



NAVIGATING THE USE OF PROTECTION ORDERS IN TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Principle One explores a guidance app to improve frontline officer
use of Protection Orders

Principle One works in partnership with UK Law Enforcement to deliver mission critical capabilities. Over the last four years, this has been strengthened by a partnership with Police Now, through which Principle One welcomes a small group of secondees each year to work alongside experienced consultants over a four-week period. As a result, Principle One develops a much stronger understanding of the challenges faced by frontline officers, while secondees develop their problem-solving skills through participating in and applying core consulting training.

In April 2023, Principle One invited three Police Now secondees to explore how Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders (DVPNs and DVPOs) could be better utilised, and design a solution that can support frontline officers in applying national guidance consistently.

The research

The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment published in May 2023 states that VAWG accounts for 15.8% of all recorded crime, and therefore places a significant demand on policing¹. This reflects the Strategic Policing Requirement, published in February 2023, which recognises VAWG as a national threat².

Despite this, challenges with the policing response to VAWG have been well documented. A super-complaint made by the Centre for Women's Justice in March 2020 highlighted limited use of Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders (DVPNs and DVPOs) by forces, resulting in missed opportunities to protect vulnerable people³. In their response, an investigation undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire and Rescue Services, College of Policing and Independent Office for Police Conduct agreed that the evidence strongly suggests that DVPNs and DVPOs were being underused⁴.

In addition, the super-complaint made by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust in November 2022 also raises concerns about the insufficient use of Stalking Protection Orders across England and Wales⁵.

Although a plethora of legislative powers are available to safeguard victims of domestic abuse and stalking using protection orders, their utilisation by police forces across England and Wales is highly variable and more must be done to improve their effectiveness as a safeguarding tool.

¹ [Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Threat Risk Assessment, NPCC, May 2023](#)

² [Strategic Policing Requirement, Home Office, February 2023](#)

³ [Police failure to use protective measures in cases involving women and girls, Centre for Women's Justice, March 2020](#)

⁴ [A duty to protect: Police use of protective measures in cases involving violence against women and girls, College of Policing, HMICFRS, IOPC, Updated June 2022](#)

⁵ [Super-complaint on the police response to stalking, Suzy Lamplugh Trust, November 2022](#)

The stakeholder map below shows the complex multi-agency stakeholder environment around the use of protective measures. While there are many opportunities to improve the application of orders across health and social care agencies and the courts system, what about those that often have the first contact with a victim? How can frontline officers be supported more effectively?

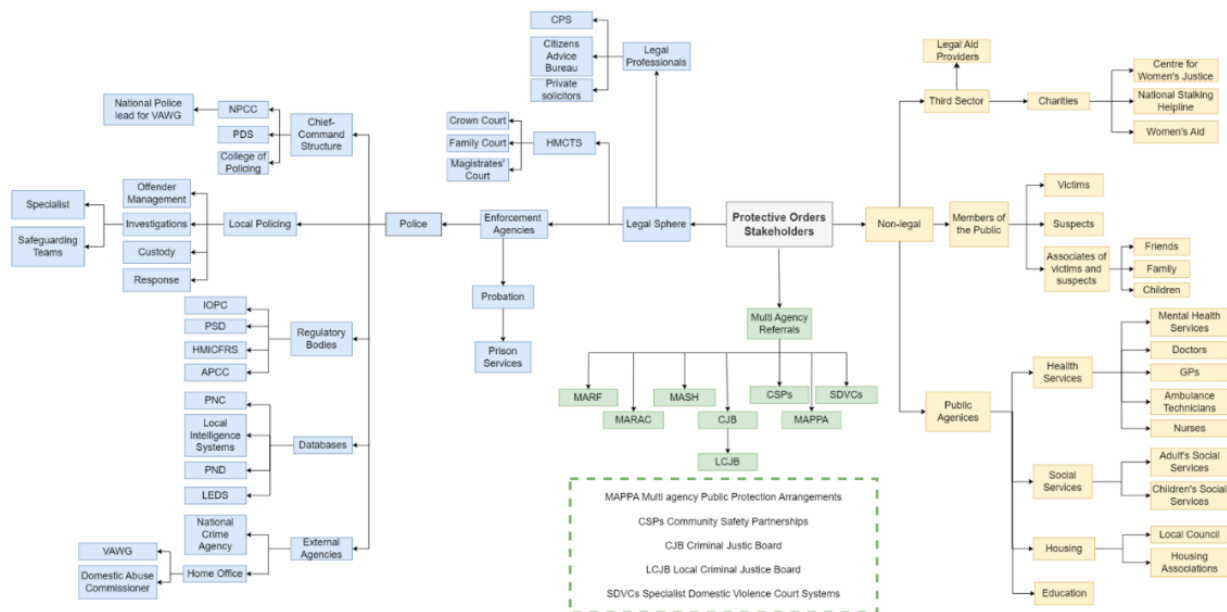


Figure 1 – Protection Orders Stakeholder Map

When researching the problem and applying their own experience of the realities of the frontline, the Police Now officers reflected on the challenges they face in finding the information they need to react quickly and effectively to operational situations. Having the information to hand to apply in an operational context at the time it is needed is a challenge for officers who are already bombarded with training and guidance materials to use in the day job.

Using protective measures is no different. With a complex and evolving set of protection orders, some of which can be issued by the police, some by the courts and some requested by the victim or potential victim, the criteria for orders and circumstances in which they can be used can be a difficult area to navigate. Despite their training, this knowledge can lay dormant and can easily fade without positive reinforcement.

How could we improve the confidence of frontline police officers in making use of protection orders at the appropriate time?

Designing a solution

The team responded by testing the idea of a simple guidance application that frontline officers and investigators could use to rapidly identify the range of suitable protection orders in any given scenario met the criteria for the range of protection orders available. The team developed a 'proof of concept' application based on the information that they typically gather when talking with a victim.

A real-time capability that supports national guidance

Starting with the application criteria for five protection orders, the team developed a decision tree and interactive set of questions that would quickly signpost officers to the most appropriate protective measures available. The Police Now secondees were able to use their own experience and understanding, both from having attended an incident and from completing their own risk assessment, to develop a realistic set of scenarios and use cases to demonstrate where an app would be valuable to access necessary and timely information.



Image 1 – Police Now officers creating their decision tree

Critically, the decision-tree is based on the latest legislation and national guidance, reducing the dependence on an individual officer's training or on the job experience. The questions within the app objectively and consistently guide officers to the options available, as well as providing more detailed information that can be passed to the victim, such as referrals to relevant support services.

Providing management information

A summary of the questions, answers and any supporting comments officers wish to make can be downloaded as a PDF and emailed directly to the victim, as well as uploaded to case files as supporting information for supervising officers. Consideration was also given to capturing MI, such as how often the app has been used and recommended outcomes. This provides understand how often particular protective measures are applied in the force and ensuring a full audit trail. This would help forces better understand demand, both in terms of response management and support services.

A tool that is easy to develop and to use

Microsoft PowerApps was chosen, offering a low code development environment that would enable rapid development. This also aligns with national initiatives to make greater use of the Microsoft technology stack for frontline applications and a potential route for deployment via the Police Digital Service.

Operating model considerations

Often in policing, technology can be developed and introduced without an understanding of the wider impact on the business. With this in mind, Principle One encouraged the Police Now secondees to consider the wider operating model implications of deploying the app. This resulted in them identifying the importance of mapping the full end to end business processes in a force to understand how the app would be embedded and sustained - and raised some important questions.

If the app achieved its goal of increasing effective utilisation of orders, will the legal team be resourced to support additional applications? Will victim support services have a capacity to manage referrals? If legislation changes, who will have responsibility for updating the decision-trees embedded into the app?

These were all identified as important operating model implications for forces to consider when deciding to use the app on the frontline.

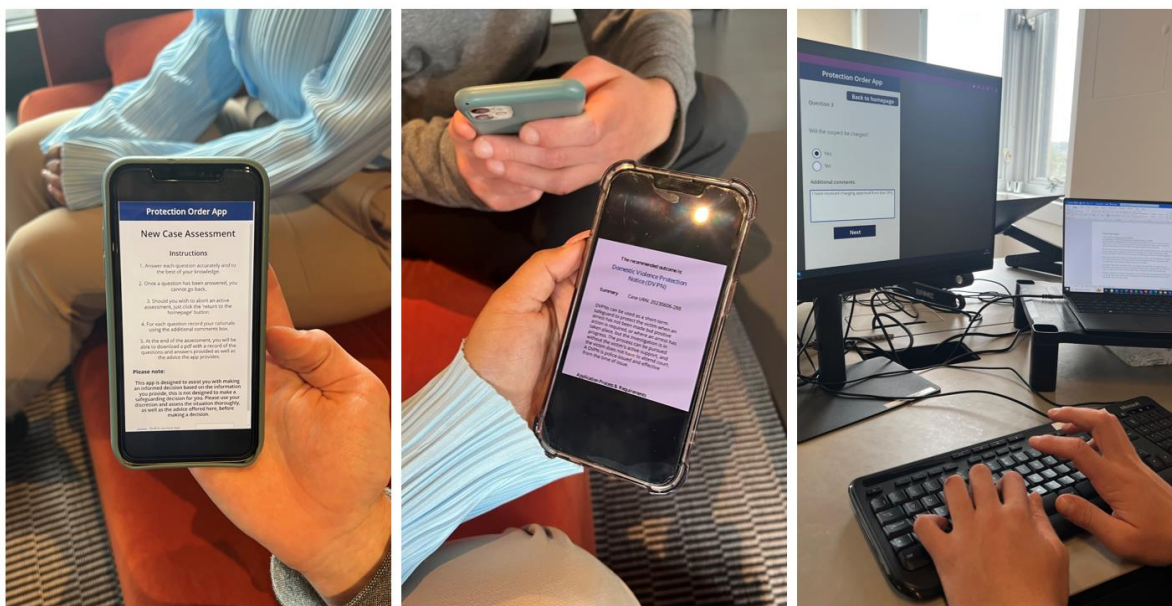


Image 2 – Protection Order app in action

So what's next?

By directly harnessing our secondees' frontline experience, Principle One progressed far more rapidly than usual into development, and before the end of the secondment were able to showcase the app to stakeholders within the Home Office and Police Digital Service.

The app can support frontline officers in rapidly and accurately navigating the range of potential protection orders available and identify suitable interventions. As the decision-trees integrated into the app are based on criteria set out in legislation and national guidance, there is no requirement for local configuration, promoting greater consistency across forces, and improving on the postcode lottery referenced in the super-complaints.

While the three Police Now officers are returning to their forces with new analysis skills, technology awareness and a broader understanding of protection orders, they have also shown how input from officers on the ground can drive change at a national level. Their openness about the challenges they face on the ground and their passion for adopting better ways of working has brought the problem to life and will help Principle One in its wider work with the Home Office and NPCC in tackling Violence against women and girls.