

# Safeguarding

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Safeguarding is central to every police response to domestic abuse. Officers should take **positive action** to protect victims and prevent further harm. This includes immediate **safety planning**, risk assessment and the use of powers or protective measures. All actions should be guided by the **national decision model (NDM)** and informed by professional judgement.

Officers should address the following to ensure the safety of domestic abuse victims:

- clarity as to who is responsible for risk assessment and safety planning at all times
- accurate and dynamic risk assessment that is reviewed at each trigger point
- appropriate safety planning that is tailored to meet the needs of the victim and reviewed at each trigger point
- clear communication – there must be clarity about who is responsible for keeping the victim informed, from the point of initial handover by the first responder and throughout the life of the case

Officers should review risk assessments and safety planning at the following trigger points:

- release of the suspect from custody by the police or the court
- the suspect being charged
- the lead-up to a trial
- sentencing
- release from a prison sentence
- the imposition of a court order
- the expiry of a court order
- family proceedings, especially concerning child contact
- start of a new relationship by the victim.

## Positive action

Officers should take positive action to protect victims and prevent further harm. This should not be confused with the concept of positive action under the [Equality Act 2010](#).

The first duty is to make people safe. This may involve arresting a suspect where grounds exist. Where [arrest](#) is not possible or proportionate, officers should take alternative protective measures.

Police officers should apply positive action to both:

- victims – by providing immediate safety planning, referrals and ongoing safeguarding
- perpetrators – by using enforcement powers, protective orders or restrictions to prevent further harm

## Alternative positive action

In cases where arrest is not possible or proportionate, officers must still take steps to protect the victim and manage risk.

Examples of alternative positive action include the following.

- Removal to prevent a breach of the peace, in accordance with [R v Howell \[1982\] QB 416](#). The perpetrator should be taken to a safe distance and the rationale should be recorded, in accordance with [sections 30\(7\) to 30\(9\) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 \(PACE\)](#).
- Follow-up safety checks, ensuring that the victim remains safe and considering additional protective measures, such as a [domestic violence protection notice \(DVPN\)](#), [non-molestation order](#) or civil injunctions.
- Immediate safeguarding measures, such as:
  - referral to specialist support, for example, an independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA), multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC), Victim Support, Women's Aid or Refuge
  - arranging refuge or [emergency accommodation](#)
  - installing panic alarms or improving home security
  - implementing neighbourhood prevention schemes

Officers should not view removal or temporary diffusion as an easy option. All reports of domestic may indicate underlying coercive or controlling behaviour that requires further investigation or

support.

## Strategic oversight

Senior leaders should ensure that their force fulfils its legal and ethical obligations to protect victims of domestic abuse. This duty arises under the [Human Rights Act 1998](#), which incorporates the [European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#). It requires public authorities to take positive safeguarding action at domestic abuse incidents.

Officers and staff should understand the relevant rights and obligations. These include:

- [Article 2](#) – Right to life
- [Article 3](#) – Freedom from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment
- [Article 8](#) – Right to respect for private and family life

Police officers have a positive obligation to take reasonable and proportionate action within their lawful powers to safeguard these rights. This duty applies at every stage of the police response. Senior leaders should ensure:

- a [force-wide approach](#) that embeds positive action in domestic abuse responses
- staff awareness of their responsibilities under the [Victims' Code](#) and the [Code of Ethics](#)
- oversight mechanisms to monitor compliance, outcomes and victim safety

For further information, go to:

- [Leadership](#)

## Safety planning

Effective safety planning reduces risk and prevents further harm to victims of domestic abuse. It should be carried out in partnership with the victim, relevant agencies and professionals, such as [IDVAs](#). Safety planning should address both immediate risks and longer-term protection, complementing wider risk management and safeguarding processes.

For further information, go to:

- [Risk management](#)

- [Checklist: Principles of safety planning](#)
- [Checklist: Developing safety plans with victims](#)

Police forces should support victims and partner agencies to develop and implement safety plans tailored to the victims' circumstances. Plans should build on the victims' own coping strategies and protective measures. Plans should also use existing resources and protective factors to reduce risk. They should focus on the individual needs of the victim and any children, with their safety and protection as the priority at every stage.

Plans may include changes to routines, routes to work or school, and communication with childcare providers or employers about safety arrangements. Officers should also consider whether firearms licences should be revoked or withheld in line with [firearms licencing APP](#).

Where the victim's location is undisclosed, officers should take steps to prevent inadvertent disclosure during unrelated proceedings or administrative processes. For example, this may relate to refugee or temporary accommodation.

Domestic abuse specialist officers should provide practical advice on home security, crime prevention and weapon safety. Safety plans should integrate existing risk management processes and, where appropriate, should include [referral to MARAC](#) or other multi-agency frameworks. Safety planning provides reassurances to victims and their children, while increasing awareness of the specific risks associated with domestic abuse.

For further information, go to:

- [Checklist: Safety planning and children](#)
- [Example safety plan](#)
- [CPS domestic abuse guidelines for prosecutors, annex E – National support organisations](#)

## Crime prevention and home security

Where victims choose to remain in their homes, police forces should support them to do so safely. Crime prevention officers (or their local equivalent) should be made available to assess home security and should advise on appropriate target-hardening measures, such as improved door and window locks, alarm systems, lighting or CCTV.

Officers should consider referral to the fire service if there is a risk of arson. Fire safety surveys can assess escape routes and provide additional reassurance.

## Neighbourhood and police safety schemes

Forces may consider implementing cocoon watch schemes, with the victim's consent, to involve trusted neighbours, family or agencies in providing an early warning system. Awareness campaigns can also be carried out without naming the victim where consent is not given. Cocoon watch should not be used where:

- there is any reason to suspect that neighbours and/or family may be involved in the abuse
- the victim may feel more at risk by neighbours being informed – for example, revealing the sexual orientation of a victim could place them at risk of homophobic abuse

Police watch schemes provide visible reassurance and deterrence through regular patrols or welfare checks.

The policing team responsible for dealing with domestic abuse investigations should brief neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs) on known offenders, victims, relevant orders and current safety plans. They should assist in information gathering, enforcement and supporting local **MARAC** action plans.

Relevant information that may be made available to NPTs – for example, in daily tasking meetings – includes:

- known perpetrators and victims in the local area
- any known locations for domestic abuse offending
- children associated with households where domestic abuse is known to occur, including children who are not normally resident there, but who visit or stay over on a regular basis
- newly imposed non-molestation and restraining orders, DVPNs and DVPOs, and other civil orders
- pending or recent release of a perpetrator on licence
- current victim safety plans

For further information, go to:

- APP on [information management](#)

## Sanctuary schemes

The **Secured by Design (SBD)** sanctuary scheme offers high-risk victims the option to remain safely in their homes through enhanced security and the creation of a safe room. It should form part of local safeguarding arrangements and MARAC-led interventions.

The police crime reduction unit and domestic abuse specialist officer should carry out a full risk assessment for every referral made. Partner agencies should be consulted where appropriate. Sanctuary schemes are not appropriate in all circumstances and must be carefully assessed for suitability.

Addresses with sanctuary measures should be flagged on agency IT systems to ensure an emergency response.

For further information, go to:

- **[Sanctuary schemes for households at risk of domestic violence: Practice guide for agencies developing and delivering sanctuary schemes](#)**

## Technology safety measures

Officers should consider technology that support tool for safety planning. These include:

- personal safety devices or handsets (such as TecSAFE phones), which provide direct emergency contact with the police, record incidents and enable rapid location tracking via GPS
- proximity tagging of perpetrators, which alerts victims and police if a defined exclusion zone is breached

Officers should ensure that victims understand the risks posed by GPS, satnav, mobile apps and social media location services, which may disclose their location to the perpetrator.

Officers should advise victims who are planning to leave an abusive relationship to:

- clear satnav histories
- disable location sharing
- delete contact logs with support agencies, where safe to do so

Practical safety methods may include:

- changing locks on doors and windows
- replacing wooden doors with steel doors
- security systems
- sanctuary schemes, where in operation (including additional locks, door chains, spyholes, window bars, alarms, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, outside lighting and electronic sensors)
- issuing a **personal safety device or handset**
- proximity tags

Some police forces have home and/or personal alarm systems with direct connections to the emergency services. These devices may provide recorded evidence.

For further advice, go to:

- **Suzy Lamplugh Trust**
- The National Stalking Helpline: 0800 802 0300

## **Domestic violence protection notices and orders (DVPNs and DVPOs)**

DVPNs and DVPOs provide short-term protection to victims following a domestic incident involving a perpetrator over the age of 18 years. They offer immediate safety to victims in situations where:

- an arrest has not been made
- an investigation is ongoing
- a suspect is released without conditions that restrict contact with the victim

A DVPN is an emergency non-molestation notice issued by the police that can protect the victim from violence or the threat of violence by the perpetrator. It can also exclude the perpetrator from the home, giving the victim time and space to seek support and make informed decisions without interference. Within 48 hours of serving a DVPN (excluding Sundays and public holidays), an application must be made to a magistrates' court for a DVPO. If granted, the DVPO can last for between 14 and 28 days.

DVPNs and DVPOs are governed by sections 24 to 33 of the **Crime and Security Act 2010**.

For further information, go to:

- [Home Office DVPN and DVPO guidance](#)

Officers should consider a DVPN or DVPO as part of their duty of positive action when there are reasonable grounds to believe that both of the following apply:

- the suspect has used or threatened violence against the victim
- such a notice or order is necessary to protect the victim from further violence or threats of violence

This includes situations where:

- an arrest has not been made but the risk to the victim remains
- a suspect is released pending further investigation without bail conditions that restrict contact
- the investigation results in a caution, no further action or charge that does not sufficiently mitigate risk
- the case is referred by a [MARAC](#) for ongoing management

The [first responding officer](#) should identify the need for a DVPN and should ensure that the matter is referred to a supervisor. The decision to authorise a DVPN must be made by authorising officer of superintendent rank or above, who should consider:

- the risk to the victim and any children
- the opinions of the person to be protected
- any representations made by the suspect
- the opinion of any other associated person also residing at the address, where both parties live at the same address

Consent from the victim is not required to issue a DVPN or DVPO, as the duty to protect lies with the police. Officers and staff should engage and inform the victim of any proposal to apply for such orders and appropriate conditions should be discussed with them.

## Issuing a DVPN

Once authorised, the DVPN must be personally served on the suspect by a police officer. The notice must:

- state the grounds on which it has been issued
- warn the suspect that they can be arrested if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the notice has been breached
- state that an application for a DVPO will be made within 48 hours and that notice of the hearing will be given separately
- state that the DVPN will remain in force until a decision has been made on the application
- set out the provisions that a magistrates' court may include in a DVPO

The suspect should be provided with information about emergency accommodation and, where available, should be referred to a voluntary perpetrator programme.

Victims should be informed that the DVPN has been issued, of its conditions and of the next steps in the process. They should also be referred promptly to specialist domestic abuse [support services](#).

## DVPO

Officers must ensure an application for a DVPO is made to the magistrates' court within 48 hours of serving the DVPN. The court will determine whether violence or the threat of violence has occurred and whether the order is necessary to protect the victim.

A breach of a DVPO is a civil contempt of court, punishable by fine or imprisonment. Officers should take prompt enforcement action where a breach occurs. Delays undermine victim safety and the integrity of the order. Where the conduct amounting to a breach also constitutes a criminal offence, both the breach and the criminal conduct should be investigated.

For further information, go to:

- [Section 27](#) and [section 28 of the Crime and Security Act 2010](#)
- [Checklist: DVPO application](#)

## Monitoring and enforcement

Officers should ensure that each DVPN or DVPO is supported by a clear plan for monitoring and enforcement. This includes:

- recording and flagging the notice or order and its conditions on relevant police systems

- ensuring that local policing teams are aware of any restrictions for proactive monitoring
- reviewing risk assessments and safety plans following the issue, refusal or expiry of a DVPN or DVPO
- notifying partner agencies, including MARAC where relevant, of the outcome and expiry date
- ensuring that victims are kept informed of developments and understand how to report breaches
- ensuring that information relating to the order is provided to the force covering the victim's new address, if a victim moves out of the area

Where a breach of a DVPN is suspected, the suspect should be arrested and brought before a magistrates' court within 24 hours of arrest (excluding Sundays and public holidays). The DVPN remains in force until the court decides on the DVPO application. If a DVPN is not applied for and heard within 48 hours of the DVPN being issued (excluding Sundays and public holidays), the DVPN expires automatically.

## Other civil and protective orders

Victims may seek longer-term protection through civil injunctions. Officers should ensure that victims are aware of these options and are referred promptly to support or legal services. These include:

- non-molestation orders, which prohibit specified forms of harassment, intimidation, or contact – breach of a non-molestation order is a criminal offence
- occupation orders, which can exclude the perpetrator from the home or prevent them from returning
- prohibited steps orders, which prevent a person with parental responsibility from removing a child from the applicant's care
- violent offender orders, which may be sought by a chief officer of police against a person who poses a continuing risk of serious violent harm

Police officers should not provide legal advice. However, they should ensure that victims understand the urgency of seeking protection and are referred to appropriate specialist or legal support.

## Tags

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