

Police In Sussex Are Leading The Way To Enforce A New Law Aimed To Helping Victims Of Stalking - 20.01.20

New Stalking Protection Orders (SPO's) come into effect on Monday (20th January), as an additional tool for police to use in responding to reports of stalking, and Sussex Police are already planning to apply for SPOs in cases during the same week.

Detective Chief Inspector David Springett of the force's Public Protection Command, said:

"The new Orders, which we will seek from Magistrates, are an important development in helping us to better protect victims or anyone connected with them, in stalking cases.

"Significantly, SPOs enable us to include both prohibitions and/or requirements on a subject.

"For example, subjects can be made to undertake offender rehabilitation courses or mental health assessments. They can also be required to stay away from specific areas and from contact with named people."

However an Order is not an alternative to prosecution for stalking offences under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, and it can be used to strengthen prosecutions as well as safeguarding victims.

Any breach of an Order is itself a criminal offence punishable by Magistrates by up to 12 months or a fine or both, or at Crown Court with imprisonment for up to five years or a fine or both.

David Springett adds: "This new resource will really help us to protect victims. In Sussex we are already recording the second highest number of stalking reports anywhere in the UK after the Met, and are now advising and supporting more victims than ever.

"With better awareness and enhanced training our approach is more robust in keeping people safe and feeling safe. We encourage victims to come forward with the knowledge that our officers and staff are better trained and that they will take all reports seriously.

"We are absolutely aware of the consequences if our response is not the correct one, so we want to ensure that victims have confidence in how both police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) will support them.

"There is clearly an increased awareness and identification in society generally of stalking behaviour and that too helps us to provide early intervention and provide safeguarding to those in need."

The force has independent advice on our response to stalking and harassment, from partners and this has improved our understanding of stalking as well as its impact on victims. We regularly review our response to ensure we have taken the right action and to identify learning for our staff.

Officers and staff already complete online mandatory stalking and harassment training so they can provide the right response and keep people safe and further specialised training is being delivered to all officers and staff from this month.

Katy Bourne, Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner said; "Stalking is an insidious crime that takes over and destroys lives. It is vital that those affected feel confident in reporting, knowing that early action will be taken and that the law is on their side.

"Stalking Protection Orders will now allow the police to take swift and decisive action against perpetrators, putting restrictions in place and enforcing breaches, treating them as criminal offences.

"The terms of these Orders should be a substantial deterrent and a way to enforce the law without adding unnecessary strain upon the victim.

"The key challenge now is to ensure that police officers have the support they need to enable them to readily recognise stalking as a serious crime and put these measures in place quickly.

"I've been working hard with partners from neighbouring forces and our local Sussex stalking advocacy service, Veritas Justice, to develop a screening tool.

"This will help frontline professionals identify stalking victims more easily, determine an appropriate response and implement immediate safeguarding if needed.

"I'm pleased to announce that this tool will soon be piloted across Sussex, Surrey and Cheshire. Then, once reviewed and evaluated, I'm hoping that it will be adopted nationally."

If you are being stalked or harassed it is important that you report it. Stalkers are fixated and obsessive offenders who will not stop.

You can report stalking or harassment online or by calling 101 or in person at your local police station.

But always call 999 if you are in danger. Our officers and staff will undertake a risk assessment and focus on keeping you safe.

If you would like further information about stalking or harassment, there are several organisations that specialise in providing advice and support to victims.

Veritas is a local organisation which provides advocacy and support for victims of stalking.

<https://veritas-justice.co.uk/stalking/>

The National Stalking Helpline also provides advice and guidance to current or previous victims of stalking or harassment. The helpline can be contacted on 0808 802 0300.

Help Us Keep Sussex Safe

Seen something suspicious or have information about a crime or incident? Please contact us at <http://www.sussex.police.uk/contact-us/>, email us at 101@sussex.pnn.police.uk or call 101.

Alternatively you can contact the independent charity **Crimestoppers**, anonymously, on **0800 555 111**, or online at www.crimestoppers-uk.org