

Thousands of survivors to be protected from prison abusers

- new scheme to thwart domestic abuse campaigns from behind bars by blocking unwanted calls and letters from prisoners
- delivers on the government's Domestic Abuse Plan

Under the scheme, police forces, prison governors and victims' services will work hand-in-glove to automatically block offenders from calling or sending threatening letters to their victims.

The new Unwanted Prisoner Contact Service – trialled at Kent and Thames Valley earlier this year – will act immediately on any intelligence to contact jails and block offenders from sending further communications.

In practice, this will mean offenders will be physically unable to dial their victim's number from the prison landings or send out letters to the victim's address as these contact details will automatically be barred.

Crucially, the new scheme means survivors will not have to ask for help themselves, with other agencies and support services able to contact the service on their behalf – protecting them from further trauma.

By creating a single hub for police victims and support agencies, the new service will ensure a speedier response with dedicated case handlers quickly locating offenders and blocking contact. It will also prevent abusers from using other offenders to torment their victims by barring victims' contact details from all prison phones.

Minister for Prisons and Probation, Damian Hinds, said:

We will never tolerate domestic abusers who seek to continue their campaign of abuse from behind bars and will always take tough action against the prisoners responsible.

This new service delivers on our commitments in the national Domestic Abuse Plan and will better protect victims once their cowardly abusers are jailed.

During successful pilots, hundreds of victims came forward to request contact was blocked – showing the new model is more accessible and effective in identifying and protecting victims.

Diana Fawcett, Chief Executive of Victim Support, said:

Unwanted contact from offenders is frightening and stressful. It can stop victims from moving on with their lives and, particularly

in cases of domestic abuse, is often used to intimidate victims and continue campaigns of abuse.

We welcome steps to make it easier and quicker to take action and hope that this will make a real difference for victims.

The move delivers on the cross-government Domestic Abuse Plan which sets out investment of £140 million to support victims and £81 million to tackle perpetrators.

The government also continues to implement the Domestic Abuse Act which recognises all forms of abuse beyond physical violence, introduces new offences for non-fatal strangulation and so-called revenge porn, as well as preventing abusers from being able to directly cross-examine their victims in family and civil courts. The vast majority of measures are now in force.

Notes to editors

Requests to block contact can be made by the victim, on behalf of the victim with their consent, or by police, probation, victim services, friends, or family members of the victim without their consent. Each case will be assessed individually.

Last year we passed our landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021, alongside a comprehensive action plan of other non-legislative measures.

For the first time in history, we now have a general purpose legal definition of domestic abuse which emphasises that domestic abuse goes beyond physical violence, and includes emotional, coercive or controlling, as well as economic abuse.

This is in recognition of the devastating impact different forms of abuse can have on victims' lives.

On 30 March 2022, we published the cross-government Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan.