and the femicide timeline.

- Two-day training on stalking delivered by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust.

Suggestions to improve the police response to stalking through additional and/or improved training

Forces were asked for any suggestions about how the police response to stalking could be improved. Additional or improved training was frequently mentioned as a suggestion.

Some forces specifically suggested that training about handling stalking crimes should be mandatory. Some also suggested mandatory training annually or every two years. Some responses suggested mandating the College of Policing e-learning modules.

Some suggestions referred to improving the existing training available with reference to improving student officer training and continuous professional development training. Some responses also suggested that College of Policing training products should be amended, with less reliance on e-learning.

Almost all forces identified training as important in helping officers and staff identify stalking correctly. Some forces noted that specialist training for supervisors was particularly important to address issues of misidentification, as well as consistent and repeated training for call-handlers and responding officers. Some forces felt that better learning materials and clearer guidance were also needed.

The resourcing impact of training was also noted as an issue – both in terms of the specialist resources required to deliver training (whether internal or external stalking specialists) and the limited capacity of officers and staff to attend training.

Misidentification of stalking

The survey asked respondents about their views as to whether misidentification of stalking was an issue in their force. A total of 35 out of 43 forces reported that this was an issue.

Many responses pointed to the inherent challenge in distinguishing between stalking, harassment, or coercive, controlling behaviour, given the significant overlap between elements of these offences.

While most forces reported misidentification as an issue, many also reported that the identification of stalking had improved in their force through interventions. However, some forces noted that misidentification persisted despite interventions to address this.

A small number of responses raised concern that too many incidents were now classified as stalking. This was described as an issue because it may mean that

higher-risk cases are potentially not dealt with appropriately as resources are directed towards dealing with incidents that have been classed as stalking, but which are low risk and less serious.

Forces were asked to provide examples of any steps taken, or actions that would be helpful to address the misidentification of stalking. Many forces referred to the value of training in supporting the police to identify stalking accurately. Further details about the responses relating to training are set out in the previous section.

Forces also discussed the need for greater clarification around the definition of stalking, use of tools and aides to support identification, and actions for screening or checking for misidentified stalking crimes. The responses and suggestions under these themes are below.

Clarification on the definition of stalking

Many responses from forces commented on the need for better clarity about the differences between stalking and harassment in law and guidance. Respondents felt that the law around stalking was unclear and contributed to misinterpretation and the misidentification of stalking offences. One force response stated:

“As it stands, there is no clear definitive distance in the legislation which shows, unequivocally, the legal difference between s2 harassment and s2a stalking.”

Distinguishing stalking from harassment was often described as inherently difficult. In one example, the respondent notes that a certain level of misidentification is anticipated by the force because of the overlap in these crime types.

“It is not easy for officers to pick the right crime type with the limited training they get, they most probably work from a theory that as long as they record something then the victim will get a service. There is recognition from the force with that, because it is not easy to define when harassment become stalking.”

In 2020, Home Office rules on crime recording changed to introduce the presumption that instances of harassment by an ex-partner should be recorded as stalking. Some forces referred to these changes as adding to the confusion around the distinction between stalking and harassment.

“The line between harassment and stalking is not clear particularly in cases where ex-partners are involved. The changes have made it harder for officers to identify risk and the cases which require specialist resources to investigate.”

Tools and aids to assist the identification of stalking

A number of forces mentioned the use of the FOUR mnemonic (fixated, obsessive, unwanted, repeated) as a helpful aide for officers and staff to identify stalking and avoid misidentification. However, the responses from forces were not universally positive about relying on these terms to define stalking. One response raised concern that FOUR over relied on the interpretation of what constituted fixated or obsessive behaviour. Another response raised concern that the terms ‘fixated’ and ‘obsessive’ were not reflected in the law around stalking.

A number of forces referred to the value of tools to help officers identify stalking crimes. Reference was made to the stalking screening tool. There was some positive feedback that this tool, if properly implemented, could help officers to identify stalking.

Some responses reflected on the lack of progress around implementing the stalking screening tool. Some forces noted that the tool needed to be used more, or that it had not been implemented effectively during pilot phases. A response from one force explained:

“I believe [the stalking screening tool] had real potential to aid frontline responders in the accurate identification of stalking and the immediate safeguarding action required. However, the overall purpose of the tool lacked clarity with many forces viewing it as another risk assessment. I was hopeful that this would be overcome with the planned university evaluation, unfortunately this did not take place.”

Some forces reported that they had developed their own bespoke templates, questions sets or apps to assist officers and staff to identify stalking. For example:

“We are developing a PowerApp for deployment on frontline devices to guide officers through the identification process, linking into the force stalking intranet portal which has all stalking resources, policies, SPO advice and links to external support.”

“The force has developed a vulnerability app, which includes a section on stalking using questions from the National Stalking Helpline framework that will assist officers in asking victims about incidents. The app contains an initial assessment to prompt officers to consider malicious comms, harassment, section 2A or section 4A. An initial pilot of the app took place in July 2023, with a further pilot expected to run in September 2023, before the app is introduced force wide.”

“[A stalking investigation template] has recently become a mandatory requirement for all investigators in cases of stalking or harassment. It has been introduced to improve consistency around the minimum expected standards around stalking investigations.

From Tuesday 30 May 2023 all officers and staff investigating any stalking or harassment crime are required to complete the stalking or harassment template on NICHE. The template should be completed as early as practicable in any response or investigation of a stalking crime. Its use is to help investigators:

- identify stalking
- ensure minimum standards are adhered to
- encourage a consistent approach to investigating stalking or harassment
- help investigators frame their investigations and identify lines of enquiry
- get better and quicker outcomes for complainants”

Some forces also referred to developing question sets or improved guidance to help call-takers and first responders probe the impact of stalking on the victim. This helped to better understand and correctly identify the crime. Further details of these initiatives are provided in the next section which focusses on the distinction between the more serious section 4A offences and less serious section 2A stalking offence.

Screening and quality assurance

Almost all forces suggested some form of screening or quality assurance to make sure that officers and staff identify stalking and correct crime recording decisions are made. Most forces gave examples of these types of quality assurance activities in their force.

Many forces referred to audits and reviews conducted by crime data integrity teams (who are responsible for making sure crime data is accurate and high-quality, or other quality assurance teams. In most cases, forces referenced crime recording reviews or case handling audits undertaken after the completion of a case with issues and learning fed back to teams. However, some forces referred to crime data integrity teams carrying out reviews of crime recording for stalking and related

offences (such as harassment) within the first 24 hours of the crime being recorded. This means that changes made to the crime recording could also impact immediately on the case handling.

One force also mentioned stalking crimes being reviewed at daily management meetings. This helped to make sure that the correct offences are investigated, the risks are fully understood, and the response is appropriate. This approach appears likely to rely on stalking first being identified, but may help to address other issues, particularly the identification and response to immediate risks.

A number of forces described routine, early screening of crimes to ensure correct identification, recording and handling of stalking crimes by dedicated stalking officers or teams. In some cases, this intervention work was specific to domestic abuse cases, so would not appear to apply to non-domestic abuse stalking. In other cases, reviews were only undertaken of cases identified as stalking. These would be unlikely to capture stalking that had been mis-recorded as a different crime. However, some forces did specifically refer to early checks on a broader range of related crimes or incidents including harassment and breaches of orders.

"The force specific stalking team conduct daily searches of offences which are commonly misidentified as stalking (breaches of orders, harassment etc) to ensure that the 'dots' are joined where appropriate, crimes are recorded appropriately and officers consider tactics specific to stalking such as SPOs, attendance at stalking triage clinic and consider use of the perpetrator programme as an out of court disposal, where appropriate."

Recognising section 4A stalking offences – involving fear of violence or serious alarm or distress

Stalking is split into separate offences. Section 2A stalking is a less serious, summary only offence. The more serious, section 4A stalking offence applies where the stalking causes the victim to fear that violence will be used against them, or causes the victim serious alarm or distress which has a substantial adverse effect on their usual day-to-day activities.

In the survey, forces were asked for their views about whether officers and staff in their force found it difficult to distinguish between the section 2A and section 4A stalking offences. A total of 27 forces confirmed that this was an issue, while 15 respondents reported that this was not an issue in their force. One force did not answer this question.

Forces were asked about what steps they had taken, or what further action might help to address this issue.

Forces referred to many of the same interventions as those aimed at improving identification of stalking (discussed in the previous section). These include training, screening and quality assuring by supervisors or stalking specialists, and the use of the stalking screening tool and similar guidance tools, checklists and apps.

Additional areas discussed in responses are set out below.

Clarifying the definition of ‘serious alarm or distress’

Many of the responses mentioned the need for clarity around the definition of ‘serious alarm or distress’ in the context of the impact of stalking crimes on victims. One response noted that “all forms of stalking cause alarm and distress”. However, some respondents reported that serious alarm or distress was often missed by officers, as the focus was on victims’ fear of violence. Some forces suggested a need for clearer guidance on this for officers to improve understanding and awareness of this element of the section 4A offence.

Questioning the value of the separate section 4A and section 2A stalking offences

A small number of responses specifically questioned the value of having separate section 2A and section 4A offences. They suggested that there should be one crime of stalking. For example:

“Having a higher and lesser offence (at the time of recording) could lead to officers/investigators paying less attention to those crimes that are deemed less serious at the outset. One crime of stalking would alleviate this.”

Engaging with victims to better understand impact

Some forces referred to the need for better conversations with victims and to the value of the victim personal statement to draw out the impact of stalking on the victim. Other suggestions included improving the questioning of victims by call handlers.

Responses covered a range of approaches that might help officers engage effectively with victims to better understand the impact of the stalking on them. One example referred specifically to working more closely with advocacy services, recognising that they may be better at exploring the impact of stalking with the victim:

“[We] try to ensure officers are linking in with advocacy services to better understand the level of fear a victim has. Victims do not always disclose this to an officer and so multi-agency working allows for better understanding and awareness from the officer, thus enabling better representation to the CPS. This also promotes the safeguarding of victims.”

Some responses suggested that better guidance or question sets were required to support officers with straightforward, structured points to cover when questioning victims of stalking.

One force noted that support with questioning victims about impact was particularly required for non-domestic abuse cases. They stated that the use of the DARA (domestic abuse risk assessment) question set helped officers with this type of structured questioning in domestic abuse cases.

Another force suggested that guidance should be issued to make it mandatory in stalking cases to collect a victim personal statement early, and before a charging decision. They stated that this would help to understand the impact on the victim so that the correct charging decision could be made. This force described work they had undertaken to try to improve how victim impact evidence is collected in stalking cases, building on the victim personal statement:

“The (force) has been working closely with the Crown Prosecution Service stalking leads to design an improved approach to Victim Personal Statements [VPS]. We feel that the VPS, taken on first reporting or at the outset of a secondary investigation, draws out significant evidence relevant to the section 4A classification. We have drafted example VPS with the CPS which we feel hit the required standard. In addition, we have stipulated that officers use a proforma VPS which covers essential points.

We have worked with our clinical psychologists and the Suzy Lamplugh Trust to compile a list of common indicators of psychological injury. This is to assist frontline responders and investigators in being alerted to aspects of a victim’s account which may indicate trauma consistent with the section 4A legislation.”

Working with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

A number of forces mentioned involving the CPS in training, provision of case advice, and case screening or reviews to help make sure the correct offence is considered. Close working with the CPS was also identified as important to help address issues around evidence collection to support a section 4A stalking charge.

Risk identification and screening tools

Forces were asked about any tools regularly used by frontline officers or investigators to screen or assess risk in stalking cases.

All forces responded. Some forces used more than one tool to help officers and staff to consider risk.

Table 1: Risk tools used in stalking cases

Risk tool	Number of forces reporting regularly using the tool
DASH – Domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and honour-based violence risk model	35
S-DASH – Question set to support identification of stalking risk (used with or separate from DASH)	22
DARA – Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment	13
SASH – Screening Assessment for Stalking and Harassment	5

All but two forces reported routinely using [DASH](#) or [DARA](#). These tools are the College of Policing and National Police Chiefs Council’s (NPCC) preferred risk tools for all domestic abuse cases (stalking by intimate or ex-intimate partners). The two forces that reported using neither of these for assessing stalking cases referred to using the S-DASH and SASH in one force, and a different domestic abuse risk tool (MeRIT) and a Stalking Risk Checklist in the other force.

Five forces reported using the stalking screening tool (SST), in addition to the options selected from the list above. The SST is a risk identification tool which has been piloted by a number of forces. The SST was developed to support frontline police personnel to identify stalking behaviours and prompts them to take and record safeguarding actions when certain risk indicators are present. Further information about the development and implementation of this tool is set out in the [tri-lateral super-complaint investigation report](#).

Other tools that were referred to by forces include: [THRIVE](#) (a model used in policing to assess the right initial response to a call for service), [Cambridge Harm Index](#) and [Stalking Risk Profile](#) (SRP). Some forces also referred to different forms used to record safeguarding plans and public protection notifications.

Forces were asked about where risk management plans were recorded, and whether this was part of the risk assessment form or elsewhere. A total of 17 out of 43 forces responded that risk management plans were recorded as part of the risk assessment form. In some forces this was only for domestic abuse cases where a DASH was

used. In other cases, forces generally referred to risk management plans being recorded on force crime records.

A number of forces mentioned the need for more clarity around the most appropriate or the best risk assessment tool to use in stalking cases, particularly non-domestic abuse stalking. Responses noted that there was confusion around the most appropriate risk assessment tool to use in these cases and that a tool similar to DASH or DARA was needed for non-domestic abuse stalking cases.

Stalking Protection Orders

The [Stalking Protection Act 2019](#) introduced stalking protection orders (SPOs). SPOs are a civil order which can be made by magistrates following an application by police. SPOs place specific prohibitions and/or positive requirements on those subject to them. These prohibitions and positive requirements are intended to protect victims from risks associated with stalking. Examples of positive requirements include attending an appropriate perpetrator intervention programme, surrendering devices, or providing the police with access to social media accounts, mobile phones, or computers.

Forces were asked about their use of SPOs in the survey. All 43 forces reported using SPOs. Most forces reported that they use their legal services departments to apply for SPOs, though many forces noted that this is done in collaboration with investigating officers or specialist officers.

Respondents were asked to reflect on the effectiveness of SPOs. Almost all forces (37 out of 43) viewed SPOs as an effective tool for protecting victims. Six forces were unsure whether SPOs were effective at this or not.

However, 33 forces also reported problems obtaining SPOs. Many respondents noted that the challenges they experienced obtaining SPOs and the limited availability of perpetrator intervention programmes undermined their value. These challenges reported by forces, as well as views on the benefits of SPOs, are set out in more detail below.

Reflections on whether SPOs are an effective tool for protecting victims of stalking

Benefits of SPOs

Many responses referred to the value that SPOs offered in both disrupting offenders and protecting victims.

Some forces described SPOs as offering greater control over suspects compared with other protective orders or bail conditions. Some forces described them as acting as an enforceable and effective deterrent that could assist with breaking cycles of

behaviour and reducing reoffending. A number of forces highlighted the value of being able to put an SPO in place before conviction and being able to pursue breaches of the SPO as a criminal offence.

Many responses highlighted the scope to include positive requirements on offenders as a strength of SPOs. Positive requirements were seen as an effective way of managing stalking behaviours and holding offenders accountable and responsible for their behaviour:

“SPOs allow the police to add positive requirements onto a perpetrator and these assist in managing them moving forward. They have the ability to protect the wider public and not just the victim and when used appropriately and in the context of the individual circumstances of the case, they can have a significant impact on the perpetrator’s behaviour. This is the main difference between SPOs and Restraining Orders (which are more restricted in terms of the conditions available) and this is why they should be used more in stalking cases.”

A number of forces referred to victims reporting that they felt reassured where SPOs were in place. One force reflected on feedback gathered from victims about the value of SPOs and other protective measures:

“We have sought feedback from some victims where an order is in place. We asked how they felt once an order was granted and one victim stated “I feel happy. It will always be on my mind but I feel better that I was listened to. It feels like a comfort that it is there” another responded by saying “I felt better and was relieved. I felt safer because if something legal, like bail conditions are in place, he abides by it”.

Issues undermining effectiveness of SPOs

Respondents also reflected on issues which undermined the effectiveness of an SPO, despite reporting they were an effective tool. The main concerns raised about SPOs focused on the difficulties obtaining them. This included issues with meeting the burden of proof, and challenges with managing and enforcing them once in place.

“SPOs are extremely difficult to obtain. Unlike a lot of other orders, it is the criminal standard of proof that must be applied in order for an application to be successful. If the criminal standard of proof is met then a prosecution will take place, likely resulting in a restraining order being issued if successful. Although this means that positive requirements cannot be placed on an individual, this approach does still provide protection for the victim. Running an SPO application alongside a prosecution can cause duplication in effort.”

Some forces raised the need for effective management of SPOs. Several forces highlighted the significant burden this placed on officers or staff, who may not have the capacity or skills and experience to manage this effectively. This was seen as a particular issue where forces did not have a dedicated team to manage protective orders.

Some respondents commented that it was difficult to see the benefit of SPOs without inclusion of positive requirements for offenders to attend perpetrator programmes, which were often not available. Only nine forces reported that stalking intervention programmes for perpetrators were included in SPO conditions in their force area.

Some forces stated that the lack of intervention programmes and the challenges with enforcing positive requirements undermined the effectiveness of SPOs.

Problems experienced with obtaining SPOs

A total of 33 out of 43 forces reported problems with obtaining SPOs. Forces were asked to provide details of the problems they had encountered.

Overall forces reported that the process for obtaining SPOs was complex, resource intensive and slow. Many of the issues identified around knowledge, skills, resources and capacity were reported across all elements of the criminal justice system, including police officers, police legal teams and courts. The themes arising across the responses are set out below.

Complex, slow and resource intensive process

Many forces referred to the time-consuming and cumbersome process of applying for an SPO. SPO applications were described as resource intensive and complex.

Many responses referred to the complexity of SPO applications as a barrier to increasing their use. This was particularly reported as an issue where stalking crimes were being investigated by frontline officers and not more specialist investigators. However, some forces also reflected that the complexity of SPO applications also presented challenges for investigators in criminal investigations departments (CID) and other specialist investigation teams.

Linked to this was a lack of understanding and training around the application process and evidence requirements, and a lack of capacity among frontline officers or investigators to invest the time to pursue SPO applications. A number of forces said officers were reluctant to apply for SPOs as a result.

"Individual [officers in charge of the investigation], on investigation teams, with high work-loads and poor knowledge of the orders have historically been required to apply for SPOs via [our] legal services department. This has resulted

in extremely low numbers of orders (interim and full) being applied for and obtained by the force.”

A number of forces with specialist teams or officers in roles to support stalking investigations, reflected on the benefits this brought in terms of raising awareness of SPOs, identifying where SPOs may be appropriate, and supporting applications. However, one large force that had invested in specialist officers to apply for SPOs, reflected that this still resulted in capacity limitations. They said there was a ceiling on the number of SPO applications that could be made, dependent on the availability of this specialist resource.

Delays in the court systems meant some there was issues with timeliness in putting SPOs in place. A number of forces referred to the length of time it took to get hearings listed as a particular problem. For example:

“Our local court have centralised a large amount of work meaning there is often a wait time of four to six weeks before a hearing date can be accommodated. This is despite legal services flagging up the need to prioritise applications for public protection and DA matters (many of the current SPOs in force have a DA element).”

Support from legal teams

Most forces reported that they use their legal services departments to apply for SPOs. They described a process where investigating officers submit applications or requests for SPOs to police legal teams who then make the court applications.

A number of forces reported challenges with the capacity of legal teams to support SPO applications in a timely way. One response noted that the inherent complexity of SPO applications meant that applications required significant support from legal services. Forces referred to capacity issues across small legal teams limiting the number of SPO applications that could be made. Some forces noted that additional legal services capacity had been made available for SPO applications, in response to this issue.

In some cases, forces pointed to challenges where legal teams had different views to investigation officers about whether an SPO was appropriate or required. This is discussed further under the next theme.

Preferencing other orders and protective measures

Some forces reported that investigating officers were reluctant to apply for SPOs where other orders or police or court bail were in place or available.

Some responses suggested that officers were more willing to pursue other protective measures, such as bail conditions, restraining orders and domestic violence protection notices (DVPNs) or orders (DVPOs), rather than SPOs, because these were seen as easier to apply for and obtain. Some forces also referred to officers not seeing SPOs as necessary when other types of protective measures were in place.

Forces reported similar feedback about police legal teams and courts having a preference for other protective orders and measures, or not seeing SPOs as necessary where these were in place.

A number of forces also raised concerns that courts did not appear to understand the risk of stalking. For example, one force reported that courts had declined to issue an SPO where the force had applied because the court did not find the actions of the suspect sufficiently serious.

“The cases we have had refused have been due to the court not finding the actions ‘sufficiently serious enough’... to justify an order, when we have got to court the victim has obtained a non-molestation order before we’ve had the chance to make the application for a SPO, or the court has not found the need for an order when the person has been subject to bail conditions that would do the same as an order would (despite submissions that bail does not have any sanction if breached).”

One force mentioned that since 2020 officers had submitted applications for more than 100 SPOs to their legal service team, but this had resulted in only 12 full SPOs granted by courts (a further 18 interim SPOs had been granted but many of these related to the same subjects as the full orders).

Solutions in place and suggestions to address issues with SPOs

Forces were asked about any solutions they had put in place to address problems with obtaining SPOs, and what the impact of these actions were. They were also asked to provide any suggestions for improving the SPO process to provide the best service for victims. The responses to both these questions have been grouped below under themes.

Dedicated resource to support SPO applications

A common theme across responses was suggestions around involving specialist resource to support applications for SPOs. Forces that had invested in specialist resources were positive about the impact this had on the number of SPOs obtained. A number of forces that did not have such specialist resources in place were considering implementing this type of approach, or suggested that this would be a helpful development.

Examples where specialist roles were in place include introducing stalking coordinators, single points of contact (SPOCs) or dedicated SPO officers whose role was to identify and triage suitable cases for an SPO and support their application. Other forces had set up or expanded stalking coordination units or stalking teams to carry out this role. One larger force described a network of SPO coordinators working with a multi-agency stalking unit across the force area. This example is set out below. It sits alongside an example of a different approach to using specialist resource to support SPOs in a smaller force.

Several forces referred to using other specialist roles or resources to assist with SPO applications. These included civil orders teams, or specialist roles in domestic abuse or violence against women and girls (VAWG) teams. Forces also identified the recruitment of dedicated legal staff or the expansion of their legal teams as a step they had taken or as a suggestion to improve numbers of SPOs.

Examples of specialist SPO resources

"[The force] has established a network of 12 SPO co-ordinators sitting in each [area]. By undertaking this work on a daily basis and having strong links with the [specialist stalking unit] and our legal teams, they are able to build up the required knowledge to competently secure these orders. They are also a key point of contact for frontline responders and investigators requiring advice.

- Our [multi-agency stalking unit] run a monthly co-ordination board, co-delivered with our department for legal services, allowing SPO co-ordinators to flag up issues and challenges, and providing an opportunity to improve practice.
- Our SPO co-ordinators attend the monthly stalking review group, meaning they are fully appraised on strategic developments in the [force's] response to stalking. It also allows them a forum to raise issues with the force's lead and deputy lead directly.
- The [multi-agency stalking unit]... provide in-depth training to all new SPO co-ordinators in recognition of the complexity of this role. This training is predicated on the College of Policing guidance on SPOs. We have also developed a clear role-profile for the SPO co-ordinators, to deliver a uniform approach across frontline policing and ensure officers are clear on their role and responsibilities.

Overall, we believe this structured approach and close management by the [multi-agency stalking unit] are responsible for our strong SPO performance against national trends."

“The introduction of a stalking coordinator in July 2022 to identify the ...cases that should be considered for an SPO and the support in completion of the application, where required.

Civil orders team has been introduced in January 2023, responsible for supporting applications, coordination of orders, conduit between force and legal, monitors and respond to breaches.

These changes have had a positive impact.”

Changes to the law around SPOs

A number of forces suggested that legislative change was required to make it easier and quicker to apply for and obtain SPOs, particularly interim SPOs. Many forces referred to the need for a quicker interim SPO process that could be put in place to protect victims before a court hearing for a full SPO.

Parallels were drawn with domestic violence protection notices (DVPN) and orders (DVPO), with the suggestion that a similar framework should be introduced for SPOs. Respondents suggested that the benefits of this would be to have an immediate police-applied protection and a set timeframe for implementation of a full order by a court.

“There ought to be consideration for the introduction of an SPN (Stalking Protection Notice) – akin to the DVPN or forthcoming DAPN where the police can impose an SPN initially which then guarantees that the case will be before the magistrates within a couple of days. This would ensure speedier protection and probably more SPOs and be a fabulous tool to assist while an SPO is applied for.”

Another area of concern was the criminal burden of proof required for SPOs, as indicated at the time of the survey in the [Home Office SPO statutory guidance](#). A number of forces suggested that the civil burden of proof should apply for SPOs and this should be made clear in legislation or statutory guidance. It was argued that this would make SPOs easier to apply for, particularly during the course of an investigation. This also linked to concerns raised around victims being required to attend court where an SPO application is being heard, risking additional trauma to the victim.

Since this survey was completed, the Home Office has amended its [statutory guidance on SPOs](#). This now states that it is ‘likely that the courts will apply the civil standard of proof (balance of probabilities) to the different elements of the SPO application.

Forces mentioned several other suggested changes to the design of SPOs. These included:

- Suggestions to allow prosecutors to apply for an SPO following a conviction for stalking offences and a presumption that this should be done.
- Suggestions to change the requirement that a force may only apply for an SPO if the offender lives in, or is coming to, that force area. This was seen to create issues where the victim and perpetrator live in different force areas.
- Suggestions to increase sanctions for breaches of SPOs to better protect the victim.

System-wide training and improved guidance on SPOs

Many forces mentioned that some form of training had been provided for staff, officers and legal services around SPOs. Some forces said training on SPOs was delivered as part of general training on stalking crimes. Others referred to delivering specific training for specialist roles involved in supporting SPO applications.

Forces also suggested that further training, guidance and work to generally promote awareness of SPOs would be beneficial. One suggestion was made for simplified, practical guides on SPOs for frontline investigators.

A number of forces also suggested that improved training and guidance for the judiciary and courts was needed to build a better shared understanding of SPOs. Some forces referred to the benefits where this type of training had been delivered to partners within the legal system:

“Magistrates and legal advisors in [force area] were given an input on stalking and SPOs. This was well received and magistrates have been fully supportive of all orders brought before them. A further input was given this year, to refresh relationships and let them know the positive impact SPOs are having, including number of breaches and a victim’s voice.”

Governance and feedback processes

Some forces pointed to improved governance and performance management around SPOs as a mechanism for improving the number of applications. One force described monitoring SPO performance through a monthly vulnerability board. This was chaired by the head of crime, which included representation from the legal services department. Another force discussed seeking regular feedback from victims about their experiences where orders are in place, with feedback informing process improvement work.

“We have recently sought feedback from victims where orders are in place and will continue to do so on a regular basis to ascertain how we can continually improve the service we offer and experience felt by victims.”

Management of SPOs once in place

A number of forces mentioned the need for improvements in the management of SPOs once in place.

Some respondents referred to the value of having ancillary orders managers, dedicated teams or hubs to manage protective orders. They described that these teams helped to make sure monitoring and compliance were carried out consistently across local policing areas.

Some forces suggested there was a need for the development of national practices around the management of SPOs, including supporting management of protective orders across force borders.

“As a force with a larger number of SPOs, we would benefit from the development nationally of working practices and risk assessments to assist with post-order management. Those on SPOs are managed by our proactive DA teams and we have created our own guidance in relation to management, visit regimes and risk assessment. However, it would be beneficial to be given a national steer.”

Specialist stalking support services for victims

Forces were asked about the provision of specialist stalking support services for victims. A total of 32 forces reported that specialist stalking support services were available to victims in their force area. Nine forces reported that these services were not available, and two respondents reported that they did not know.

Most forces were not able to provide information about what percentage of stalking victims were referred to specialist stalking support services. However, 15 forces did know this information. For eight forces, this was 1-25%, for two forces this was 26-50%. One force reported 51-75% and four forces reported 76-100% of stalking victims were referred to specialist stalking support services.

Forces were asked to provide information about the types of services these support services provide. In most cases this covered personal safety advice, online safety advice, advice about tracking devices, and support to engage in the criminal justice system. Some services also provided some form of counselling service to victims, as well as signposting to other services.

Many forces referred to relying on national stalking support services or a combination of national and local services to provide specialist stalking support. Some forces explained that their stalking provisions sat within their wider domestic abuse victim support provision, which included specialist trained stalking advocates. In some cases, these also provided services to victims of non-domestic abuse related stalking. However, some forces referred to different availability of stalking support services for domestic abuse and non-domestic abuse victims. One force stated that there was no specialist support for non-domestic abuse related stalking victims.

Some forces provided details about how stalking advocates were integrated into the delivery of the policing response. For example:

“The force employs two Independent Specialist Victims Advocates (trained as IDVAs, ISVAs and ISACs – Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworkers). They are part of the [multi-agency stalking unit] but work independently to provide practical support, safety planning and advocacy to stalking victims.”

Independent Stalking Advocates are funded by the PCC and form part of two key charities across the force area]. They are key attendees as part of the working group and the '[Force] Stalking Intervention Panel' which is held monthly.

We have 11 currently trained and looking for additional funding to increase another four. We are now looking to give them access to police stations and partial access to the crime recording system to update directly. They are a very valuable asset.

Suggestions for improving victim support

A number of forces said better victim support was important to improve the effectiveness of the police response to stalking.

“Greater local advocacy for stalking victims would both increase their confidence in reporting and also increase the quality of investigations and positive outcomes if the victim was supported through the investigative and prosecution process.”

Many responses pointed to the need for increased funding for specialist victim services to make sure the national availability of these services was consistent. Several respondents suggested greater awareness of support agencies by officers was needed so victims could be referred or signposted to them.

Allocation of stalking cases for investigation

Forces were asked which roles were generally responsible for investigating domestic (or intimate/ex-intimate partner) stalking and other, non-domestic stalking cases.

Most forces referred to frontline response officers or other volume crime investigation teams investigating some stalking cases. Many forces referred to response teams investigating both domestic and non-domestic stalking cases in some circumstances. Generally, forces reported section 2A, medium or low-risk cases being investigated by frontline teams.

Some forces provided more details about how cases were allocated to different teams. Generally, these forces referred to making allocation decisions based on an assessment of risk, whether the case was section 2A or section 4A stalking, and whether it involved domestic abuse.

Dedicated stalking teams

A total of 14 out of 43 forces reported having some type of dedicated stalking team or stalking co-ordination unit. However, in two of these forces, the specialist teams referred to were not solely focused on stalking but were domestic abuse specialist teams or safeguarding teams.

Forces were asked to describe the types of activities that stalking specialist teams undertook. One response mentioned that the dedicated stalking unit in that force was developing an investigative function. However, in most cases, dedicated stalking units were small teams providing an advisory, support and co-ordination role. In some cases, this dedicated resource was complemented by a network of stalking single points of contact throughout the force.

Forces gave examples of activities dedicated stalking teams undertook. These included:

- Tactical and investigative advice on stalking cases.
- Supporting or reviewing risk assessments (sometimes using more in-depth, specialist stalking risk tools such as the Stalking Risk Profile or SASH), and safeguarding advice.
- Identifying cases where SPO opportunities exist and supporting SPO applications.
- Developing and presenting training.
- Facilitating referrals to specialist stalking advocates and working with specialist stalking advocates and other partner agencies to support particular cases.
- Helping co-ordinate the response to cross-boundary stalking cases.

All 14 forces that reported having dedicated stalking teams advised that their work involves screening cases. In most cases, this involves screening both domestic abuse and non-domestic abuse stalking cases. Some forces also referred to

screening harassment cases, coercive control, and malicious communications cases and breaches of protective orders.

Some forces described multi-agency teams involving stalking advocates, psychologists and other partners working with police officers. Where this multi-agency approach is taken, forces described the specialist unit also offering access to interventions for some stalking perpetrators.

An example of this multi-agency approach is the Harm Reduction Unit in Cheshire Police (set out below). The Harm Reduction Unit is included on the [College of Policing practice bank](#) as an example of promising practice. Further details about this approach are provided there.

Cheshire Police: Harm Reduction Unit (HRU)

The existing HRU provides tactical and investigative advice to as many stalking cases as possible. Referrals come directly from officers and partners as well as pro-active scanning to all recorded stalking crimes.

The HRU also offers a therapeutic intervention for some stalkers who meet the required criteria, whether mandated through a legal order (for example a licence or SPO) or voluntarily.

The HRU also offers:

- specialist independent advocacy for stalking victims
- bespoke specialist training
- Support with risk management for multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC), multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) and the newly established Health Public Protection Hub
- development of policy and procedure
- primacy in some stalking investigations and stalking protection order cases

Some forces provided examples of smaller stalking specialist teams. For example, one force described the work of their Stalking Co-ordination Unit:

The Stalking Coordination Unit conduct a daily (weekday) triage facility to provide support and guidance to officers when responding to and investigating stalking.

The triage criteria has recently been reviewed and amended to focus on the highest risk non-domestic abuse stalking crimes and high-risk domestic abuse when referred in by domestic abuse coordinators following discussions at their daily risk assessment meetings. The review includes providing early

investigative advice, safety planning, early consideration of SPO, cyber-flagging and CDI compliance checks.

The work of the unit also includes:

- daily (weekday) review of harassment crimes to correct any misidentification of stalking
- developing and maintaining the stalking action plan
- gatekeeping and tracking SPO applications
- flagging prolific/high-risk stalking nominals
- training to officers and staff, as well as partner agencies

Reflections on the value of dedicated stalking units

When asked to suggest how the police response to stalking could be improved, close to half of responses suggested dedicated stalking co-ordination units, stalking clinics or more specialist stalking officers as key mechanisms.

Forces with dedicated stalking co-ordinating units reflected on the value they provide:

“We feel strongly that our strong charging performance is a result of the role of the [multi-agency stalking unit] and their crime screening role.”

“The provision of access to specialists and the opportunity to discuss cases is really helpful... and has created a much more open dialogue about the use of SPOs and other protection measures.”

“Every force should have a multi-agency stalking clinic - this works extremely well in [our force].”

A number of forces reflected on the need to make sure dedicated stalking co-ordination units have sufficient capacity to support the stalking response effectively. One force noted the importance of making sure these units had capacity to support both non-domestic abuse as well as domestic abuse cases.

Cyber-stalking and digital evidence

From the responses to the survey, many forces appear unclear about how significant the cyber or online element of stalking is across their stalking caseload. A total of 22 out of 43 forces responded that they did not know how many stalking cases involved a cyber element. Forces who did provide this information reported vastly different rates of stalking cases involving a cyber-element.

A total of 13 forces reported that the prevalence of online stalking (where any element of the offence was committed online or through internet-based activities) was 25% or lower of stalking cases in the force. An additional four forces reported the incidence at 26-50%. Four forces reported the incidence of stalking with an online element at more than 50%. Of these, two reported the incidence at 76-100%.

Specialist support for online stalking and digital evidence retrieval

Almost all forces reported that specialist support is available to assist officers with evidence retrieval for online stalking offences.

Forces referred to digital media investigation teams and cyber-crime teams providing support to stalking investigations involving online offending or digital evidence retrieval. Some forces mentioned digital media vehicles. These allow the download of a victim's digital device to take place at their home or place of work without the need to take it away. Other examples included digital kiosks which are used to support quicker and more convenient evidence downloads from victims' devices.

Some forces also referred to investments made into 'Guardian'. This is a cyber-security safeguarding tool. It can scan victims' phones and other devices to identify if stalkerware or spyware is present or being used to track or hack into their device.

A number of forces mentioned the need for further investment in digital evidence retrieval and increasing the numbers of officers skilled in digital investigations and cyber-enabled crime responses.

Police forces suggested further guidance and training was required in online stalking, as well as improved information sharing and updates regarding emerging online stalking trends and technology.

Analytical software tools used to support stalking investigations

We asked forces about analytical tools used to map co-locations of offenders and victims in stalking cases.

A number of forces discussed using data intelligence tools and mapping software to understand 'heat spots' for stalking offences. This is done by mapping where offences are concentrated. It was described by forces as used to highlight repeat offenders or repeat victims.

Other examples related to the use of analytical software by trained officers to analyse and cross reference perpetrator and victim digital data for evidence. These tools were described as allowing police to more easily combine digital data from a range of sources to identify patterns, spot connections and provide evidence against key

investigative lines of enquiry. Forces described a range of processes for identifying cases to be referred for this type of digital investigation support – including triage or referral processes.

An example of this approach is a pilot programme in the Metropolitan Police Service, Operation Atlas (described below). Further details of this pilot and its initial evaluation is on the [College of Policing practice bank](#) where it has been included as an example of promising practice.

Metropolitan Police – Operation Atlas

Operation Atlas was piloted in one area of the MPS between November 2022 and April 2023.

The pilot was designed to test an approach involving embedding specialist digital investigation capabilities into the MPS response to public protection, with a specific focus on stalking. The pilot involved a team of officers trained in a specialist software application.

This software distils large amounts of data gathered through investigations. It produces graphs, tables and other data summaries. This allows officers to quickly process significant amounts digital data and draw out significant evidence for investigations.

Operation Atlas includes a triage process as a first step, with appropriate cases submitted to a sergeant for review. For cases assessed as suitable, Operation Atlas officers agree a digital investigation strategy for the case and request data from relevant sources.

Operation Atlas officers are trained to analyse the relevant digital data using the software which helps them make sense of and report on the data. An Operation Atlas officer uses these outputs to provide a witness statement which includes commentary on what the data can and cannot prove. The witness statement is provided to investigators for use in interview and case file submission to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

An initial evaluation of the pilot showed promising results in terms of reductions in the time taken to investigate crimes and improved charge rates. The MPS also report that the use of the software allowed officers, in some cases, to identify stalking behaviours that the victim was not even aware of.

Operation Atlas is now being implemented in other areas of the MPS following the success of the pilot.

A small number of forces described work in development to potentially use GPS tagging devices by court order for some stalking perpetrators. One force also

discussed using location tracking apps as part of safeguarding options offered to some high-risk stalking victims.

Changes or suggestions to improving the police response to stalking

Forces were asked an open question about any suggestions they had to improve the police response to stalking, locally or nationally. Many of the suggestions related to topics previously covered. Where this is the case, these responses have been incorporated into previous sections of this report. Below is a summary of the points raised that have not been included elsewhere.

Investigative skills and capacity

A number of forces reflected on the skill level and capacity of investigators to provide appropriate responses to stalking victims. One response noted that internal audits in their force had shown that where stalking was effectively identified and then investigated by a detective, the overall quality of investigations had been found to be good. A number of forces referred to the increased volume of recorded stalking crimes adding to the issues around capacity and resources.

Suggestions included:

- The need for increased numbers and capacity of investigators to allow more time to investigate stalking crimes.
- Focusing on improving supervision and oversight to ensure effective investigations. This included through audits or implementation of regular stalking or 'at risk' meetings.
- Greater alignment between domestic and non-domestic stalking to make sure that there is no disparity in the service level offer.

Caution about resourcing recommendations

Some responses noted that staff levels and capacity may make it difficult to implement recommendations arising from the super-complaint. In particular, it was noted that it may be difficult for smaller forces to implement some recommendations that specifically relate to introducing specialist teams:

“Small forces do not have the additional resources to be able to create specialist teams for specific crime types, any recommendations need to factor this in”.

Impact of recent changes to crime recording rules

A small number of responses expressed concern about the 2020 crime recording changes that required domestic harassment cases to be recorded as stalking in most cases. It was suggested that the increased volume of stalking cases resulting from this change risked overwhelming specialist investigative resources and leading to cases being inappropriately allocated to response officers. For example:

"The changes to the crime recording rules introduced in 2020 which saw all acts of harassment undertaken by a partner/ex-partner recorded as stalking has increased volumes significantly and made it more challenging to establish the cases that require PIP2 oversight. With detective shortages it is not possible for all offences to be investigated by a PIP2 resource and identifying those that should [is] more challenging. This has resulted in many stalking offences being investigated by neighbourhood policing teams or response officers without the necessary skills or time. A return to pre-2020 crime recording changes would allow greater focus and risk management."

One response also expressed concern around the most recent 2023 crime recording changes regarding behavioural crimes, which introduced principal crime recording. Concern was raised that stalking offences might be masked if they are not the principal crime according to the [Home Office crime recording rules for frontline officers and staff](#), and that stalking offences may be missed or under-investigated depending on the force's IT systems, crime recording scrutiny and allocation processes.

Perpetrator interventions

A number of forces included suggestions relating to the availability and effectiveness of stalking perpetrator interventions.

Some forces mentioned the introduction or wider use of multi-agency stalking intervention programmes (MASIPs):

"MASIPs are vital – allows expert risk assessment of stalking perpetrators. All forces should implement a MASIP wherever possible and MASIPs should work together nationally to share best practice and new ideas/innovations."

A number of forces referred to the need for better evaluation and a clearer evidence base around offender programmes for stalkers to inform a better understanding of what is available, what works, and the expected standards for the provision of these programmes.

Aligned with this were calls for investment in the provision of perpetrator intervention programmes to improve availability nationally. Forces mentioned psychological intervention programmes and other tools for perpetrator management such as GPS tracking for stalking perpetrators (which could be delivered through an SPO). These suggestions included making sure funding was available for an extended period of time (rather than yearly or every two years). One response reflected on the value of this type of investment:

“Investment in the form of early robust interventions with perpetrators will save so much demand in the long term but this rarely happens...”

Some forces referenced work underway to better identify and manage high-risk perpetrators. One response noted that “this work offers real opportunities to disrupt potential stalking offences”. They suggested a consistent national framework focused on stalking offences.

Broader changes across the criminal justice system

A number of responses referred to the need for a system-wide approach looking at the service received by stalking victims from the wider criminal justice system, including the Crown Prosecution Service, courts, and police.

Some suggestions included better and closer working with magistrates, including joint training around the impact of stalking on victims and [the different types of stalking perpetrators](#) and associated risks. Others suggested that delays in obtaining charging decisions contributed to victims withdrawing support for prosecution. They suggested this might be addressed through reverting to ‘on the day’ charging for all stalking and domestic abuse offending.

One response specifically suggested that the learning from [Operation Soteria](#) should be applied to improve the system-wide response to stalking and other behavioural crime - adopting the same victim-centred, suspect-focused, context-led approach to investigations.

Public awareness and education

Some responses pointed to the importance of improving public awareness of stalking, including its seriousness and the risk to victims. It was proposed that this could be done in schools so that students would learn to recognise stalking crimes, particularly online stalking, and how to report them. It was also suggested that more information should be made available to the public about emerging online stalking trends and technology, and how people could best safeguard themselves.

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